

“Lord, here comes the flood”:

Investigating the chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati

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Abstract

This thesis is aimed at uncovering the *chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati*. Building a theoretical and analytical framework from literature on accountability and responsiveness, I separate between four dimensions of discourses on climate change: the *electoral channel*, the *state actor interactions*, *non-electoral citizen participation*, and finally, the *non-domestic interactions*. This is supplemented by previous research on small and island states, cultural and historical aspects related to politics in the Pacific, as well as studies on domestic climate change policy formation.

An exploratory single-case study is done using data triangulation with a main emphasis on elite and expert interviews conducted during fieldwork on Fiji and Kiribati in early 2012. Through interviews with centrally placed political, organizational, bureaucratic and academic persons I have been able to secure inside accounts of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This has been corroborated by documentary, archival and to a certain degree observational data. The main findings are that there is little interaction on broad climate change policies in Kiribati between political actors, and the discourses that do exist are dominated by the government. However, citizens, parliament and civil society seem more inclined to engage the government on concrete, “street level” issues. The government also interacts with non-domestic actors frequently on climate change, but due to a reliance on foreign technical and financial assistance, the former is in a disadvantaged position in this relationship most times. Drawing on previous literature on small states, climate change policy formation and accountability theory, I am able to set forth hypotheses explaining these results. Structural, institutional and cultural factors work together with the valence-ness of the climate change issue to create limited discourses outside government circles. At the same time, these causal effects also contributed to the interactions on climate change being mainly focused on concrete events that perhaps could be traced back to climate change, such as coastal erosion, but without this being done explicitly in most cases.

I conclude that it is hard to see how one can easily change the structural conditions that are inherent to the country’s smallness and isolation. An implication of my hypothesized causal relationships is that non-domestic actors are playing, and must continue to play, an important role in strengthening the capacity and ability of all political actors in Kiribati. However, more research is needed to determine whether the factors set forth are necessary or sufficient to create the *lack of climate change discourse beyond “street level” implementations* observed.

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List of abbreviations and glossary

Abbreviations

AOSIS - Alliance of Small Island States	OCTs – Overseas countries and territories
BTK - Boutokaan Te Koaua (political party)	PACE-SD – Pacific Centre for Environment & Sustainable Development
CAN International – Climate Action Network International	PICs – Pacific Island Countries
EMP – Environmental management plan	PIFS – Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
GDP (PPP) – Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity)	SPREP – Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
GEF – Global Environmental Facility	UNESCAP – United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
IMF – International Monetary Fund	USP – University of the South Pacific
IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	
KANGO – Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations	
KAP – Kiribati Adaptation Program	
KTK – Karikirakean Tei-Kiribati (political party)	
MKP – Maurin Kiribati Party (political party)	
NGO – Non-governmental organization	

Glossary (based on Van Trease 1993a)

I-Kiribati – Person from Kiribati
Maneaba – Coumminty or village meeting house(s)
Maneaba Ni Maungatabu – The Kiribati Parliament
Unimane/unimwane – Old man or men of respected status, also council of elders
n na katia – Living for today

Chapter 1 – Introduction: climate change discourses in a small island state¹

At a press conference in Auckland, New Zealand in September 2011, UN General-Secretary Ban Ki-moon made the following statement:

“I am here to continue sounding a global alarm about climate change. As you know, I have visited almost all the places around the world where I could see the impact of climate change, including the North and South Poles, and you name it. And my most recent visits to Solomon Islands and Kiribati have reinforced my belief and conviction that climate change is happening and we must take action now. (...) The countries of the Pacific are at the front of the front-lines of climate change” (UN News Service 2011).

This marked the continuation of more than two decades of linking the small island states of the Pacific to anthropogenic climate threats. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 to inform governments on the developments in climate science and global warming, and for its first assessment report seven Pacific Island countries (PICs) were represented in the work of a sub-group focusing on coastal zone management. In 1990, the same year as the report was published, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Bikenibeu Paeniu, held a passionate speech at the Second World Climate Conference where he spoke of the small island states of the Pacific as innocent victims of problems induced elsewhere. This resulted in the international media beginning to write stories on these islands, portraying them as hapless victims of the actions of industrialized nations (Barnett and Campbell 2010:86-87). Thus PICs became “central figures in popular understanding and the politics of global warming” and “the construction of the small islands as Davids fighting against the industrial and newly developed Goliath” gained considerable appeal (Barnett and Campbell 2010:155).

Since then, other PIC leaders have joined president Paeniu in campaigning internationally for immediate actions to be taken to alleviate the threats and impacts of climate change to their countries (Barnett and Campbell 2010:165-166). The result is that the number of actors who operate in the region and who tie at least some part of their work to climate change has become substantial (Barnett and Campbell 2010:113-114).²

Kiribati is one of those countries in the region that has embraced the identity as “sinking state”, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter. My research question was born out

¹ I am grateful for being given a grant from L. Meltzers Høyskolefond for doing field research for my thesis.

² See chapter 6, "Doing Climate Change in the Pacific", in Barnett and Campbell (2010) for a critical overview of the climate change actors in the region, including the national governments.

of a puzzle: when Kiribati and other small Pacific island states are so active and visible on the international arena on climate change, how is the issue treated domestically? My focus will be on the national political leaders and how the government interacts with other political actors when formulating policies. Thus my research question is as follows:

What are the chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati?

Johnstone (2002:2) defines discourse as “actual instances of communication in the medium of language”. Language is here meant as “talk, communication, discourse”. This resonates well with what I am after: instances of communication relating to climate change between the political actors in Kiribati. However, unlike discourse analysis, I am not focused so much on the implicit content of the communication, but rather trying to uncover its presence and direction. Each instance of communication uncovered becomes a unit of analysis, but I am not interested in breaking it down into parts to analyze it in great detail. Rather, I seek to find out if its presence is indicative of a systematic direction in the discourse on climate change in Kiribati. The content will be considered in so much as they reveal something about the nature of the discourse. Therefore, I borrow some of the tools of this research method by asking the same questions: who is saying what to whom and in what context, and perhaps just as important, who do they *not* communicate with?

It is furthermore useful to separate between different types of discourses. I roughly follow the levels of climate policies identified by Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b:7): positions taken in international negotiations, ratification or non-ratification of international treaties, adoption of domestic programs to abate climate change, and “street level” implementations of those programs.³ However, since my focus is domestic, I combine the three first into what I choose to call broad-based policy discussions, while the last translates into concrete, on-the-ground initiatives. The former is those interactions that do not revolve around a specific project that is being implemented, while the latter are those that do. In the Kiribati context, this would mean that discussions on the causes of climate change, strategies for international summits, the links between development and climate change, or how the country should prepare for a worst-case scenario well into the future can be seen as broad-based. On the other side are debates on concrete measures, such as building a particular sea wall to combat beach erosion or installing water tanks to harvest more rainwater to lessen the impact of salination of the fresh water

³ Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b) focuses primarily on mitigation, but I find their levels to be transferable and provide analytic value in the Kiribati context as well, where the focus is primarily on adaptation.

lens. Admittedly, the latter can be seen as a subtype of the former, and I suspect that this differentiation will be somewhat impractical in some cases, as these intertwine. Nevertheless, I think the separation has some value. I would suspect that the cost-benefit calculation biases citizen interaction towards being focused on the concrete measures, while the more abstract discussions are left to more resourceful state actors, perhaps with specialized civil society organizations purporting to speak on the former's behalf. Thus, being conscious of the level of abstraction in the discourse adds value to the analysis.

Furthermore, following Lawson and Rakner's (2005:11-12) identification of four dimensions of accountability, I will argue that there are roughly four different chains of climate change discourses that can be theorized to exist in Kiribati. The first is between the voters and the government. This *electoral accountability* relationship is typically seen as a vertical one, understood as the voters acting as a principal delegating authority upwards to their agent, the government, who rules on their behalf (see Lindberg 2009:8).

Another chain of discourse can be expected to run *horizontally* between the parliament and the government. The legitimacy of claims made by parliament on government is derived from their relationship with the voters, but they are also expected to scrutinize and sanction government activities independent of the electoral channel. A somewhat related chain, in so much as it is usually treated as running horizontally between independent state actors, is that between courts and independent oversight agencies, and other state actors.

The third major relationship involves vertical non-electoral citizen, civil society and mass media interaction with government. According to Lawson and Rakner (2005:11), this mechanism of *societal accountability* involves the "informal role of non-state agents checking government's power via the media, vocal civil society organizations and popular protest".

The fourth link is between the Kiribati government and what I have chosen to call "non-domestic actors" to encompass bilateral partners, regional forums and international organizations. This discourse can be seen as either external or international, that is, separate to the other discourses that are treated as domestic, and can be labeled as *external accountability* (see Rakner and Gloppen 2003, also Lawson and Rakner 2005).

An exploratory single-case study is done using data triangulation with a main emphasis on elite and expert interviews conducted during fieldwork on Fiji and Kiribati in early 2012. The main findings are that there is little interaction on broad climate change policies in Kiribati between political actors and the discourses that do exist are dominated by the government. However, citizens, parliament and civil society seem more inclined to engage the government

on concrete, “street level” issues. The government also interacts with non-domestic actors frequently on climate change, but due to a reliance on foreign technical and financial assistance, the former is in a disadvantaged position in this relationship most times. Drawing on previous literature on small states, climate change policy formation and accountability theory, I am able to set forth hypotheses explaining these results. Structural, institutional and cultural factors work together with the valence-ness of the climate change issue to create limited discourses outside government circles. At the same time, these causal effects also contributed to the interactions on climate change being mainly focused on concrete events that perhaps could be traced back to climate change, such as coastal erosion, but without this being done explicitly in most cases. This is in line with Macdonald (1998:37), who claim that in Kiribati, there is little knowledge of advanced policy issues beyond what he calls the “politico-bureaucratic elite” and that third parties, most often aid donors, frequently gets involved in policy formation.

1.1. Contributions of my thesis

I will argue that my thesis contributes to expanding academic knowledge (King et al. 1994:15-18, also George and Bennett 2005:74). Climate change is an issue for many small island states (see Leatherman and Beller-Simms 1997, Nunn and Mimura 1997, Mimura 1999, Bettencourt et al. 2006). However, not much is written on the domestic climate change policy-making process in these countries. While their international position is sometimes studied (see for instance Barnett and Campbell 2010, McNamara 2009, McNamara and Gibson 2009), analyzing the domestic basis for this have not been done. I will argue that this is important, as one cannot fully appreciate the position of these countries internationally without considering their domestic situation. Furthermore, the field of small and island state research in political science, with notable contributors such as Dahl and Tufte (1973), Hadenius (1992), Ott (2000), and especially Dag Anckar (see for instance 2001, 2004a, b, 2005) and Carsten Anckar (1995, 2000), have not focused on climate change. My thesis will therefore bring new knowledge on a policy-field vital to many small states.

It will also contribute new knowledge on Kiribati’s struggle to maintain its democratic way of life on a series of small islands in the middle of Pacific in the face of major economic, political and demographic challenges. The last comprehensive study of the country’s political system is found in the book *Atolls Politics: The Republic of Kiribati*, edited by Howard Van

Trease, published in 1993.⁴ Later studies dealing specifically and exclusively with Kiribati are scarce, and usually come in the form of reports commissioned by multilateral organizations or institutions, such as the World Bank (Macdonald 1998), the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2011a), Transparency International (Neemia MacKenzie 2004) and the United Nations Development Program (Malifa 2001). These are most often purely descriptive and usually have a limited scope. They rarely try to fit the data into a wider academic framework. I hope to rectify this by analyzing the data gathered within a framework based on accountability theory and previous research on small states.

Furthermore, I will argue that my thesis has real world relevance (King et al. 1994:15, Skocpol 2003:409). First of all, as argued by several of the authors cited above, smallness matters (see for instance Ott 2000:18-20). If small political entities have certain characteristics, then this has implications for how one should structure political systems. Although I will not touch upon this directly here, arguments developed through studies of small states may be transferable to debates on decentralization in larger states. Additionally, as mentioned, climate change is a major threat for many small states, and therefore, how it is dealt with is of interest to both those who are affected and those who are seeking to assist them. In fact, when I visited the region for my fieldwork, both representatives of multilateral organizations and the Kiribati political system expressed a keen interest in my work and were looking forward to get an “outsider” perspective on the things they were doing.

1.2. Setting the scene: The case of Kiribati

Kiribati is a country consisting of 32 coral atolls and one island, of which 21 are populated, scattered in groups over an enormous area, giving the country an exclusive economic zone of almost 3.5 million square kilometers. The distance between the capital of Tarawa and the administrative center for the Line and Phoenix Groups on Kiribati is over 3 500 kilometers. The state spreads mainly east-west of the coast of Papua New Guinea in the Pacific Ocean, just south of the equator, with the capital and most of the population concentrated in the western-most parts. An July 2011 estimate puts Kiribati’s population at just over 100 000, of which roughly 43 000 live in the capital of Tarawa (CIA - The World Factbook 2012c).

Together with what was to become Tuvalu, Kiribati was under British rule, first as a protectorate, from 1892 to the late 1970s as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. As in most other

⁴ The book was preceded by an article on the 1991 election (Van Trease 1992). It builds on a similar publication from 1980, which I have not been able to track down. As far as I have been able to uncover, the academic works of Van Trease are among the few available in wide circulation that focus solely on politics in Kiribati.

British subjects in the region, their limited size, resources and remoteness meant that there was little interest for exploitation from their rulers, and as such the islands was subject to more of a “paternalistic” form of governing, with the aim of helping them progress while at the same time minding the pitfalls of too rapid modernization (Firth 1997). Ellice Islands were populated by mainly Polynesians, while Gilbert Islands were dominated by Micronesians. Thus, when the time came for independence, Ellice Islands broke out in 1978 and became the sovereign state of Tuvalu, whilst Gilbert Islands joined with the Line and Phoenix Islands Groups and became independent as Kiribati a year later (Colbert 1997:43-44).

1.2.1. Climate change and Kiribati

According to Nunn and Mimura (1997:134), the islands of the South Pacific have varying degrees of vulnerability to climate change and sea-level rise, both between and within states. Being almost exclusively made up of coral atoll islands, Kiribati are amongst those that are most threatened (Mimura et al. 2007:703, Sem 2009, Leatherman and Beller-Simms 1997:2, Nunn and Mimura 1997:135, Bijlsma et al. 1996:301). They risk being rendered uninhabitable by flooding associated with rising sea-levels or salt-water intrusion already within the next few decades (Nunn and Mimura 1997:135). As many other neighboring island states, Kiribati has also experienced vast migration from the peripheral islands to the more urbanized center, concentrated in the coastal areas of Tarawa. This leads to more people in the immediate proximity of beach zones, which increases their vulnerability to rising sea levels, often accentuated by devegetation and beach mining (Mimura 1999:140, Asian Development Bank 2000:1). This problem was recognized by the Kiribati government as early as 1990 (Government of Kiribati 1990:107), but the proposed major resettling of families in the Northern Line Islands apparently did not alleviate the increasing pressure on the capital area (Europa World online 2011a). In mid-1999, Kiribati came into the world’s attention as two uninhabited islands disappeared under water (Lean 2006, Europa World online 2011a). However, a 2010 article by Webb and Kench (2010) assessing 27 atolls island in the Pacific, including four Kiribati islands, found that most did not experience loss of territory during the last decades despite sea-level rise. They conclude that

“Results presented in this study show that the entire footprint of islands are able to change so that erosion at the local scale (on one aspect of an island) may be offset by accretion on other parts of the coastline.” (Webb and Kench 2010).

Nevertheless, the natural science of climate change is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, I am focusing on how the actors perceive the risk and how they act upon that perception. Therefore I will now concentrate on the climate change politics of Kiribati.

1.2.2. Kiribati and climate change on the international arena

Consecutive Kiribati presidents have been quite vocal on the international arena, addressing the shortcomings of the industrial nations to do something substantial with the causes of climate change (Europa World online 2011a). Then-president Teburoro Tito was the first Kiribati leader to bring the country into the international limelight on climate change when he spoke on the topic at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. He stated that

“Global warming, climate change and rising sea levels seriously threaten the basis of our existence and we sometimes feel that our days are numbered. I join other small island states in pleading for the cause of the endangered peoples and to urge all concerned to save this planet from any further damage, harmful to life to ensure our future generations continue to enjoy the resources and beauties of this planet.” (un.org 2000).

The current president, Anote Tong, has built on his predecessors work after replacing him in 2003. Since then, he has been campaigning actively abroad, spreading the message that Kiribati is in dire jeopardy due to anthropogenic climate change (see for instance ABC News 2007, Marks 2008, Nair 2008, Helvarg 2010, Tong 2011). In a 2009 address to the UN General Assembly, he is quoted saying that “We, together with those of other low-lying States, are the human face of climate change” and that when the world can

“mobilize trillions of dollars to address the challenges to the global economy, then we are capable of taking the actions necessary to deal with the challenges of the global environment” (Government of Kiribati 2011c).

The president has also closed off fishing in more than 150 000 square miles of its exclusive economic zone in an effort to show the world that Kiribati was able and willing to take drastic conservation steps, hoping it will inspire “the people of the world to make a sacrifice” (Butler 2010). In the same interview, he states that:

“Climate change is a moral challenge, perhaps the greatest since slavery. The international community readily condemns terrorism, genocide and nuclear proliferation, but why can't we see the injustice of our inaction on climate change?” (Butler 2010).

The Office of the President of Kiribati has even launched a web portal called “Climate change in Kiribati”, which according to President Tong is “designed to bring you information and updates on our situation in Kiribati” (Government of Kiribati 2011b), consisting of news clippings, articles and reports detailing Kiribati’s struggle to combat the effects of climate change. The perspectives given on the web portal is a continuation of the position taken by Kiribati under president Aote Tong on the international arena. Under his leadership, it seems that Kiribati has embraced its position as one of those most vulnerable to climate change, and has turned this into an international campaign to make sure that the rest of the world are aware of the fact that climate change is already affecting the country in a very real way. On the web portal, Harvard University biological oceanographer, James J. McCarthy, is cited as saying that Kiribati is “like the canary in the coal mine in terms of the dramatic impact of climate change on a whole civilization of people” (Government of Kiribati 2011a).

Kiribati has also taken a leading role in the region, trying to get its neighbors onboard to form a united front internationally. The government held a conference on Tarawa in November 2010 on climate change ahead of the Cancun summit, which was attended by representatives from the US, China, Brazil, Japan and several other industrialized states, as well as many of the Pacific island states. The result was the Ambo Declaration, which the conference chair, president Tong, stated would “contribute hopefully to some positive steps forward in the Cancun negotiations” (Government of Kiribati 2010). Several of the eighteen points in the declaration called on developed countries to support measures in developing countries, and especially those “most vulnerable States in the frontline due to the urgency in the climate change crisis facing them” (Ambo Declaration, article 16).⁵

1.3. Structure of the thesis

Having established the scene and essentially explained *why* my research question is worth pursuing, I will in the next chapter create a theoretical framework for my study. Drawing on

⁵ Adopted by 12 of the attending countries: Australia, Brazil, China, Cuba, Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, who also attended the conference, chose not to be part of the declaration by taking Observer status.

literature on small and island states, the political culture of the Pacific, domestic climate change policy formation and accountability theory, I am able to build a structure that uses existing academic knowledge to tell me *where* to look and *what* to look for.

Chapter 3 is a methodology chapter explaining *how* this is best done. Here, I argue that doing an exploratory single-case study of Kiribati with multiple sources of data provides the depth necessary to give a reliable answer to the research question. Through interviewing centrally placed political, organizational, bureaucratic and academic persons I have been able to secure inside accounts of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This has been complemented and corroborated by documentary, archival and to a certain degree observational data. I also discuss how Kiribati might be seen as a sample from a larger population.

Chapter 4 presents the data gathered within the four-pronged structure set forth in the theory chapter. In short, the main findings are that the government dominates the interaction there is with other domestic actors, but that the latter seem more willing to engage on concrete, “street level” measures and events that can be seen as implicitly linked to climate change, such as coastal erosion. At the same time, the government depends on non-domestic actors for both financial and technical support and they seemingly feel accountable to their benefactors.

In chapter 5, these findings are discussed and analyzed in light of the theoretical expectations in the literature consulted in the theory chapter. I show how a set of structural and institutional factors such as systematic capacity constraints, the lack of an institutionalized party system and the absence of an independent civil society and mass media that work to give the incumbent a clear advantage in the political game. This reduces the political space and contributes to fewer options for voters and less criticism of government policies from the other political actors. The trend is further accentuated by a culture of consensus and climate change being a *valence issue*, meaning that most people are in agreement that something must be done. Finally, the reliance on foreign assistance means that the political space becomes even more narrowed, as the Kiribati government must work to please non-domestic actors in order to secure support in the struggle with a series of development issues, of which climate change is just one. After summarizing, I end the chapter and my thesis with some concluding remarks about the limitations and representativeness of my findings, as well as giving some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2 – Theorizing climate change interactions: smallness, culture and accountability

As shown in the introduction, Kiribati has been quite vocal on the international arena on the issue of climate change. Conversely, regional and international actors are also active in Kiribati on the same issue. But how do this relate to the other political actors in the country? In the introduction, I argue that one can distinguish between four *chains* of accountability and responsiveness that can be arenas for discourses on climate change. These are the *electoral channel*, the *state actor interactions*, *non-electoral citizen participation*, and finally, the *non-domestic interactions*. In this chapter, I will draw on the literature on accountability and responsiveness to demonstrate how separating the interactions into four dimensions add conceptual and analytic clarity to my research. The analytical framework will be supplemented by the relevant contextual factors found in the previous research on small and island states, cultural and historical aspects related to politics in the Pacific, as well as studies of domestic climate change policy formation.

I begin this chapter by presenting these characteristics of my particular case and field of interest before moving on to constructing the analytical framework based on theories of accountability and responsiveness.

2.1. Previous studies of small and island states: smallness as limitation or opportunity?

Kiribati is by most measures a small state.⁶ Their estimated population is just over 100 000, which ranks them 194th in the world on the CIA World Factbook's list of states and territories. Their 811 square kilometers of total land area places them at 187th in the same list, and their GDP per capita (PPP) is at 135th with USD 6 200 (data from the CIA - The World Factbook 2012c). Also, being situated far from any industrialized state contributes to them having limited market access and little leverage vis-à-vis other states in international relations.

Still, there is one aspects of Kiribati's geography that speaks against the smallness label. The country consists of 32 coral atolls and one island scattered in groups over an enormous area, giving the country an exclusive economic zone of almost 3.5 million square kilometers (U.S. Department of State 2012). Yet, this has not been enough to counteract the substantial drawbacks posed by being small on most other measures, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis.

⁶ Ott (2000:13-18) provides a short discussion of various measures of "smallness", including the ones used here. See also Srebrnik (2004).

Much of the work on the relationship between size and policy behavior is focused on how the former affects democratic performance and endurance.⁷ In their seminal book aptly named *Size and Democracy*, Dahl and Tufte (1973:chapter one) details how size have been seen as intrinsically linked with democracy. In short, it is believed that small democracies provide more opportunities for citizens to participate effectively in decision making, while larger democracies have a better capacity for that participation actually turning into desired policies (Dahl and Tufte 1973:13-15). However, the findings of their own research are ambiguous as best. They find no strong correlation between state size and political participation and sense of effectiveness among citizens. Still, they do find that very small, within-country units⁸ maximizes these, but at the potential cost of the unit lacking capacity to deal with the “problems of great concern to most citizens” (Dahl and Tufte 1973:65).

Thus, being mindful of the caveats, one can expect citizen participation to be reasonably high and more personal in small states, while government capacity and effectiveness is perhaps low. For Kiribati, this would presumably translate into citizens being highly active politically, also on climate change, but that the government is not able to meet their expectations due to capacity constraints. However, Dahl and Tufte (1973:28) admit that “[t]hough we try to provide answer to the questions we pose, limitations of data are often overwhelming”, and as such, some claims are based more on rhetorical arguments than empirical evidence.

Hadenius (1992:122-127) takes the empirical analysis of size and political behavior a step further, and finds effects similar to those of Dahl and Tufte (1973). However, there is a threshold, meaning that the association is only strong at what he calls “a very low level of size”, defined as micro-states with a population of less than 100 000.⁹ The effect on democracy is also stronger for islands than non-islands, and it might appear that islandness is actually a more important indicator than population size. However, he concludes that the effect seems to be spurious, and that relatively higher levels of education and a predominance of Protestantism might explain the positive effect being an island has on democracy.¹⁰

⁷ For a thorough, but slightly dated summary, see Ott (2000:chapter 2).

⁸ Less than 10 000 inhabitants. Dahl and Tufte are concerned with relative size, and as such, countries like Norway, Sweden, Finland, Ireland and Belgium are considered small. Although they discuss it at some length, they do not test on Kiribati’s scale of smallness (Dahl and Tufte 1973:18-19,94-95).

⁹ He finds a similar pattern with regards to area, concluding that this is not surprising since it is strongly correlated with population.

¹⁰ Hadenius (1992) incorporates all states in his study, but he only uses data from a single year (1988). As such, his analyses do not allow for temporal variations. Furthermore, his conclusion about the observed effect being caused by educational levels and Protestantism are not tested, but merely stated.

Writing on the island states of the Easter Caribbean, Peters (1992) argue that they operated like the city-states of old, with all government activity concentrated in the capital, where most of the people live. This is certainly also the case in Kiribati, where almost half the population is concentrated on South Tarawa, as well as all government offices. Peters (1992:12) writes that “the people know their leader well and have constant easy access to them”. On the downside, he states that “citizens who do not support the popular governments are easily identified and invariably victimized”. He concludes that overall, “the system appears to have built in components that neutralize extreme behavior both on the part of government officials and citizens” (Peters 1992:13).

Baldacchino (1994:69-70, in Srebrnik 2004:334), on the other hand, criticizes small states’ governments for being too influential in the economy and society, and holds that “[t]he distinction between state and civil society becomes close to a theoretical quirk”, which in turn may foster nepotism, cronyism, patronage and political clientilism. He also fears that some have capacity problems due to a small population base and high emigration, leaving many dependent on outsider consultants.

Ott cites Benedict’s (1967, in Ott 2000:37-40) work on what the latter calls *multiple-role relationships* in small states.¹¹ It is defined as those relationships in which members of the society encounter one another in a variety of social roles, for example a government official who is also a relative. This has the potential for encouraging corruption, nepotism and favoritism. With government often dominating most sectors, “few avenues of upward mobility do not involve the government” (Ott 2000:38). Political issues become structured around personal encounters and relationships, and not ideology. In this atmosphere, it becomes difficult to establish a viable opposition. She also presents the work of Vital and McGowan and Gottwald (1967 and 1975 accordingly, in Ott 2000:42), who claims that the multiple roles for individuals within the bureaucracy of small states necessitated by resource constraints causes a narrowing of the range of people with input in the policy-making process. She summarizes her examination of the works on the relationship between size and political behavior by stating that most studies finds that “smallness acts as a limitation on the behavior of small states” (Ott 2000:44) . However, based on her own analyses of the relationship between size and democracy, she concludes that “small states as a group are significantly more likely to become and remain democratic than large states” (Ott 2000:208).

¹¹ Ott (2000:40) also points out serious limitations in the data available to Benedict at the time of writing.

In his work on political parties, Dag Anckar (1997, 2001) agree with Hadenius' (1992) initial findings of a threshold for when smallness has an effect. He concludes that very small islands¹² usually have very few or no parties, but once you go above that threshold there is no clear pattern. Carsten Anckar (2000) follows Dahl and Tufte (1973) and tests whether size is related to party fragmentation. He concludes that the larger the size of a country, measured as both area and population, the more parties they have and the less support the leading party is able to muster, even when controlled for factors such as electoral system and ethnic-religious fragmentation.¹³ Colbert (1997:66-67) supports this in her study of the Pacific island states, who are expected to be at the opposite side of this spectrum, usually being quite small. Here, coalitions are easily formed and just as easily broken during a parliamentary session, and the head of government cannot be sure of his support until it is put to the test. Typically, parties are formed and at their most active during election campaigns, and afterwards disintegrate.

Dag Anckar (2001) further considers five possible contributors to the lack of parties in small island states in general: smallness, remoteness, geography, colonial legacy, and customs and traditions. Smallness often leads to economic monoculturalism and uniform problem setting, which decreases the potential ideological distances. Remoteness fosters an isolation that enhances customs and traditions, which in turn work against the establishment of modern and western views of political conduct and method. Geography, here meaning the archipelagic nature of many small island states, can be theorized to cause an intensified center-periphery divide that means votes are cast on the basis of regional and kinship ties rather than political issues (Anckar 2001:268-269). With direct respect to Kiribati, Anckar (2001:271) speculate that if the British had not allowed for the separation of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands prior to independence, one could have seen the rise of two territorially-based parties. He also mentions the effects of the electoral system inherited from the colonial masters, which for most former British colonies meant some version of majoritarian Westminster model, known for producing fewer parties (Anckar 2001:273-274).

Indeed, Kiribati has few and fairly unorganized parties, and the political groupings that exists are most active during election campaigns. The head of government in Kiribati cannot rely on a solid party structure to maintain his support (Meller 1990:63, Colbert 1997:63). While some do form from time to time, often around specific leaders or issues, they do not play an important role in the political processes (Van Trease 1992:67). Van Trease

¹² Less than 100 000 inhabitants.

¹³ Tellingly, Kiribati is excluded from the analysis due to lack of data. However, Pacific cousins like Micronesia, Nauru and Tuvalu are included.

(1993d:150) argues that there is little awareness of the political groupings outside the inner political circles. Yet, according to Anckar (2001:262), the absence of formal political parties does not imply the absence of a subsystem for goal attainment. Van Trease (1992:72) found that Teatao Tennaki's presidential victory of 1991 owed in no small part on his ability to draw support, both organizationally and electorally, as the representative for a group loosely based on supporters of the outgoing incumbent called the National Progressive Party. Later publications, however, have continued to describe the Kiribati political system as constituted by independent candidates and loose groups (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011, Europa World online 2011b, Utenrikespolitiska institutet 2009, Anckar 2001, Macdonald 1998), so the 1991 presidential election did not prove to be the catalyst for a more consolidated party system suggested by Van Trease (1992, 1993c).

This has certain implications for how we can expect politics to be conducted. Parties are seen as important mechanisms of *ex ante* and *ex post* control of elected officials in parliamentary systems. The former means that they control candidates before they take office, while the latter occurs during their tenure. Müller quotes Jones and Hudson (1998 in Müller 2000:323) that "political parties offer an 'implicit contract' between voters and politicians and thereby reduce the scope for opportunism by politicians". They also serve as screening mechanisms, trying to ensure that a candidate for office has the qualities needed for the job (Müller 2000:327-328). During a representative's tenure, parties often require that she reports (i.e. give accounts), both to the party leadership and the grassroots. In Müller's (2000:329) words, "[t]he party organization "on the ground" often functions as a "fire alarm" concerning policy implementation and consequences". Additionally, the different level of the party structure serves as check and balances on each other, with no single institution, even government, being able to force their will on the others indiscriminately. Thus, given this perspective, political parties serve as mechanisms for making sure that the "right" people get into office and that they do the "right" thing when they get there.

A consequence of weakening this mechanism of control with the elected representatives could be that those chosen are not up to the task of tackling such important and complex issues as climate change. This can reduce the capacity of the Kiribati government to deal with it, and not at least parliament's ability to effectively scrutinize government actions. On the other hand, the lack of a clear party structure might also allow access for critical voices that would otherwise not been able to secure a party's nomination.

Summing up, most empirical analyses seems to find a positive relationship between democracy and small state size (see for instance Anckar and Anckar 1995, Ott 2000, Anckar 2004a, 2005, 2006, also Diamond 1992:40-41, Srebrnik 2004), although the exact causal nature is still somewhat unclear. According to Ott (2000:ch. 5), social systems on small island states mitigates political conflicts, encourages elite cooperation and increase citizen participation. The result is more accountable and more responsive governments (Anckar and Anckar 1995).

At the same time, the smallness also carries with it some limitations that should be kept in mind when researching policy formation in a small island state. One can expect few or no parties, which might cater to individual populists and provide sub-optimal performance from both parliament and government. Additionally, multiple-role relationships might provide a breeding ground for nepotism and corruption, and political outsiders can easily be isolated and sanctioned. However, this must be weighed against the potential benefits of face-to-face interaction between leaders and subjects.

2.2. Cultural and historical factors of the Pacific

In addition to the geographical constraints, Kiribati is also faced with a cultural and historical legacy that might contribute to its political behavior (Anckar 2001:270-278). Most small islands in the South Pacific opted for a governmental organization that resembled that of their former colonial rulers. However, given the special characteristics of these newly formed states, some local hybrids and peculiarities emerged (Meller 1990). For instance, when a newly elected parliament in Kiribati meets for the first time, they select no less than three and no more than four presidential candidates from their own ranks. If there are more than four candidates nominated, a preferential vote is held where each MP ranks four candidates in order of preference (Brechtefeld 1993:44-45). The three or four final candidates then face each other in a national first-past-the-post popular election with the whole country as one electoral district (Jones 1999:173, note 1). Thus, somewhat according to common practice in parliamentary systems, the head of government is recruited from within by the MPs, but it is the citizens who actually decide amongst the candidates nominated. The reason for not opting for pure parliamentarism was that one wanted the leader of the country to have a “broad, rather than factional, appeal” to help unify the vastly spread island state (Henderson 2006:65).

Above I discussed how there are few political parties in Kiribati, as in most other small states. According to Meller (1990:68), some of the explanation for the lack of stable

political organizations in Kiribati might be that most Micronesians are culturally uncomfortable with direct disputatious confrontations and that they prefer dealing with disagreements in indirect manners.¹⁴ He refers to some of the MPs having openly stated that they chose to serve as independents because they believe policy decisions should be made through traditional consultative and consensus procedures, rather than through polarized debates and confrontations. They particularly oppose the “raucous style of debate” practiced in Australia, Britain and other Westminster-style parliaments, which they feel some MPs are trying to bring to Kiribati. Larmour (1994:52) also cite the view that Kiribati have a “cohesive monoculture”, but argues that this might be exaggerations by political leaders.

Lawson (1996:6) is critical of the cultural relativism she feels is sometimes used to justify undemocratic behavior in non-Western contexts, as well as ideas of an absolute universalism of Western democracy. Her study of “tradition versus democracy” in the three Pacific island states of Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa leads her to conclude that conservative political elites have defended undemocratic political institutions to stay in power, often using rhetoric of “traditional ways” (Lawson 1996:163-165). She cites the contradiction noted by other scholars between the popular movements for democratization on the one hand and the “prevalent and disturbing view that democracy and accompanying notions of freedom and human rights are foreign to non-Western societies” on the other (Robertson 1992, in Lawson 1996:167). Thus, she more or less rejects the notion that Pacific culture and tradition is inherently hostile to democratic practices, and claims that such arguments are mere excuses by the traditional elite to justify their continued dominance. This is supported by Larmour (1994:52), who argues that particular South Pacific regimes “are selectively interpreting tradition” to legitimize their rule.

The focus of village life in Kiribati has traditionally been the maneaba.¹⁵ In short, it was the place where the village gathered to deal with the problems that was seen as the concern of the community, much like the town halls in New England, with a strong focus on consensus and equality (Van Trease 1993b:83). However, the system is also very much based on the power of the unimane (elders) over younger men, and women in general (Tabokai 1993, Macdonald 1998:13-14, 20-21). In post-independence Kiribati, the maneaba has become an institution where politics are discussed at the local level, and during campaigns candidates visits the maneaba in their constituency to garner support (Van Trease 1993d).

¹⁴ According to the CIA – The world Factbook (2012c), 98.8 percent of Kiribati’s population are Micronesian.

¹⁵ Translate roughly to “community or village meeting house” (Van Trease 1993a).

According to Macdonald (1998:20), the maneaba is still a potent political force, especially on the outer-islands. They usually control local government, either from within or outside through informal channels (Macdonald 1998:23-24). However, realizing their shortcomings due to lack of education and ability to speak English, the unimane has mostly left the national politics to better qualified younger men, all the while trying to remain a force behind the scenes through their local representatives. On some smaller islands, the unimane is able to influence the election of candidates to such a degree that they can either secure the return of a candidate unopposed or ensure the defeat of someone unwanted (Macdonald 1998:21)

Larmour (1992:107-108) claims that when considering civil society in the South Pacific, one cannot ignore the power of the Church and church organizations, as well as traditional associations such as clans and kinship groups. In situations where the state is too powerful and influential for more traditional “Western-style” civil society organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be an independent check on state power, these traditional structures step in to set “powerful limits on state action”. Thus, the unimane might also contribute to holding a dominant government accountable. According to Linnekin (1997:397), “national governments [in the Pacific] must contend with district and village demands for autonomy”, all the while traditional chieftains have tried to make the transition into politicians and statesmen. As Lawson, Linnekin (1997:399) also criticizes the notion of a pure dichotomy between *tradition* and *modernity* (i.e. democracy).

As with the geographical factors, we see that the concern in the literature discussed on Pacific tradition and culture is mostly focused on its relationship and effect on democracy. The authors consulted nevertheless demonstrate one important point for my study of political behavior in climate change policy-making: the traditional power structure cannot be ignored. Thus, even if there does not seem to be any formal interaction between the citizens and the government on climate change, this could be because it goes through intermediary channels outside the formal political system and Western-style civil society organizations. Furthermore, remnants of a consensus culture might act to mitigate political disagreements.

So far I have discussed factors that are inherent to the case I have selected. Now I turn to the literature on the phenomenon of interest: climate change policy-making and interaction.

2.3 Climate change and policy-making

Many studies on climate change policy-making have concerned themselves with the *tragedy of the commons* aspect of the phenomena, trying to explain why the international community

have been unable or unwilling to deal with what a 2009 article in *The Lancet* (Costello et al. 2009) calls “the biggest global threat of the 21st century” from an international relations perspective (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010b:2).¹⁶ These findings are not of immediate use for my study, as I am not trying to explain why Kiribati adopts its stance on climate change in international negotiations. Rather, I seek to see whether the climate change discourses has a domestic component in addition to the one held with non-domestic actors.

However, authors like Fredriksson and Gaston (2000), Bättig and Bernauer (2009) and Harrison and Sunstrom (2007, 2010a (eds.)) have brought the domestic political situation of countries in as explanatory variables for between-country variation in attitudes towards climate change policy on the national and international arena. The two first finds that democracies are more conducive to ratification of the Kyoto protocol and positive mitigation strategies, while Harrison and Sundstrom (2007, 2010b) finds that this depends on the strength of the impetus received from the voters. Although these works are mostly concerned with the big polluters and powerful players, it might still have some value when researching small island states. Especially the findings of Harrison and Sundstrom (2007) that the willingness to take action on climate change depends on how much it is wanted by the voters can be useful.¹⁷ If we assume the universality of those finds, we can expect Kiribati’s activism on the international arena to be backed by a strong desire for it domestically. At the same time, this doesn’t necessarily translate into support for taking measures at home, as voters are more supportive of the *idea* of compliance rather than for actual measures imposing costs (Harrison and Sundstrom 2007:15). Translated into Kiribati’s political landscape, this could mean that although the international approach is supported, drastic measures at home which entail costs for the citizens might not be.¹⁸

However, Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b:3) also discusses how in the absence of electoral incentives, “politicians own values may carry the day”. They identify the mechanisms of *self-interest* and *ideas* as important in explaining why politicians act as they do. This basically means that the electoral costs of climate change advocacy are weighted against the perceived urgency and importance of dealing with the issue. In Kiribati, this can mean that even if the electorate don’t care or are opposed to the work of President Tong on climate change, he will still do it if he sees it as important enough to risk his electoral fortune.

¹⁶ For example Luterbacher and Sprinz (2001,eds.), Rowlands (1995), Cazorla and Toman (2001), Dai (2010).

¹⁷ They considers six political entities: USA, Australia, China, Russia, Japan, and the European Union.

¹⁸ This is also supported Bättig and Bernauer (2009), who finds a discrepancy between commitments and action on climate change, which they call a “words-deeds” gap.

Furthermore, Paavola and Agder (2006:605-606) contend that political-economic factors, such as inequality and lack of capacity are obstacles for equal participation in climate change policy formation at the national and sub-national level. This also limits participation of non-state actors in the international climate discussions. Through this, certain demographic groups risk being ignored when political assessments of vulnerability and adaptation is considered. It means that when researching domestic climate change discourses, one has to be mindful of resource imbalances that might prejudice the interaction in favor of one of the participants, in this case most likely the state. This indicates that I could find that the linkage is predominantly top-down, with the government engaged in one-way communication with other domestic actors.

2.4. Four dimensions of discourse: political interactions, responsiveness and accountability

So far I have considered factors such as geography, culture and the issue at hand, climate change, to arrive at a set of expectations for my research. In this section I will argue that a framework provided by the twin concepts of accountability and responsiveness supplements these in a fruitful way. Conceptualizing the various channels where I can expect to find traces of a climate change discourses along those lines is analytically useful.

Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999b:8-10) argues that accountability and responsiveness are the core principals of representative democracy.¹⁹ However, accountability has become somewhat of a *cause célèbre* in democratization circles, and Lindberg (2009:2) found well beyond 100 different subtypes and usages. There is no doubt a danger of *conceptual stretching* (Sartori 1970), where everything and nothing at once becomes enshrined in one buzzword. Nevertheless, according to Lindberg (2009:8), most of the literature agrees that an accountability relationship must contain the following:

1. An agent or institution who is to give account (A for agent);
2. An area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);
3. An agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal);
4. The right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D;
5. The right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.

¹⁹ Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes cites Pitkin (1967 in Manin et al. 1999b:2) on the meaning of (political) representation: “acting in the best interest of the public”.

Here, climate change is a specific policy issue which requires action, and as we have already seen and which will be further demonstrated later in this thesis, the government of Kiribati seems to be on the case, at least internationally. Thus, this is the domain (D) in the list above, while the government is the agent (A). The principal (P) is different in the different links, either being the voters, parliament, courts, civil society, or even possibly foreign actors. Thus, the government can be conceptualized as the agent of these principals in the domain of climate change. The latter may ask the former to explain or justify their actions on climate change, and ideally also have the right and means to sanction it if they are not satisfied with the explanation.²⁰ How formalized these relationships needs to be is a major theme in the literature²¹, but I will not dwell too long on it as these discussions are not immediately relevant to my thesis.

On the other side, responsiveness means that a government adopts policies that are signaled as wanted by the citizens. In other words, the government represents the citizens by doing what they tell them to do. Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes' (1999a, also Stokes 1999) is mostly concerned with responsiveness to the *mandate* a government receives from the voters in an election. However, Gloppen, Rakner, and Tostensen (2003:2) describes it as the way governments "perceives the needs and responds to demands of particular groups", and thus it can be seen as encompassing other ways of signaling preference as well.

In essence, the idea is that a government is responsive if it acts on the signals or mandates given by the citizens, and they are accountable if the outcome of said action is open to sanctioning by the citizens. In the words of Palumbo (2010:xi), accountability "represents the umbilical cord that connects citizens to their representatives". However, I must stress that this is an ideal, and that in reality the chains are much more complex and intertwined.

The rest of this chapter will focus on setting up four theoretical dimensions which will function as a heuristic tool for structuring my research: the *electoral channel*, the *state actor interactions*, *non-electoral citizen participation*, and finally, the *non-domestic interactions*. These roughly correspond to the four dimensions of accountability identified by Lawson and Rakner (2005:11-12).

²⁰ Lindberg (2009:9) argues that at its core, the sanctioning function in condition 5 need only give the P the right to sanction A over failure to give proper accounts, not normatively on the content. Although this might suffice as a minimal definition of accountability, as Schedler (1999), I find this to be too restricting, and therefore also include the right of P to sanction the content of A's actions on D. Smulovitz and Peruzzotti even argues for accountability not necessitating a right to sanction, a discussion Mainwaring (2003:12-13) also covers.

²¹ See for instance O'Donnell (1999b), Schedler (1999), Schmitter (1999), Mainwaring (2003), also Lindberg (2009), Bellamy and Palumbo (2010, eds.).

2.4.1. The first dimension: Voters and government interaction through the electoral channel

Arguably the most important link in a democracy is that between the citizens and their government. Elections in representative democracy is a typical example of what is called democratic vertical accountability, since power is sent upwards from the people (*the principal*) to elected representatives (*the agent(s)*), with the former being able to hold the latter to account for their actions next time around (Schedler 1999, Manin et al. 1999a). In representative democracy, this happens through elections at certain intervals, where the voters collectively decides whether to keep an incumbent in office for another term based on his or her previous record (Manin et al. 1999a). In this setting, elected officials are accountable “first and foremost to the citizens whose votes put them in office” (Mainwaring 2003:8) and this can be labeled *electoral accountability* (Lawson and Rakner 2005:11).

Elections can be seen as an arena for the voters of Kiribati to both pass judgment on the performance of their representatives and a way of signaling policy preferences for the years to come (Fearon 1999). If climate change is an issue that voters are concerned with, it should be detectable in the electoral campaigns of the country. Both general elections for parliament and presidential elections can serve as vertical mechanisms to signal satisfaction with climate change policies. Even though it is the latter election which decides the head of government in Kiribati, his ability to rule effectively is dependent on his legislative support. Thus, a supportive MP removed from office might be a signal to the president that her particular constituency has an objection to the incumbent’s actions on climate change.

To some, such as Shumpeter (1942 in Manin et al. 1999b) and Lippman (1956 in Manin et al. 1999b), this is sufficient. As the latter states about citizens, “[t]heir duty is to fill the office and not to direct the office-holder” (1956 in Manin et al. 1999b:13). However, governments usually have an informational advantage over the citizens, and by using this, they are able to both do only the bare minimum of what the voters will be satisfied with, and steer the preferences of the population (Manin et al. 1999b, Stokes 1999, Anckar 1982). Cheibub and Przeworski (1999) show how this can lead to *moral hazard*, meaning that the government take actions that are not in accordance with the best interest of the people. Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999a) conclude that the single instrument in the hands of the voters to control decision-makers, the vote, is insufficient to ensure representative governments. Diamond et al. (1999:2) makes the same point when they argue that elections are necessary, but not sufficient, to guarantee “decent” government. This is supported by Mainwaring (2003:23), who argues that *informational asymmetry* also allows the office-holders “ample

opportunities to behave autonomously”, since the average voter don’t have the capacity to monitor them closely.²² According to him, this problem is even more pronounced in Latin America, where most voters have limited education and access to information about politics. This last point can certainly be seen as transferable to the Kiribati political setting as well, where most inhabitants are educated, but few go beyond the compulsory primary education²³, and where there is little knowledge of advanced policy issues beyond the “politico-bureaucratic elite” (Macdonald 1998:37). This can be coupled with Paavola and Agder’s (2006:605-606) claim that political-economic factors are obstacles for equal participation in climate change policy formation at the national and sub-national level.

Mainwaring (2003:23) further claims that the weakness of the electoral channel of accountability is exuberated if there is a perception that there is no clear political alternative to the present incumbents. This causes voters to see less use in sanctioning poor performance by voting their representatives out of office. Once again, this can be seen as having relevance for Kiribati. As discussed earlier, we can expect fewer parties and more uncertainty around the qualifications of the candidates in small states, which is also the case in Kiribati. This can be enhanced by what Anckar (Anckar 2001) calls “uniform problem setting”, giving less potential ideological distance between candidates.

Not all is bad, however. Several of the authors consulted in the section on small states holds forth the advantages of closeness between electors and elected, resulting in easy access, mitigation of conflicts and increasing participation (see Ott 2000:chapter 5, Peters 1992). This can counter some of the negative effects of informational asymmetry and moral hazard, and certainly serve to encourage government accountability. Furthermore, the multiple-role relationships that Benedict (1967, in Ott 2000:37-40) talks of, in which voters encounter government officials in several different roles, for instance as relatives or employer and employee, might make it harder for officials to remove themselves from the society which they represents, and thus, their actions may be closer to the wishes of their constituency.

Finally, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Harrison and Sundstrom (2007) found that that the willingness to take action on climate change depends on how much it is wanted by the voters, which I argued could mean that Kiribati’s activism abroad could be expected to be

²² However, both Stokes (1999:103) and Lindberg (2009:7) argues that only a ruler with a certain amount of power to make discretionary decisions can be held accountable, and as such, agents must be able to rule somewhat independently of the mandates given.

²³ In 2000, mean years of schooling was 6.1, while literacy was at 92 percent (Asian Development Bank 2000:5). The length of compulsory education was recently increased to nine years, so this is expected to rise (Utenrikespolitiska institutet 2009).

founded on strong electoral support at home. At the same time, they later discuss how in the absence of electoral incentives, “politicians own values may carry the day” (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010b:3). Thus, the electoral costs of climate change advocacy are weighted against the perceived urgency of dealing with the issue, and we can expect President Tong to continue advocating if he sees it as important enough to risk his electoral fortune.

2.4.2. The second dimension: State actors alleviating the shortcomings of the electoral channel?

An often mentioned way to counter the insufficiencies of the electoral channel, such as asymmetrical access to information and moral hazard, is through mechanisms of so-called *horizontal* or *intrastate accountability* (O'Donnell 1999a:30, Gloppen et al. 2003:5-6, Mainwaring 2003, Lawson and Rakner 2005:11-12). Put simply, this means that relatively autonomous institutions have the power to hold each other accountable *on behalf of the people* (O'Donnell 1994, 1999a, 2003, see also Gloppen et al. 2003). The classic notion here is that of separation of powers with the appropriate checks-and-balances, which gives the different powers competence to sanction the others in specific areas (Persson et al. 1997).

When talking about horizontal or intrastate accountability, the most obvious actors are the three traditional state powers: the executive, the legislator and the judiciary. Additionally, some independent agencies of oversight, such as ombudsmen, independent commissions with competence in specific areas such as human rights, or even central banks, are also seen as part of this structure, as they are meant to be act as watchdogs over the state powers, although their ability to (O'Donnell 1999a:39, Mainwaring 2003:13, see also Gloppen et al. 2003:6).²⁴

O'Donnell (1999a:38) defines horizontal accountability as

“the existence of state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered, and factually willing and able, to take actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state that may be qualified as unlawful”

However, this includes only accountability in cases of legal transgression. Others, such as Schmitter (1999) and Mainwaring (2003) argues that the definition should be broadened to include holding “rulers accountable for the political and not just legal consequences of their

²⁴ Schmitter (1999) also wants to include non-state actors such as civil society organizations, private enterprises, media and mass social movements into the concept of horizontal accountability. However, as Schedler (1999) states, assuming the relative equality of power between these institutions and the state actors will in most cases be unfair, as the latter usually holds significant physical, economical and law-making power over the former.

behavior in office “ (Schmitter 1999:60). Kenney (2003:67) argues that if the Constitution allows for parliamentary sanctioning of the government for “actions that are politically objectionable”, this is horizontal accountability.²⁵ Indeed, according to Mainwaring (2003:11), “the political answerability of ministers and cabinets to the legislature is a fundamental aspect of intrastate accountability”.

Thus, even if climate change is not present in the electoral channel, it might be handled by state actors who are in a presumably better position than the electorate, both in terms of resources, expertise and access, to interact with the government on such a complex issue. In fact, the works on horizontal accountability prescribes it as their duty to oversee government action, and thus we should expect to find at least traces of a discourse on the subject between them. Following the discussion above, I choose to also allow for holding state agencies accountable on political grounds, simply because setting such strict restrictions as prescribed by O’Donnell (1999a) will risk excluding much of the climate change discourses, which I presume to be more political than juridical. Additionally, as Schmitter (1999:61), I also think one should consider the signals of preference sent by actors before the mechanisms of accountability are set in motion. This is because one can imagine that if a state actor is seen as having a credible ability to sanction politically objectionable actions by other state actors, the latter will probably not take those actions if discontent is signaled beforehand. Thus one risks missing an important piece of the interaction between state actors involving responsiveness if one is too focused on formalized accountability mechanisms.

Strøm (2000) shows how, in parliamentary systems, parliaments are part of a chain of vertical accountability structure and therefore might not be as effective horizontally in countries such as Kiribati. Nevertheless, even though the government in Kiribati to some extent originates in parliament by the cabinet being formed of its members and relying on its support to continue in office, the opposition must be expected to scrutinize and criticize government actions independently. Indeed, the ability of parliamentarians to demand that government representatives explain and justify their actions (i.e. give accounts) to the parliament is one of the central tenants of the parliamentary system, although their ability to sanction depends on who has parliamentary majority (Mainwaring 2003:11, Kenney 2003).

In Kiribati, this should be expected to translate into climate change being an issue that is discussed in the formal interaction between these institutions. For instance,

²⁵ He argues that this is only the case in parliamentary systems, something that Mainwaring (2003:12) objects to in the same volume.

parliamentarians should ask questions of government action, and if the mechanism of horizontal accountability functions properly, the government should reply. Failure to do so, or other breaches of the law relating to climate change, should be found to be treated in the court system if the need has ever risen.²⁶ However, Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b:16-18) contends that in system with few institutional veto points, such as the majoritarian system of Kiribati, the attitude of the leadership towards an issue becomes important in facilitating action. Thus, the power of the committed executive to promote the climate change agenda is strengthened and the sanctioning capacity of the parliament is lessened.

2.4.3. The third dimension: Civil society and non-electoral citizen participation²⁷

The previous channels of discourse discussed are fairly formalized links that base their relationship on a set of prescribed rules of procedure. However, these actors also interact with other political actors in less formal ways. These latter have been given various names and definitions, but a commonly used label is “civil society”, which is meant to stand in contrast to the state and the family, although in reality the lines are blurred. Following especially the work of Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2003) on *societal accountability*, I treat this separately from the other channels of accountability for the sake of clarity. Just as accountability, civil society is also a popular concept within democratization theory (see Ottaway 2008 for a brief history and discussion, also Cohen and Arato 1992, Cohen and Arato 1994). Diamond (1994) defines civil society through five character traits: firstly, it is concerned with the *public* rather than the private interest. Secondly, it relates to the state in some way, but do not seek to replace or control it. Thirdly, it encompasses *pluralism* and diversity and do not seek to monopolize a function or political space. Fourth, it represents *partialness*, meaning that it does not try to be all-encompassing, but rather just focus on specific interests. Lastly, it is separate from *political society*, meaning in essence the party system, since civil society entities need their independence to perform a mediating role. This definition is similar to the one offered by Schmitter (1997:240).

Diamond (1994:7) further states that civil society is “a vital instrument for containing the power of democratic governments, checking their potential abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny”. Civil society also provides arenas for citizen participation in politics outside the formal structures (i.e. participation in elections and local

²⁶ See Gloppen and St. Clair (2012) for a discussion on treatments of climate change-related issues in the courts.

²⁷ Civil society has been seen as both a part of the vertical (Schedler 1999, O'Donnell 1999b, Lawson and Rakner 2005:1-12) and horizontal (Schmitter 1999) chains of accountability.

or national government bodies). Civil society organizations, such as NGOs and the independent mass media, are central in articulating the concerns of citizens vis-à-vis power-holders (Diamond 1994). In O’Neil’s (2007:245) words, they “enable underrepresented segments of society to organize and expand their rights”.

Civil society performs what some label *social* (Sharma 2009:8) or *societal accountability* (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003, Lindberg 2009:14, Lawson and Rakner 2005:11). Organizations and the media can force the government to give accounts and justify their action. However, since the relationship between civil society and power-holders is not codified as a formal principal-agent relationship with one being the representative of the other, the former is dependent on gaining legitimacy either through the group they profess to represent or the validity and urgency of their plea. In addition, they also lack a formal mechanism of sanctioning, which Schedler (1999) argues makes it a “weak, toothless, ‘diminished’” form of accountability. Although Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2003) agree that civil society organizations and the media might not have formal mechanisms for sanctioning, they nevertheless argue that civil society is able to impose costs on political actors by exposing bad performance and wrongdoings. This will hopefully activate the other mechanisms of accountability that do have the power to sanction, namely the electoral, parliamentary and judicial. In their words, societal organizations “turn on the alarm” for other accountability mechanisms to respond to (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003:311). Thus they are able to indirectly impose both legal and reputational costs which might be extremely damaging to those exposed.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Paavola and Agder (2006:605-606) contend that political-economic factors, such as inequality and lack of capacity are obstacles for equal participation in climate change policy formation at the national and sub-national level. Through this, certain demographic groups risk being ignored when political assessments of vulnerability and adaptation is considered. This makes it even more important for civil society organizations acting as intermediaries between the government and these groups.

Still, Ottaway and Carothers (2000) try to check the all-encompassing praise of civil society in democratization. They find a distance between NGOs and the society that they claim to represent due to the elite nature of the people who gravitate towards the “technocratic policy advocacy work”. They also criticize the assumption that civil society organizations are strictly separate from the political society by stating that it is not supported by the facts on the ground. Their critique is however mostly directed at the idea of advocacy NGOs being a cure-

all in democratizing countries, while they praise “broad social movements”, for instance for leading the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Schmitter (1997:240) also contends that the mere presence of intermediary organizations doesn’t necessarily translate into a vibrant civil society. If they are too closely linked with either the state or undemocratic groups, they are nothing more than facades masking the actions of their guardians. In those situations, Diamond (1994:7) argues that they “lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions”.

The ideal of a strict distinction between civil and political society may be even more distant in Kiribati. As discussed earlier, Baldacchino (1994:69-70, in Srebrnik 2004:334) claims that the state is very influential in small states, and that “[t]he distinction between state and civil society becomes close to a theoretical quirk”. Here it is worth reiterating Larmour’s (1992:108) claims that in the South Pacific context, traditional structures, such as Churches, clans and kinship groups, steps in to set “powerful limits on state action” when other civil society organizations are too closely associated with the state to be an independent check on the latter’s powers. Thus, in Kiribati, traditional structures might replace the civil society organizations as intermediaries between the government and the citizens. However, as the earlier presentation of Lawson’s (1996) work on tradition and democracy in region shows, this might not be done in a “democratic manner”.

Following this discussion, we can expect citizen engagement on climate change if it is indeed as important domestically as it is portrayed internationally. At the same time, one must keep in mind Macdonald’s (1998:37) claim that there is little knowledge of advanced policy issues beyond what he calls the “politico-bureaucratic elite” in Kiribati. Thus, civil society organizations might act as an intermediary between the citizens and the government on the issue, since it might be easier for a specialized group to acquire the capacity needed to interact on such a complex issue. Additionally, one might reason that it will be easier for the government to uphold a discourse on climate change with one or a few organizations representing the people as a collective instead of with each citizen individually. Lastly, it will also be interesting to see if civil society has *turned on the alarm*, to use Smulovitz and Peruzzotti’s (2003) phrase, exposing practices and policies relating to climate change that has activated the other mechanisms of accountability. When the government is as vocal as it is internationally on the issue, one can argue that there is a need for someone making sure that what they say and do is divulged, explained and discussed with the people they purport to speak on behalf of. This can of course happen in parliament, but the literature consulted above

are almost in unison in their assertion that this horizontal mechanism often needs to be set in motion by independent and vigilant non-state actors.

2.4.4. The fourth dimension: non-domestic actor interaction and external accountability

So far I have set up expectations for the interaction between domestic actors in Kiribati. However, climate change is usually treated as a global phenomenon which requires global solutions and this has some consequences for the structures of responsiveness and accountability that I will discuss in this next section.

Pastor (1999) argues that a “third dimension of accountability” is needed to supplement the vertical and horizontal. He argues that governments have become “more permeable to outside influence” due to three factors: the growth and power of the human rights movement, the demise of the Cold War, and the spread of democracy, in addition to economic globalization (Pastor 1999:124-125). This has made it possible for the international community to shape and strengthen national mechanisms of accountability, such as elections, to the point that he argues that “they sometimes function as surrogates for domestic institutions that have not yet established their competence or autonomy” (Pastor 1999:123). Although Pastor has a specific focus, national elections, I will argue that his call for a third dimension of accountability can be seen as applying also in other areas of domestic interaction with non-domestic actors. As mentioned in the introduction, Macdonald (1998:37) claim that in Kiribati, third parties, most often aid donors, frequently gets involved in policy formation. In the following section, I will therefore argue that the democratic accountability discussed earlier in this chapter might be challenged and replaced by an inclination to instead act as responsive and accountable to non-domestic actors who the government could perceive to hold more leverage. This can be labeled as *external accountability* (see Rakner and Gloppen 2003, also Lawson and Rakner 2005).

Harrison and Sundstrom (2007) identifies three mechanisms that causes international pressure on the domestic climate change agenda: normative pressures from foreign governments and NGOs, international negotiations to reduce the costs of compliance with the Kyoto protocol, and business concerns about competitiveness in the global economy. Although this was regarding ratification of the Kyoto protocol and only involved large states, it might give some hints as to the interaction between the sub-national, national, and international arena in forming climate change policies. In this context, the normative pressure applied by foreign governments may also apply to other areas of climate change politics

besides ratification. This could lead to an agenda that would otherwise have not been fronted by the Kiribati government.

Furthermore, sectional and regional forums, such as the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) have been important in bringing together leaders of countries threatened by climate change to form a united front (Barnett and Campbell 2010:101-109). Through especially the latter two, adaptation has been set forth as a regional priority, and as such, leaders might feel compelled to take action to avoid embarrassment when meeting their peers. This is similar to what Lindberg (2009:14) calls *reputational accountability*, where actor's reputation among equals might be damaged if she is deemed to act contrary to established norms and practices. It is diffuse and indirect, but might still be quite compelling for those involved. Barnett and Campbell (2010:120) argues that much of the climate change programs are formed at this level and it still remains the "business of foreigners and Pacific Island elites", without much participation from local people. Moreover, Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b:18-19) explains how transnational actors may influence the beliefs and values of both the policymakers and the citizens by promoting particular norms. Through this, non-domestic actors become tied into the domestic arena as national actors strengthen their legitimacy by referencing to their international partners, particularly in less wealthy states. Thus, it may be the case that climate change policy originates external to the domestic political system and that the dominant discourse on the issue might be running from non-domestic actors to the Kiribati government.

This might be augmented by factors such as the smallness and dependency of Kiribati. Ott (2000) summarizes many of the findings of small states' interaction with non-domestic actors.²⁸ Discussing state autonomy, she refers to Baker (1992, in Ott 2000:46) when arguing that "if a majority of the capital budget of a small country comes from abroad, then there is a real question about who has the ultimate decision making authority over both policy and priorities in these countries". Ott (2000) herself also makes the case that small states are far more likely (than large states) to be dependent on foreign aid, and that through bilateral conditions and the imposition of so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), economic smallness removes some political autonomy from the leadership in these states. She claims that "the ultimate result of such programs is often the inability of political leadership in small states to respond to constituency concerns " (Ott 2000:8). Thus, economic dependence on

²⁸ Since I have not been able to get copies of the original sources, I have to rely on secondary quotations.

non-domestic actors could move agenda setting and executive power away from national actors. This can arguably weaken the mechanisms of accountability, as the former are not directly accountable to the citizens in the country affected, but more often to their own domestic base. Dietche et al. (2005:15) states that

“While formally accountable to parliament and their electorate through a range of constitutionally defined instruments, governments in aid dependent developing countries may in practice prove more accountable to external donors since withdrawal of aid funds constitutes a serious sanction.”

At the same time, if the government accepts this infringement and restriction of self-governance, and are responsive and accountable to the electorate and other state actors as prescribed in the discussion on the three other pillars, then one can also argue as problematic.²⁹

Another aspect that Ott (2000:106-108) finds is that small states are also relatively vulnerable to intervention and dependent on cooperation with other states, and thus much of its foreign and security politics is geared towards regional and international cooperation. Vital (1967, in Ott 2000:31-32) argues that small states have less political options than larger states, and that there is a tighter connection between domestic and international affairs. They stand to benefit the most from international recognition of the sovereignty of states, as there is little else to deter potential intruders. Conversely, they also generally lack the economic and military weakness to impose their will on other state, giving them “a greater interest in developing international law, the establishment of international courts, and the promotion of instruments and institutions of peaceful change” (Vandenbosch 1964:304, in Ott 2000:33). Here it can also be argued that there is minimal cost involved for small states in pursuing such a policy, since they have few interests in other countries that might be disrupted.

Along those lines, Leary (1969, in Ott 2000:45) argues that regional organizations can be crucial for small states overcoming the limitations imposed by their lack of capacity, as cooperating with their neighbors might help in maximizing the use of “scare local talents and resources available for development purposes”. Getting the most out of the limited resources they have might be important on several fronts, for as McNamara (2009) finds, the institutional capacity of Pacific small island states hinder their ability to voice their concerns

²⁹ See Burnell and Rakner (2011) for a discussion on aid conditionality, also Collier (1999), Elbadawi and Gelb (2003).

adequately in the UN forums. Here it is worth reiterating Baldacchino's (1994:69-70, in Srebrnik 2004:334) fear that some small states have a problem of capacity due to a small population base and high emigration, leaving many dependent on outsider consultants.

Leary (1969, in Ott 2000:45) further argues that regional organizations might also serve as conduits of external aid flowing into the region, thus insulating the small states from some of the demands that may accompany bilateral assistance. Barnett and Campbell (2010) claims that this is the preferred way for the donors to operate in the Pacific region, since it is easier for them to engage a single point of contact instead of many different countries. Regional organizations might also provide the expertise needed for a more equal interaction. However, Barnett and Campbell (2010) also hold that these regional organizations might be torn between loyalty to donors, individual member states or their own organization.

Thus, when discussing climate change discourses in Kiribati, one cannot ignore the international aspect. Following the literature consulted here, it might be that non-domestic actors hold significant sway over Kiribati's policy-making, be it through economic or other means. Additionally, when the government interacts with these, it could be torn between being responsive to the wishes of its own people and accountable to its peers and benefactors. Perhaps this marks one of the most important questions that my thesis seeks to answer: who does the Kiribati government feel beholden to on climate change issues, domestic or non-domestic actors?

2.5. Summary

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for my later presentation and analysis of the results of my research. By drawing on previous research on small and island states, cultural and historical aspects related to politics in the Pacific, as well as studies on domestic climate change policy formation, I have shown how contextual characteristics shape what can be expected to be found when studying the relationship between the political actors in Kiribati. Furthermore, the structure offered by the literature on accountability and responsiveness shows how it is conceptually and analytically useful to separate the discourses on climate change into the four dimensions of the *electoral channel*, the *state actor interactions*, *non-electoral citizen participation*, and finally, the *non-domestic interactions*.

I will now move on to discuss the methodological choices made in order answer my research question.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: case study research using data triangulation

As mentioned in the introduction, the island states in the Pacific have been given little attention by political scientists (Anckar 2004a:3), and scientific studies have mostly been done within the natural sciences or anthropology. Statistical data are also inadequate or simply nonexistent (Anckar 2004a:16). Commonly, the literature dealing with the politics of the region focuses on groups of country, either based on location (see for instance Colbert 1997) or geographical trademarks, such as size and remoteness (see for instance Anckar 2001, 2004a, b, 2006, Anckar 2000, Anckar and Anckar 1995). Therefore, finding data on a particular case often involve piecing together side-remarks from several sources in order to get a fuller picture. This provides part of the reasoning behind my choice of doing interviews as the main method of data collection. Since few have collected and published the relevant data before me, I have to go find it myself.

The thesis is therefore close to what George and Bennet (2005:75) calls a *heuristic* case study, meaning that it “inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths”. I seek to uncover how climate change is treated on the political arena in Kiribati and say something about why it is so. Furthermore, it is exploratory in nature since the main aim is to uncover new evidence not studied before.

This chapter will therefore begin with discussing the principles of case study research and how the interplay between theory, data collection and analysis offered by this design best suit my research question. Then follows a section on the rationales behind choosing Kiribati as my case, and potential drawbacks this might have for the representativeness of my findings. Next I argue that data triangulation with a main focus on qualitative elite and expert interviews complemented with documentary, archival and to lesser extent observational data provides “*converging lines of inquiry*” (Yin 2003:98, italics in original) that strengthens the validity and reliability of my findings. I end the chapter with a short discussion on measurement validity and conceptual stretching in light of my chosen research design.

3.1. Doing case study research

Gerring (2007:19) states that a case can be any phenomenon with identifiable boundaries that comprises the primary object of an inference. He further defines a case study as “the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is –at least in part- to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)” (Gerring 2007:20). It is usually focused on the within-case variation, and involves more than one observation. In my thesis, the political system of

Kiribati is my case, and how the politics of climate change are treated by the political actors are the observations. Subordinate to that is the interaction between the political actors on that particular issue, which constitutes the dimensions, or variables, in my research.

Thus, like most case studies, my focus is on the within-case variation (Gerring 2007:21). This is done *synchronically*, meaning that the variation is measured at a single point in time. I do this because of the lack of available data, which means I have to discover the outcome of the observations as of today. Therefore, a weakness of my study is that I am not able to compare it to previous studies done at different times since none have been done, and time and resource constraints stops me from observing the case over a significant period to allow for a temporal dimension. Thus, I end up with something similar to a snapshot of the political system of Kiribati, with a particular focus on interactions on climate change policies. This affect the generality of the conclusions I draw based on the material collected.

According to Gerring (2007:41), case studies are the best way of doing exploratory research, since it allows the researcher to both generate and test a multitude of hypotheses in a “rough-and-ready way”. Thus, one can establish what is happening and several theories as to why by gaining in-depth knowledge of the circumstances. King, Keohane and Verba (1994) claims that case studies are important because they can provide good descriptions of a phenomenon which is crucial to arriving at good explanations, especially if little is known about a subject. Yin (2003:1) has a similar perspective when he argues that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed”, given that the investigator has little control over the events studied and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. This is certainly relevant to my study, as I seek to ask *how* the chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati are, and *why* they are as they are.

Following this, George and Bennett (2005:111-112) argue that an inductive case approach can provide novel theories. As new evidence are uncovered and consulted, initial expectations are reformulated and new hypothesis constructed. Furthermore, King, Keohane and Verba (1994:46) states that data collection, theory generation and theory testing happens interchangeably throughout the research process. Although some theoretical assumptions are in place before one proceeds to collect data, it is important to allow new pieces of information to reshape the assumptions and directions of the study if needed. Moreover, when doing research into a field that is as uncharted as the one I am focusing on, it is hard to know beforehand what theories are relevant. It is therefore necessary to bring in more theory after the facts to try to explain the findings. This is precisely one of the advantages of the single-

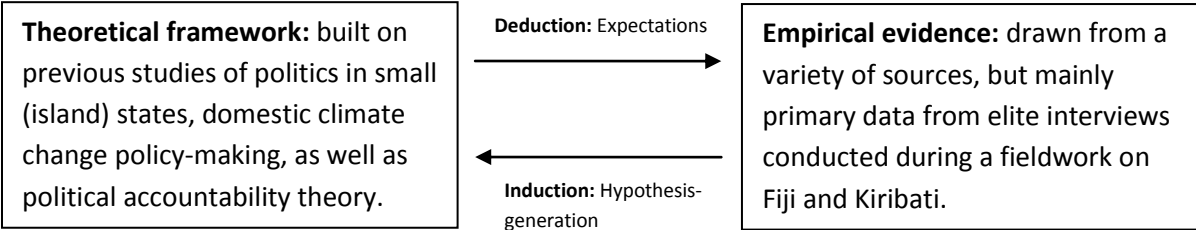
case approach I have chosen. Even if I have a certain theoretical approach at the beginning of my study, the closeness to the data material allows me to reconsider my approach in the light of new evidence. For instance, if a respondent gives an unexpected answer to a question, I can shift the focus of the interview to probe this new angle (George and Bennett 2005:20).

My study is perhaps seemingly an *atheoretical single-case study* in the sense that I seek to explore a phenomenon that has not been studied before, and therefore do not have a particular theoretically-based starting-point (Lijphart 1971). However, I will resist such a label. First of all, as Lijphart (1971:691) admits, purely atheoretical studies are an ideal type because

“almost any analysis of a single case is guided by at least some vague theoretical notions and cases, and usually results in some vague hypotheses or conclusions that have a wider applicability”.

This is indeed true for my part as well. As the theory chapter demonstrated, although I am not able to draw on previous studies dealing specifically with domestic climate change discourses, I am still able to set forth explicit statements about what I should expect to find, based on studies of cases that share some resemblance to mine, be it islandness, size or some other trait. Furthermore, I showed how my study can benefit from theories of political accountability in building a theoretical framework to structure my data collection. In chapter 5 I discuss my findings in connection with the findings in the field of small state research to create hypothesis of the causality. Thus, my study moves beyond purely atheoretical description, and is probably more fitting the label of a *hypothesis-generating case study* (Lijphart 1971:692). The interaction between the theory and the data is illustrated in figure 1 below. Gerring (2004:350) calls this floating movement between theory and data “a highly circular process”.

Figure 1: The process between theory and empirical evidence in case study research



Furthermore, Yin (1981:64) argues that

“[t]he typical case study report is a lengthy narrative that follows no predictable structure and is hard to write and hard to read. This pitfall may be avoided if a study is built on a clear conceptual framework.”

Taking heed of this advice, the theoretical framework offered by accountability theory is of vital importance for structuring my research. Presenting and discussing my findings within four separate pillars, each representing a certain mechanism of accountability, contributes greatly in making the empirical evidence more comprehensible.

3.2. Case selection: generalization?

Gerring's (2007:20) definition of a case study cited above states that “the purpose of that study is –at least in part- to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)”. Przeworski and Teune (1970:17) takes this further and argues that generality and parsimony are more important than accuracy. Although I do not try to develop a universal theory, I will still argue that my thesis sheds light on a large population, despite my research question being highly specific. First of all, by placing my study within the field of small state research, I implicitly compare Kiribati with other states sharing certain similar characteristics. According to Landman (2003:34), “a single-country study is considered comparative if it uses concepts applicable to other countries, develops concepts applicable to other countries, and/or seeks to make larger inferences”. The population of my study thus becomes those countries that share these traits. However, at the outset I will refrain from making bombastic assertions of who my case represents. This is because I do not know *a priori* which traits are important and which can be ignored. Ragin (2004) argues that the initial puzzle upon which the research is built is not necessarily theory-driven, and therefore, the cases are not “pre-determined” at the outset of an investigation. The population is formed as the case-oriented research progresses and conditions for an outcome begin to appear. These limit the representativeness of findings by asking “what conditions are necessary for this outcome”, from which the population is identified. My assumption is nevertheless that my findings can be replicated in other small island states facing a similar threat from a changing climate. In the last chapter of this thesis, I will give a brief account of the population of cases in which the hypothesis I develop can be usefully tested.

Nevertheless, by doing a single-case study, I trade external for internal validity (George and Bennett 2005:22, Gerring 2007:43). According to George and Bennett (2005:31-33), the greater explanatory richness of case studies is preferred at the expense of explanatory power across cases. They argue that it is important to be aware of these limitations, and that contingent generalizations should only be made to the subclass of cases that are similar to the one studied. This counters some of the critique of this type of study, which is based on a notion of the representativeness of the case studied being stretched too far.

When selecting the case to be studied, the researcher often opts for the case that can offer the most in terms of building the strongest possible inference on a particular theory (George and Bennett 2005:31-32, Ragin 2004). When I chose Kiribati as the case for this thesis, I considered it a part of the population of small island states threatened by climate change. More precisely, I had noted that several of these countries had leaders that were quite vocal on the international arena on this issue, disproportionate to their size and voice on other issues. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, by asking how the issue was treated domestically, my research question was born. Thus, I had both my population, small island states threatened by climate change, and the phenomenon, domestic climate change policy interaction, for my study (George and Bennett 2005).

The next step was therefore to select a case from the population that would allow me to uncover as much as possible about the phenomenon. As shown by Gerring (2007:87), drawing at random from the population when doing a small-N study means that one risks both the cases chosen being unrepresentative and that they do not sufficiently provide leverage into the research question. Therefore, some kind of nonrandom selection procedure should be followed. For me, limitations in the available data preclude a careful consideration of the entire population of available cases. Therefore, I decided to choose an *extreme* case which I expected to be “prototypical or paradigmatic” of the phenomenon of interest (Gerring 2007:101). Firstly, Kiribait can be considered extreme on the vital context variable *level of climate change threat*, based on several studies and reports listing them among those states most threatened by climate change, being a low-lying country consisting of coral atolls and reef islands (Mimura et al. 2007:703, Sem 2009, Leatherman and Beller-Simms 1997:2, Nunn and Mimura 1997:135). Secondly, they score quite high on “*vocal-ness*” on the international arena on climate change, as demonstrated in the introductory chapter. According to Gerring (2007:105), the “extreme-case method is purely exploratory – a way of probing possible

causes of Y, or possible effects of X_1 , in an open-ended fashion” . This is what I am trying to achieve in this thesis: uncovering Y and finding potential X’s.

By going to the extreme and knowingly choosing a case that is severely threatened by a changing climate and active on the issue on the international arena, I am able to maximize my chances of finding interesting results. If the domestic discourse does not stand in proportion to the threat and the activity internationally even in the paradigmatic case of Kiribati, then it is reasonable to believe that they do not exist in other small island states with more moderate levels on these two conditions, given a close similarity between the cases.

However, one must keep in mind that the traits that makes Kiribati extreme in a larger context is shared by several other small island states. For instance, Tuvalu, which was previously joined with Kiribati as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, is also mentioned as among the most vulnerable in the reports cited above. Furthermore, as shown in the introduction, then Tuvalu Prime Minister, Bikenibeu Paeniu, is credited for being the one who made Pacific islands the *cause célèbre* by holding a passionate speech at the Second World Climate Change Conference in 1990 (Barnett and Campbell 2010:87). Another oft-mentioned low-lying island state is the Maldives, who held an official cabinet meeting under water in 2009 to send a message to let the world know “what will happen to the Maldives if climate change isn't checked” (cnn.com 2009). Thus, Kiribati might be more of a *typical* case among extremes. It can serve an exploratory role by being a representative for a larger class of cases (Gerring 2007:91). However, lack of data makes it difficult to assess how extreme or representative my particular case is *a priori*.

Kiribati is chosen over these cases mainly out of pragmatic reasons, such as time and resource constraints. Although this is not a methodological reason, it is still an important determinant when both are in limited supply. According to Gerring (2007:150), “[p]ragmatic considerations are often – and quite rightly – decisive in the case-selection process”. First of all, the official administrative language of the country is English, meaning that official documents and the elites I come in contact with speaks a language I am fairly conversant in. This eliminates the need for translation services, which would greatly increase the cost both in terms of money and time invested in the data collection, as well as reduce the reliability³⁰ by me not having the ability to control the empirical evidence first-hand (Bujra 2006). Furthermore, Kiribati seemingly has greater administrative capacity in meeting the requests

³⁰ Reliability can be defined as the chance that applying the same procedures the same way will produce the same results (King et al. 1994:25). It basically means increasing the likelihood that the data a researcher gets is as “true” as possible.

for access to information and actors from researchers such as me than countries with even smaller populations, such as Tuvalu.

Secondly, during the roughly three decades as a sovereign state, the country has developed a successful democratic system in which power is transferred peacefully through relatively free and fair elections with universal suffrage at regular intervals (Henderson 2006:63, Van Trease 1993b, c, e, Anckar 2001:261, 2005, Freedom House 2011a). Hence, one can expect there to be interactions between the government and other political actors, such as parliament, voters and civil society organizations in one way or another, which is not as given in less democratic societies. This further limits the generality of my thesis, but I believe it is necessary since a single-case study of a non-democratic state would make it hard to discern whether a lack of interaction on any issue is the results of the non-democratic nature or whether it has other causes. However, the main reason for limiting the potential cases to democratic states is that one can expect the necessary information and actors to be more readily available in such systems, since openness is a constituting feature. Additionally, the relative stability of the system hopefully also contributes that my findings have certain validity beyond the immediate period in which the data was gathered. Thus, it is more convenient to choose Kiribati over the Maldives, given that the latter began a process of political opening only a few years ago and have experienced setbacks and political turmoil just recently (see Freedom House 2011b for a brief overview).

3.3. Data collection: methodological triangulation

As stated by King, Keohane and Verba (1994:26-27,51), one should always be clear of how data is collected, so others can replicate ones research. This strengthens the reliability of the study (Yin 2003:37-38). In this next section, I will therefore provide a detailed account of what sources were used to shed light on my research question, and what implications their use might have.

For me, the aim is to find as much information as possible that might help to shed light on the research question. As discussed, Gerring (2007:39) argues that case studies have a clear advantage when the research is exploratory. It gives an in-depth knowledge and closeness to the data collected that cannot be matched by other methods. Furthermore, according to Yin (2003:97) a major strength of case studies is the opportunity to use “multiple sources of evidence”. Data triangulation adds to the validity and reliability of conclusions, since using multiple sources develops what he calls “*converging lines of inquiry*”, meaning

that several sources of evidence points in the same direction (Yin 2003:98, italics in original). This is likely to make findings more convincing and accurate. Furthermore, each piece of evidence can be seen as essentially different measurements of the same phenomenon. This is lauded by King, Keohane and Verba (1994:48), who argues that “we wish to bring as much information to bear on our hypothesis as possible”. It is not difficult to argue that the same is true if we want to explore a previously uncharted area to generate new hypotheses.

Yin (2003:85) lists six sources of evidence that he finds are most commonly used in case study research: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. Of these, I utilize the three first directly, and the fourth more implicitly. However, my primary mode of data collection is qualitative interviews, and I will therefore discuss this first.

3.3.1. Qualitative interviewing³¹

According to Peabody et al. (1990:452), interviews are almost always an appropriate research strategy for political scientists. This is supported by Tansey (2007:4-5), who in relation to using interviews as a process tracing technique writes that “process tracing frequently involves the analysis of political developments at the highest level of government, and elite actors will thus often be critical sources of information about the political processes of interest.” Although my study is exploratory and not focused on clearly delineated processes, his argument is still valid for my study as well. Since my research question ask of the interactions between political actors on the issue of climate change, elite actors such as politicians, senior-level staff and bureaucrats, community leaders, NGO representatives, and foreign government representatives can provide crucial insights (see Peabody et al. 1990:454).³²

Goldstein (2002:669) identifies three basic goals when doing elite interviews:

1. Gathering information from a sample of officials in order to make generalizable claims about all such officials' characteristics or decisions;
2. Discovering a particular piece of information or getting hold of a particular document;
3. informing or guiding work that uses other sources of data

³¹ If authorized by the informants, copies of the audio files and transcriptions can be obtained by contacting the author.

³² When I later discuss the challenges to finding interview objects, I will explain why it is not feasible to do non-elite interviews for my thesis.

I will to some extent seek all three. The aim is that my interview objects will both give me insight into the climate change interactions in Kiribati in a way that both sheds light on that particular phenomenon, as well as giving clues and interpretations of other sources of data that I utilize, which relates to the data triangulation that I have discussed earlier.

Finding respondents: snowball sampling of elites and experts

When doing elite interviews, it is important that the interviews are tailored to the purpose of the study (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). A vital step is of course to decide who to talk to (Peabody et al. 1990:453). As mentioned, elite representatives will provide valuable insights. They can provide crucial information about their own interactions with other political actors, and are therefore vital in shedding light on the phenomenon under study. This is what Bogner and Menz (2009:52) categorizes as *process* knowledge. Furthermore, these same informants can be asked about specific information that they are better positioned to have access to than me, or what Bogner and Menz (2009:52) call *technical* knowledge. Finally, they can give their thoughts on interactions in general, for instance whether they think government discusses the issue with parliament or whether civil society organizations have the capacity to engage with the executive on such a complex issue. This *interpretive* knowledge will also be important, as they help me get a broader picture that goes beyond mere description and moves into the field of uncovering causal links (Bogner and Manz 2009:52). Of course, this also means that there is a greater chance that the interview object provides information that is colored by her beliefs, which once again gives weight to the necessity of data triangulation.

Additionally, there is another group of well-placed individuals who I want to interview, namely so-called experts. They too possess knowledge not immediately available to the researcher. Littig (2009:100) states that “anyone who is responsible for and has privileged access to the knowledge of specific groups of people or decision-making processes can be seen as an expert”. She differentiates between elites and experts by stating that the latter do not necessarily have a decision-making responsibility. Thus, expert might have insights based on other sources than experience from the process discussed, for instance through academic work or journalistic practice. They can particularly contribute with important interpretive knowledge to be used for theory-generation, since they can point out potential causes of the effects observed. In essence, they can help explain *why* elite actors do the things they do (Bogner and Manz 2009:47-48, also Littig 2009:101).

One of the biggest challenges when doing any type of interviewing, but which is intensified when interviewing elites, is finding people who are willing to talk to you about the things you are interested in (Goldstein 2002:669). The important point to remember is that who you talk to (or don't talk to) affects what you find. For me, I wanted to find actors who participated directly in the processes I was researching. This means primarily politicians, senior-level staff and bureaucrats, community leaders, NGO representatives, and foreign government representatives. It turned out to be a lot harder than imagined getting ahold of people of interest in both Fiji and Kiribati from Norway, which I eventually understood to be because of a these people are both very busy and in some cases not too fond of online communication.³³ This was accentuated by the fact that it was quite hard to identify the potential respondents in the first place, since more often than not the web pages of Kiribati organizations, ministries and parliament are not up to date and seldom includes working contact information.³⁴

Through persistence and relentless use of so-called snowballing as a sampling strategy, I was able to secure some interview appointments before heading into the field. Still, most interview objects were identified and contacted by using the same technique while in the field. As argued by Tansey (2007:18), this strategy is particularly suitable when the population of potential interview objects is not fully visible. Following the recommendation of authors such as Goldstein (2002) and Peabody et al. (1990), I always concluded interviews which I felt had gone well by asking if the respondent knew anyone else that I should talk to. Most did, and through this I was able to get a number of appointments.

Since my primary aim when doing interviews is to discover new information and guide my search for additional sources, I do not perceive the bias introduced through selective response rates to be a major problem. In fact, a strength in doing qualitative interviewing using purposive selection is that the researcher knows something about those he do not interview, which he can compare to those who do (Goldstein 2002). Furthermore, when doing elite (and expert) interviews for the purpose of uncovering information, talking to people from different sides or organizations can help you decide whether you have unbalanced or biased information, and thus where more data is needed to draw a conclusion. This increases the

³³ Since my subjects were literally on the other side of the planet, communicating through e-mail was the only viable option.

³⁴ Here I am thankful for the help of professor Edvard Hviding, head of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen. By giving me insight into the work of the Bergen Pacific Research Group, I was able to identify key actors in the region.

internal validity of my findings. As Tansey (2007:22) argues, when one is after specific information to uncover an event and possibly develop a theory based on this new information, it is better to talk to those you perceive to hold the information needed instead of adhering strictly to some form of random sampling. Thus, the arguments for selecting interview objects resemble those for choosing the case: usefulness vis-à-vis the research question takes precedence over sampling purity.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that snowball sampling has the drawback that one risks the referrer sending the researcher to persons that are similar to himself, thus reducing the variation in the sample (Tansey 2007:19). This must be countered by ensuring that the initial sample is sufficiently diverse. For me, this was done by introducing something similar to quotas in the initial sampling process. I sought out representatives of all sides in the political life in Kiribati, such as civil society, the government, the opposition, foreign government representatives and aid organizations. However, I was not able to find someone from the local level, such as village councils, community leaders or village elders. Time and resource constraints colluded with my unfamiliarity with the local culture, which meant I had to rely on others to set up these appointments for me, but for various reasons, they fell through. This means that I have to rely on secondary sources when probing into this level of political life, and thus, my sample is quite top-heavy and the reliability, and to a certain extent the internal validity, of my findings on the attitudes and actions of the local level actors are somewhat reduced. Furthermore, the same constraints also meant I was confined to South Tarawa when visiting Kiribati, which contributed to the elitism of my sample. Yet, as will be stated several times throughout this thesis, South Tarawa is the locus of political, economic and educational life in Kiribati, and if my sample is skewed towards this location, then that certainly goes for the rest of the country as well. Overall I felt that I was able to secure interviews with actors representing the breadth of the political elite in Kiribati, bar local level representatives.

The interview guides and the interview process

Following the advice of the authors consulted on elite interviews, I opted for doing semi-structured interviews³⁵ with all my respondents (Peabody et al. 1990, Davies 2001, Aberbach and Rockman 2002, Tansey 2007). This means asking open-ended questions from a previously prepared interview guides (see Appendix 2), but allowing the flow of the interview

³⁵ Similar to Yin's (2003:90) *focused interviews*.

and the answers of the respondent to decide precisely what questions are asked and in what order. The advantage this holds over a more structured form is that it allows the interview objects to answer freely without predefined answers. When doing an exploratory study, it is advantageous to let the informants formulate their own answers. This maximizes so-called *response validity*, meaning that the answers I am getting are more likely to be representative of what the respondents actually think about a certain phenomenon (Aberbach and Rockman 2002:674, Meuser and Nagel 2009:31). However, one loses some of the ability to compare across interviews since the respondents are not necessarily asked like questions in the same order, but for me, this is not a goal. Instead I hope to extract as much information and insight into the research question as possible.

Before going into the field, I revised the interview guides several times after running pilot interviews with fellow students. Furthermore, following the recommendation of Peabody et al. (1990:453), I learned the guides by heart, meaning that after using it as a safety blanket to calm the nerves during the first few interviews, I only needed to glance at it during the subsequent conversations. This was accentuated by each interview having their own dynamic, meaning different parts of the guides were emphasized in different interviews. I also took heed of the advice to always obtain the contact information of the informant so to be able to contact her at a later time to ask for clarifications or elaborations. This became very useful for me after returning from fieldwork, since the vast distance between me and my informants meant I had no way of going back to ask follow-up questions.

When developing my interview guides and conducting interviews, I tried to make sure that my questions were not biased in ways that would steer the answers in a certain direction (Peabody et al. 1990:452-453, Yin 2003:90, Rubin and Rubin 2005:82-83). This is obviously easier to avoid when asking broad open-ended questions which allow the respondent to resonate and formulate their own answers, but it is still something that one should be mindful of. For me, I felt that it was a bigger problem that some respondents were at times eager to please me and thus formed opinions on the spot that they had not held previously. This was probably accentuated by them knowing that I was there to study something related to climate change policies.³⁶ This is similar to the Hawthorne effect, which basically means that being

³⁶ Prior to interviews I only gave vague clues of my research question, stating that I was researching “governance issues in connection to climate change” so as not to give my intent completely away to the extent that it could dominate the interview process. I chose to tape interviews to avoid the flow of conversation being interrupted by me taking notes. I asked permission of the respondents before starting the recording, and turned it off when others entered the room out of privacy concerns. In general, I did not get the impression that the informants were bothered by the tape recorder (see Peabody et al. 1990:45 for a short discussion of this potential problem).

the subject of research affects the behavior of the research subject (Granberg and Holmberg 1992). This can of course be hard to trace without having controls not under study for which to compare my respondents to, so I therefore must trust the answers given by them to be sincere. Nevertheless, I must be wary of how my presence and behavior shapes the interview. This was done using multiple sources of evidence whenever possible.

There were a few occasions where I had conversations with people who for various reasons did not want to be quoted by name.³⁷ However, this had limited impact on my data collection, as their perspective was usually in line with other informants. When possible I prefer to use data from open sources to make my results more reliable.

3.3.2. Other data sources: triangulating using documentation and archival records

As mentioned above, when doing exploratory studies one ought to use data triangulation to ensure the data you collect is as reliable as possible. This is because it is harder to identify unreliable data when you are not quite sure what the data should look like. Therefore, Yin's (2003:98) *converging lines of inquiry*, meaning that several different sources of evidence points in the same direction, are necessary in order to increase the likelihood that the researcher is on the right track. This is particularly important when doing interviews, as one statement from one person does not necessarily constitute the entire "truth". Especially when interviewing political elites, they may have an interest of portraying an event, and especially their involvement in it, a certain way (Davies 2001). In general, I was amazed by the directness and frankness I was met with by the interview objects, to the point where I sometimes felt the need to ask multiple times if it was okay for me to quote them on their statements. Nevertheless, corroborating statements with data from other sources, be it other interviews, archival records, reports or previous research still has a lot of value and increases the reliability of the data.

Therefore, the data collected from interviews are compared to data obtained through other means whenever possible. Furthermore, these other data sources proved invaluable for filling in the gaps in my knowledge left by forgetting to ask certain question or by none of my informants sharing that particular piece of information.

The most important data source besides the interviews was what Yin (2003:85) calls *documentation*, which basically entails all written documents that can be linked to the case

³⁷ These have not been included in the list of interview in Appendix 1 to ensure full anonymity. See Ryen (2002:chapter 11) for discussion on the ethical implications of using interview data.

being researched. He states that this source is “likely to be relevant to every case study topic” and that it is useful in corroborating data obtained by other means (2003:85-87). Since my work is of an exploratory nature, a variety of documentation is crucial to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny. First of all, studies done on Kiribati’s political life were of course fundamental in providing the context for my case. As mentioned earlier, I primarily had to rely on reports written by or on behalf of multilateral organizations operating in the region. Additionally, online databases and encyclopedias such as the *CIA – The World Factbook* (2012a), *Europa World Online* (2012) and the *PARLINE database* of the Inter-parliamentary Union (2012b) were also very useful in providing empirical evidence not otherwise accessible to me. Finally, minutes of the meetings in the Kiribati parliament are used to investigate the frequency and content of references to climate change in parliamentary discussions. Although a limited source, as will be discussed in relation to its use in chapter 4, it is still valuable as it provides another *line of enquiry*. The same can be said to the few newspapers article consulted to find indications of statements and attitudes of actors I for various reason was unable to interview. However, Yin (2003:87) warns of taking everything presented in writing at face value and stresses the need for considering the original purpose and context the document was created for. This will be done each time a new source is introduced. In general, I find few reasons to doubt the reliability of the empirical data presented by these sources, since a motif for deception is usually lacking. In any case, most pieces of information are corroborated by more than one source, and thus, their leverage increases.

A related source of data is archival records. In this thesis, it mostly comes in the form of survey data such as census records, and is used to provide the necessary background information about Kiribati. Additionally, an opinion survey conducted in 2008 in connection with the second phase of the Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP) is also consulted extensively, as it is the only systematized collection of the attitudes and beliefs of the Kiribati people on climate change I have been able to find. It is very useful for providing insights into the opinions of those people and sections of society not interviewed by myself, such as the unimane, community leaders and “ordinary people”.³⁸ I was also given access to various organizational records, such as budgets. The same considerations to authenticity and context that applied to documentary evidence cited in the previous paragraph must also be observed

³⁸ I was not able to get access to the raw data from the survey and instead had to rely on a report written by a Tatoa Kaiteie, National Consultant for the survey, and Dr. Christine Hogan, Advisor on Participation & Awareness Processes.

when using archival sources. Since I do not have access to the primary data from which the reports I consulted was generated, it is hard for me to determine how reliable they are. Therefore, I must rely instead on the perceived reliability of those publicizing the reports. Aggregated data from Kiribati is hard to come by, but the ones I have found are produced by the Kiribati National Statistics Office (2012), which operates under the Ministry of Finance, in addition to the above-mentioned 2008 survey carried out by KAP staffers. Both rely on foreign consultants to raise the methodological quality, but are still faced with the enormous difficulties of trying to carry out surveys in such a widespread country with limited human resources. This is evidenced by the 2008 survey being only done on five islands due to “time and monetary constraints” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:11). This obviously reduces the representativeness of surveys³⁹, but at the same time, I find no grounds on which to doubt their accuracy. Especially in the 2008 survey, the frankness of the survey report, also on matters running counter to the official government line, suggest freedom on the part of the authors.

A final mode of data collection I utilized, but that is harder to find traces of in my text, are direct observation.⁴⁰ As Yin (2003:92-93) writes, this kind of evidence can be collected indirectly when visiting the field, including when other sources of data are pursued through for instance interviews. By observing the interview object, the context in which she operates, and for my part, the country which I am studying, I receive additional information about the case that probably would not otherwise have come to me. For instance, I was able to see the challenges faced by South Tarawa firsthand, such as pollution, overpopulation, underdevelopment and not at least its vulnerability to the forces of nature. This has helped me find new perspectives when considering power relations and interactions in the country and with outside actors. Although I have not based any section explicitly on those observations, they are still in the back of my head when considering other sources of evidence.

3.4. A final reflection: measurement validity and conceptual stretching

Adcock and Collier (2001:529) defines measurement validity as “whether operationalization and the scoring of cases adequately reflect the concept the researcher seeks to measure”. Basically, this means that care should be taken in choosing the data used for answering the

³⁹ The report authors still see the 837 respondents in the survey as representative of the wider population, and notes that the stratified target samples was met (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:11).

⁴⁰ A case can also be made for me doing participant-observations, since me going to Kiribati to interview actors on their interactions on climate chain meant I created another interaction.

research question so as to ensure that you are in fact measuring what you want to measure. For me, this is particularly important, since I seek to uncover instances of *climate change discourses*, which admittedly is a previously undefined concept. In the introduction, I operationalized this as “instances of communication between various actors in relation to climate change policies involving Kiribati”. This is still quite vague, but since my study is exploratory, I consider it counterproductive to be too restrictive about which interactions I accept as evidence of a discourse *a priori*. Furthermore, I will argue that doing an in-depth single-case study with data triangulation gives an advantage in tackling problems of measurement validity. The ability to intensively assess a few variables from several angles using different sources of data reduces the risk of measurement errors (George and Bennett 2005:220). Nevertheless, when doing my data collection and analyses, I must always keep the research question in mind and consider whether the new piece of evidence uncovered actually helps expand my knowledge on the phenomenon in question. Furthermore, I also need to be careful in drawing conclusions from the data gathered and make sure that I do not make too firm claims based only on circumstantial evidence.

I will end this chapter with a final note on the risk for *conceptual stretching*, which Sartori (1970:1034-1035) warns about. In short this means that concepts are stretched too far to accommodate different contexts, and thus loses “connotative precision”. This has relevance for my thesis, as I am using an essentially Western democratic framework to interpret political interaction in a context where notions such as the nation-state were seemingly unfamiliar until quite recently.⁴¹ The argument can be made that my inferences are based on a flawed assumption of how politics is conducted in Kiribati. However, as shown in the previous chapter, several authors such as Linnekin (1997) and Lawson (1996) criticize the notion that the region is inherently incompatible with democracy and modernity. Furthermore, the actors I encountered in the region did not seem to consider these ideas to run counter to their tradition. To them, it was quite the opposite, and they spoke proudly of how democracy was part of their culture. One of my informants puts it like this: “Our society was brought up in a parliamentary democracy administration, which started from the village level, up to the island level.”⁴² Finally, I also consider cultural factors in my analysis. In sum, I will therefore argue that the framework and approach I take to my case does not bias my results.

⁴¹ See Denoon and Firth (1997 (eds.)) for comprehensive historical analyses of the Pacific Islands before, during and after colonization, and Macdonald (2001) for the same focusing specifically on Kiribati and Tuvalu.

⁴² Interview with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Speaker of Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

Chapter 4 – Presentation of results: executive dominance and reliance on foreign assistance

As mentioned in the introduction, Macdonald (1998:37) claims that in Kiribati, there is little knowledge of advanced policy issues beyond what he calls the “politico-bureaucratic elite” and that third parties, most often aid donors, frequently gets involved in policy formation. In this chapter, I will present results from my data collection which indicates that this is true about climate change policy-making as well. The presentation will be done within the four-pronged framework set up in the theory chapter for greater clarity. I first present the *electoral channel*, where there is little evidence of climate change being an issue. The same tendency is found in the *courts and parliament*, although the opposition is more willing to engage the government on concrete instances that can be related to climate change, such as coastal erosion. *Non-electoral participation* is also mostly focused on concrete issues, and there is evidence that the NGO sector is closely associated with government. In general, it seems that the government dominates interactions on the issue domestically, and although they seek to enter a dialogue with other actors, the communication is usually top-down. Finally, the government also communicates with *non-domestic actors*, but there are indications that the former are in a disadvantaged position in this relationship as they depend on foreign governments, regional groupings and multilateral organizations for both expertise and financial assistance.

However, I will begin this chapter with a short summary of the domestic climate change policies of Kiribati before I present the results from my data collection. This will be useful as a reference when discussing climate change interactions.

4.1. Short summary of domestic climate change policies of Kiribati

The main thrust of Kiribati’s domestic climate change initiatives is gathered under the umbrella of the Kiribati Adaptation Program (KAP). It began as a USD 5.5 million initiative supported by the World Bank, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), AusAid and NZAID, while United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Japanese government have contributed earlier. The aim is to “reduce Kiribati’s vulnerability to the effects of climate change and sea level rise by raising awareness of climate change, assessing and protecting available water resources, and managing inundation.” (Government of Kiribati 2011d). It is divided into three phases. The first, which ran from 2003 to 2005 focused on a national

consultation on climate change, as well as identifying potential projects for the later phases and mainstreaming adaptation into national economic planning.

Then followed pilot implementations during the second phase, which ran from 2005 to 2011. It included awareness building and consultations, coral reef monitoring, technical assessments and strengthening of water resource and coastal management. According to a World Bank press release (2011), it resulted in some 37 000 mangroves being planted, as well as the construction of sea walls to protect against storm and flooding, rain water harvesting and improvements in water supply “in selected priority areas”. A report from May 2011 notes that “[p]roject implementation progress has improved significantly over the past year with visible on-the-ground impact on coastal protection and freshwater supply and sustainability.” (Battaglini 2011).

On 15 September 2011, the World Bank approved the third phase of the KAP. It will broaden the program based on the experiences of phase two and

“help improve climate resilience by both strengthening the Government and community’s capacity to manage climate change effects and improving the management and governance of water resources and infrastructure. The project will also focus on increasing community fresh water quality and storage capacity and better protecting targeted coastal areas from storm waves and flooding.” (The World Bank 2011).

The project is estimated to cost USD 10.8 million and receives funding from AusAID, GEF under the Least Developed Country Fund, the Japan Policy and Human Resources Development Fund, the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, and the Kiribati government. According to a February 2012 report, “[t]he project is due to become effective in [that month] and is still in too early a stage to report on implementation progress.” (Battaglini 2012).

Another approach taken by the government on climate change adaptation is through planning for relocation. In case the worst-case scenario comes to fruition and Kiribati becomes uninhabitable, the Kiribati government is preparing its population for the day they have to leave their country (Government of Kiribati 2011d). This is coupled with efforts for dealing with urban poverty, price hikes and related developmental challenges, and is done by being “very active in seeking employment opportunities for their people in external labor market” (Legg and Tira 2011). The two-pronged strategy means firstly, creating opportunities

for migration for those who wants it in the coming years. President Tong has appealed for higher quotas of Kiribati labor migrants to be accepted by more prosperous neighbors like Australia and New Zealand (RMAT 2010, Solomon Times Online 2009). The government have also sponsored a website for potential employers of I-Kiribati with the stated aim “to make it as easy as possible for you to select our best workers” (KiribatiLabour 2011). Secondly, in cooperation with development partners and institutions in New Zealand and Australia, they are seeking to enhance the levels of qualification obtainable in Kiribati to make potential migrants more attractive abroad (NZAID 2012, AusAID 2012). This “migration with dignity” scheme is considered an integral part of the country’s adaptation strategy (Government of Kiribati 2011d, McAdam 2010, Lughry and McAdam 2008).

Having provided the context, I will now present the results from my data collection.

4.2. Electoral channel: Climate change and elections

As shown in the theory chapter, elections are important arenas for voters signaling preferences and holding their representatives accountable, even though clear shortcomings do exist. If climate change is a part of the relationship between the citizens and the state in Kiribati, one would expect that it surfaced as an issue in the recent election campaign. However, according to most sources, this was not the case.⁴³

All elected members of the Kiribati parliament (Maneaba Ni Maungatabu) stand for election every four years, unless the parliament is dissolved earlier. The 44 elected MPs in the Kiribati parliament come from single- or multimember districts with each populated island constituting a constituency, except the highly populated Tarawa and Tabiteua, which are divided into several electoral districts (Electoral Commission 2012).⁴⁴ All constituencies have between one and three seats, based on population. This is also the case for the two urban constituencies of Beito and Teinainano on South Tarawa, which together holds almost half of the country’s population. If no candidate receives over half the valid votes in the first round of election, a run-off is held between the top three to five candidates, depending on the number of seats in play (Van Trease 1993b:77, Brechtefeld 1993). In multi-member districts, voters may vote for as many candidates as there are vacant seats.

⁴³ Time and resource constraints force me to rely on expert interviews as sources for this section. This is because what information is available on the election campaign is mostly available only in I-Kiribati and I therefore have to depend on first- and second-hand accounts from participants and observers.

⁴⁴ In addition, one representative is appointed from the Banaban community on Rabi Island in Fiji, and the Attorney General serves ex officio if not elected as a regular MP.

The 2011 Kiribati general election came about as constitutionally prescribed four years after the last one, and saw 136 candidates compete for the 44 elected seats of the Maneaba Ni Maungatabu.⁴⁵ After two rounds of voting, carried out on 21 and 28 October, 14 incumbents, including four Cabinet Ministers, lost their seats, while the other 30 remained in office.⁴⁶ 38 411 votes were cast in the first round, meaning that about 36 percent of the 60 000 eligible voters stayed home. However, the 88.6 percent turnout amongst the 43 343 registered to vote is a new record high for a general election (Electoral Commission 2012). The high turnout might be explained by the increasing political awareness of the Kiribati population, as well as nation-wide educational and outreach campaigns carried out by the Electoral Commission leading up to the election (Electoral Commission 2012, also interview with Teweiariki Teaero). The following presidential election was held on 13 January 2012, in which President Tong of Boutokaan Te Koaua (BTK) retained the presidency by securing 42 percent of the votes, while Dr. Tetaua Taitai of Karikirakean Tei-Kiribati (KTK) received 35 percent and Rimeta Beniamina of the Maurin Kiribati Party (MKP) got 23 percent (Teaero 2012b).

According to I-Kiribati freelance journalist and political observer, Teweiariki Teaero, climate change was never a major issue in either election.⁴⁷ He did not see Tong being reelected as connected to climate change, but rather to a split in the opposition which led to two competing oppositional candidates (see also Teaero 2012a, c). Teaero told me that the things people were talking about was the same as in the previous elections: corruption and favoritism in government, lack of food and other goods, and shortage of transportation, especially in moving copra from the outer islands to the mill on South Tarawa. As such, the voters and the campaign were focused on immediate and concrete issues. He ascribes this to the relative freshness of the climate change issue, as well as the unfamiliarity of the public to such an abstract phenomenon.

Director of the University of the South Pacific (USP) Kiribati Campus, Dr. Ueantabo McKenzie, who withdrew his candidacy for parliament just prior to the general election, also claims that climate change is not an electoral issue amongst most people, although they live with it every day (RNZI 2011; also personal interview)⁴⁸. He is quoted saying that “while climate change is an issue on the national and international stage, it’s not something that most

⁴⁵ This paragraph is based on a draft of the 2011 General Election Report (Electoral Commission 2012) and an interview with the Chief Electoral Officer, Rine Ueara, Bairiki, 9 February 2012.

⁴⁶ One district needed a third round of voting to fill its seats since two candidates had the same number of votes in the second round. This was done on 3 November.

⁴⁷ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012. Teaero is also Senior Lecturer at the School of Education at USP.

⁴⁸ Interview with Dr. Ueantabo McKenzie, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

people are talking about” (RNZI 2011). President Tong conveyed the same message just before the nomination of the presidential candidates in late November 2011, when he told a reporter who asked whether the people voted for his hard work on climate change that

“I think very few people in Kiribati tend to think beyond tomorrow and so they think about climate change as something that will happen in the years ahead. *I think majority of the people would not vote on the basis of what we are doing on the issue of climate change.* (...) It remains very important but perhaps in the minds of the people it is not very urgent maybe because it does not touch on their stomach nor their earnings and income.” (Matau 2012, my emphasis).

Nevertheless, I have found two outside sources that gives accounts conflicting with what has been established so far. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012a), UN General-Secretary Ban Ki-Moon’s visit to Kiribati in September 2011 “made climate change a major election issue in the 2011 elections, along with traditional issues such as job creation.” Along those lines, a newspaper article claims that “the issue of climate change featured strongly in the recent Kiribati elections” (Williamson 2011). Without speculating too much, the diverging reports can be seen as an indication that someone has an interest in portraying climate change in Kiribati as a “hot topic” and by this keeping the country in the limelight on the issue internationally.⁴⁹

Thus, there are conflicting accounts of whether elections have been used explicitly to signal preference or hold representatives accountable for the government’s climate change policies. However, if one considers the fact that the government have been tried to disseminate information on its climate change dealings to the public⁵⁰, it can be argued that the voters have been given a chance to pass judgment on their actions, and that the verdict was one of conditional approval. But in a country without exit polls or even regular opinion polls, it is hard to ascertain what issues the voters were considering when casting their ballots. On the one hand, the government sustained heavy losses in the general election, but on the other, the sitting President was able to stay in office in the following presidential election.

⁴⁹ See Barnett and Campbell (2010:chapter 8) for a critical analysis of how small island states are presented abroad in connection with climate change

⁵⁰ Interviews with Eni Tekane, Clerk to Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 6 February 2012, also personal correspondence, and Hon. Taomati Iuta, Speaker of Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 9 February 2012. See also sections on citizen participation and government interaction with parliament later in this chapter.

However, a split in the opposition meant that President Tong could win with well under half the popular vote behind his candidacy (Teaero 2012b:26).

4.3. State actors interaction on climate change

Having discussed whether climate change is an electoral issue in Kiribati, I now turn my attention to the interactions between state actors on the issue. As discussed in the theory chapter, the electoral channel suffers from shortcomings due to the inherent inequalities in capacity and access to information between elected representatives and the voters. In such instances, it becomes important that the different state actors hold each other accountable since they are on a more equal footing.

4.3.1. The courts and the government⁵¹

A 2010 U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report on Kiribati state that the government generally respects the independence of the judiciary as prescribed by the Constitution (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2011). The courts have been used to scrutinize the actions of other state actors on several occasions (see for instance *The High Court of Kiribati 1996 KIHC 3, Teannaki v Tito, 2003a KIHC 1, Tatireta v Tong, 2003b KIHC 116, Tatireta v Tong, Kiribati Court of Appeal 2004 KICA 17, Bataroma v Attorney-General*). The current opposition even has a pending court case, as of February 2012, against the current Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Taomati Iuta, claiming that he has unconstitutionally ruled in favor of the government.⁵²

Constitutionally, the High Court is also the arena to solve legislative disputes between the Cabinet and parliament. The Constitution (Section 65) states that if the president believes a bill proposed by the parliament is inconsistent with the Constitution, he may withhold his assent, and the bill is thus returned to parliament. If the bill is passed again by the parliament, and the president still thinks it is unconstitutional, his only course of action is to refer it to the High Court. The High Court then decides whether the bill is in breach of the Constitution. If it finds that the bill is not in violation of the Constitution, the president must assent.

I have not been able to find indications of explicit climate change issues being treated in the courts in Kiribati. A search in the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute's database

⁵¹ As a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, Kiribati adhere to the British Common Law tradition, although this source of law is subordinate to the Constitution and the Statutes of the Maneaba Ni Maungatabu (Tsamenyi 1993). Customary laws is also recognized as a source of law, although it is subject to both the Constitution and the Statutes (Tsamenyi 1993:78).

⁵² Interview with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Speaker of Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

of Kiribati court cases⁵³, using terms such as “climate”, “climate change”, “sea-level rise” and “global warming”, turns up no results (pactlii.org 2012). One case involving “coastal erosion” has been tried in the High Court, but no reference was made to the other phrases mentioned (The High Court of Kiribati 2007, KIHC 142, Berenato v Attorney General iro Public Works & Utilities). It involved a landowner seeking compensation for increased erosion of his property, which he blamed on a ramp that had been set up recently. However, the court ruled in favor of the defendant, although the preceding judge noted that it was done “reluctantly as I have a good deal of sympathy for the plaintiff”.

Thus, the courts are seemingly an active arena for exercising horizontal accountability in Kiribati, but the activities of the courts has not extended to issues explicitly relating to climate change as of yet. However, Gloppen and St. Clair (2012:2) demonstrates how there is an “increasing legalization of climate change politics” in the world and that cases related to climate change has been successfully pursued in national courts. They conclude that “the law and the courts are likely to become a major arena of contestation over climate justice” (Gloppen and St. Clair 2012:14). Therefore, if the scenarios described by the authors consulted earlier in this thesis on the consequences of climate change to Kiribati comes true, more such cases can be expected in the courts in the future.

4.3.2. The relationship between parliament and the government

Before presenting my findings on climate change interactions between the parliament and the government, I think it will be useful to present a short summary of the institutional configurations of this relationship. Firstly, after being elected, the president of Kiribati appoints his cabinet, consisting of up to eight members of the parliament, as well as the vice-president and the Attorney General⁵⁴ (Constitution of Kiribati, Section 40-41). Both he and the cabinet members retain their seats in parliament like in the Westminster parliamentary system. Furthermore, in tone with the parliamentary system, and unlike most other presidents, he is dependent on the continued support of the parliament to remain in office after he has been popularly elected (Constitution of Kiribati, Section 33.2, see also Meller 1990:60). More precisely, the president can be removed from office by a vote of no-confidence supported by a majority of all the member of parliament. The same occurs if he loses a vote by the same margins on a matter which he has notified the Speaker will be raising an issue of confidence

⁵³ Covers decisions from the Court of Appeals, the High Court and the Magistrate Court, in addition to historic decisions from the High Court of the Gilbert Islands and from the Court of Appeal in Fiji that concerns Kiribati.

⁵⁴ Both of which are appointed by the president.

in him.⁵⁵ The president does not have power of dissolution beyond raising an issue of confidence (Constitution of Kiribati, Section 78).

When speaking to I-Kiribati politicians and political observers, all usually identify members of parliament as either belonging to the *Government* or *Opposition group/side*, based on who they currently support in parliament.⁵⁶ There are also some independents, but according to the Clerk to Parliament, Eni Tekanene, they usually vote alongside whoever is in power.⁵⁷ However, based on the recent presidential election, one can identify three groupings in parliament by party name. Boutokaan Te Koaua (BTK), the current government party, is chaired by Kiribati's first president, Ieremia Tabai and was formed after a split in the National Progressive Party. Karikirakean Tei-Kiribati (KTK) is officially a newcomer, being established in 2010 through a union between the party of former president Teburoro Tito, Maneaban Te Mauri Party, and Kiribati Tabomoa Party. Its candidate in the 2012 presidential election was Dr. Tetaua Taitai. The last party, the Maurin Kiribati Party (MKP), put forward Rimeta Beniamina for the presidency. He was a leading figure of KTK before he lost the party's nomination for the presidency in 2011. Since the leader of MKP, Banuera Berina, lost his seat in parliament (Teaero 2012a), Beniamina was asked to run for them instead (Teaero 2012a, also personal interview). According to Teaero, the splits between the parties are based more on personal ambitions and clashes of personality than on issues, and as such, there is no clear ideological difference.⁵⁸ According to the Speaker, after some shuffling due to ministerial appointments, BTK has about 23 members on their side, while MKP have 7 and KTK has 14.⁵⁹ The last two MPs sit as independents. However, as often is the case in Kiribati, the numbers are not fixed and might change (see Teaero 2012a, b, for a analysis of the post-election jockeying). Due to electoral laws, party records are not kept and officially, elections do not include parties.⁶⁰ This makes it hard to trace the development of party support.

As shown in the theory chapter, the government-parliament relationship is of great importance, especially between elections and in alleviating some of the asymmetries that exist between the government and voters. Furthermore, these two branches of government are expected to keep a check on each other. I will for simplicity and clarity treat both the vertical

⁵⁵ He might also be removed on "grounds of incapacity" by parliament, but that process is long and involves the Chief Justice and an independent Medical Board (Constitution of Kiribati, Section 34).

⁵⁶ Interviews with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Teburoro Tito, Teweiariki Teaero, and Eni Tekanene.

⁵⁷ Interview, Ambo, 6 February, also personal correspondence.

⁵⁸ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

⁵⁹ Interview with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Speaker of Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

⁶⁰ Interview with Rine Ueara, Chief Electoral Officer, Bairiki, 9 February 2012.

link that goes from voters via the parliament to the government, and the horizontal link that runs independently between parliament and the government, in the same section. In reality, the data I that I have consulted makes it hard to differentiate between the two. Although parliament might not be able to be an effective check on government in a parliamentary system since the latter by design usually holds a majority in the former (Strøm 2000), one can still expect that this arena will be used by the opposition to challenge the executive on matters they see as important. As such, if climate change is as big an issue domestically as the government's international advocating makes it seem like, parliament should be an arena for some sort of debate on this topic.

However, Speaker of Parliament, Taomati Iuta, told me that climate change “has not been debated constructively in parliament, other than by intermittent presentations by the President and the government side”.⁶¹ This is supported by Eni Teknanene, Clerk to the Parliament, who says that climate change is raised mostly from the government side, and then it is done as “kind of promotion, or awareness, trying to inform the people that the climate change is happening”.⁶² Since parliamentary sessions are broadcast nationally via radio, the government apparently uses the sessions to reach out and inform about climate change and the policies they are pursuing. According to the Clerk, the opposition does not question the government on the this in parliament. They might raise query into the time spent by them overseas, but when explained why the government is doing this, Tekanene say they usually accept it. He illustrates this with a story of three members of the opposition being invited to attend a climate change conference abroad, and when they came back, they were on board with the government's policy. In general, he does not see a lot of disagreement on climate change in parliament, but notes that the opposition might question government activities on concrete events, such as the effects of climate change in coastal areas.

Still, there is particularly one oppositional figure that has been quoted by foreign media as a staunch opponent of the government's climate change policies: former president Teburoro Tito. After being relegated to the opposition, he has been quoted on “Saying we're going to be under the water, that I don't believe. (...) Because people belong to God, and God is not so silly to allow people to perish just like that” (Reed 2011, see also Reed 2010), as well as criticizing the government for pushing the climate change issue too hard (see for instance PINA 2011, RNZI 2012).

⁶¹ Interview, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

⁶² Interview, Ambo, 6 February 2012, also personal correspondence.

When I asked him to clarify this position, he said that his belief is based on the scientific evidence he have consulted, not on the Bible.⁶³ He was resolute that he believed in climate change and that he supported much of the climate change policies pursued by President Tong, but that he though the latter was “overselling” the issue. Tito finds the message being conveyed abroad that I-Kiribati is afraid of the rising seas and that they are ready to leave their lands as particularly offensive. So he says he is proud of the work the President has done, bringing Kiribati into the world’s attention and even getting the General-Secretary of the United Nations to the previously ignored island state, but that some of the statements made by the government are “not representative of the people”. He assured that if there was a change of government, his side would continue the advocacy work internationally, but be “realistic and honest” in the message they convey. More to the point, he claims that the opposition argues with the current government along those lines in parliament. However, as shown above, this last statement is not supported by Speaker. It should be added, however, that the Speaker is a former prominent parliamentarian, minister and vice-president closely associated with the government party. As such, I think the issue warrants closer scrutiny.

I have therefore analyzed the journals for the parliamentary meetings as far back as they are available, namely from late 2005 and up until April 2011 (Parliament of Kiribati 2012).⁶⁴ The parliamentary records reinforce the claims of both the Speaker and the Clerk. However, a weakness in the source material is that only the first question and answer is included in the minutes. The supplementary questions and answers are just referenced. Therefore, I have not been able to gauge the discussion held after the initial Q and A. Table 1 below shows different climate change related topics and whether they were discussed.

⁶³ Interview with Teburoro Tito, Member of Parliament, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

⁶⁴ Parliament meets for two weeks at the time three times a year.

Table 1: Analysis of the Journals of Parliamentary Proceedings, 2005-2011

Meeting	Climate change	Sea-level rise	Coastal erosion
7 th Meeting of Eight Parliament (December 2005)	No	No	No
8 th Meeting of Eight Parliament (June 2006)	No	No	Yes
9 th Meeting of Eight Parliament (November - December 2006)	No	No	Yes
10 th Meeting of Eight Parliament (May - June 2007)	No	Yes	No
1 st Meeting of Ninth Parliament	Missing	-	-
2 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (December 2007)	No	No	No
3 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (April – May 2008)	No	No	Yes
4 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (August – September 2008)	Yes	Yes	No
5 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (December 2008)	No	No	No
6 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (April – May 2009)	No	No	No
7 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (August - September 2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes
8 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (November – December 2009)	Yes	Yes	Yes
9 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament	Missing	-	-
10 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (August – September 2010)	No	No	Yes
11 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (November – December 2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes
12 th Meeting of Ninth Parliament (April 2011)	No	Yes	Yes

Source: Parliament of Kiribati (2012). The records for the 1st and 9th meeting of Ninth Parliament are missing. “Climate change” refers to a direct reference to “climate”, “climate change” or “global warming”, “sea-level rise” refers to references to rising sea-levels and “coastal erosions” refers to a reference to the coast eroding and its consequences. Parliament changed from meeting two to three times per year after the 2007 elections.

The records show that coastal erosion is by far the phenomenon referenced most often in parliamentary debates of the ones investigated. Being a nation of small atolls in the middle of the Pacific ocean with a total coastal line of 1 143 kilometers (CIA - The World Factbook 2012c), consisting mainly of sandy beaches and reefs, this is no surprise. However, it is only occasionally that this have been directly referenced in connection with climate change, and then most often by the government, who includes combating coastal erosion as a part of its adaptation strategy (see Government of Kiribati 2011d: Kiribati Adaptation Program).

References to rising sea levels are often mentioned in relation to coastal erosion, as well as inundation of crops and salination of fresh water sources.

Climate change only surfaces explicitly for the first time at the 4th meeting of the Ninth parliament, which was held in the fall of 2008. It was raised by Bauro Tongaai, a former minister and a BTK member, who asked the government to inform the parliament of its plan on climate change. The issue then lay dormant for a year until former President Teatao Teannaki, also of the BTK party, asked the government of its climate change adaptation plans. He followed up on this in the next meeting, where another former president and BTK strongman, Ieremia Tabai, also asked a question relating to the government's climate change policy. Only in the 11th meeting of the Ninth parliament, held in late 2010, did the opposition reference climate change. James Taom, a former minister in the Tong government, now belonging to the opposition, asked of the costs of the Tarawa Climate Change Conference, held earlier that year.

This analysis is limited by the source material not including the supplementary questions and answers given in parliament. However, the material available has shown that the opposition does not seem to use the parliament to discuss the government's climate change policies, at least not as a first mover. Instead, when climate change is explicitly referenced, it is usually by government backbenchers who ask for clarifications, giving the appropriate minister a chance to explain government policy. It seems that this analysis of parliamentary proceedings gives support to the statements of the Speaker and the Clerk that climate change, at least in reference to broad policy issues, is not discussed much in parliament. Yet, the opposition is more active in confronting the government on the more concrete issue of coastal erosion and sea-level rise, something that was also noted by the Clerk. A case can be made for this being more in the interest of the opposition politically. By pointing to specific instances where something needs to be done, the opposition might be signaling that the government is not doing its job. Furthermore, by not asking broad, open questions, they do not give the latter the opportunity to give elaborate explanations and justifications of their policies, and thus deprive them a venue for "campaigning". I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

An interesting case in point on government-oppositional interaction in parliament is the Tarawa Climate Change Conference, which was held in the parliament building on South Tarawa in November 2010 ahead of the Cancun summit. As discussed in the introductory chapter, 12 of the attending countries adopted the *Ambo Declaration*, which included calls for

developed countries to support measures in developing countries, and especially those “most vulnerable States in the frontline due to the urgency in the climate change crisis facing them” (Ambo Declaration, article 16).⁶⁵ The media coverage of the conference was quite positive (Ford and Packard 2010a, b, Wasuka 2010a, b, c, d), exemplified by an ABC Radio Australia story headlined “Kiribati climate change conference ends on a high note”.

However, the aftermath in the Kiribati parliament demonstrates the opposition’s willingness to reject government propositions. According to the Speaker of Parliament, the government sought to have the Ambo Declaration endorsed unanimously by the parliament.⁶⁶ However, when it came to a vote in late 2010, only 24 voted for, while 14 voted against and 8 abstained, roughly corresponding to party divisions in parliament. The Speaker, being as mentioned a close associate of the government, claims that the split came about because the opposition was insulted for not being consulted and included in the conference process. However, oppositional strong-man Teburoro Tito told me that his reason for disapproval was that the government had inflated the whole conference, calling it a summit and thus indicating a high-level meeting even though according to him, only low-level, technical people attended.⁶⁷ The aim, he thought, was for the government to enhance their own profile. In his words, “for us to approve it would be for us to approve all the wrong things behind all this”.

Summing up, it seems that although the opposition might be able to have a critical voice on the government’s climate change policy in parliament, as demonstrated by their rejection of the Ambo Declaration, they apparently haven’t used it to ask broad-based policy questions of government between 2005 and 2011. This is in line with the statements of the Clerk and Speaker of parliament that climate change is not really an issue that is being discussed broadly in parliament, and that when it is, it is mainly one-way communication from the government. Yet, on more specific issues, the opposition is more willing to engage the government. Nevertheless, in conclusion, the parliament is not an arena where the general climate change policies of the government is extensively discussed.

I will in the next section move on to focus on non-electoral citizen and civil society engagement on the issue.

⁶⁵ Adopted by Australia, Brazil, China, Cuba, Fiji, Japan, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, who also attended the conference, chose not to be part of the declaration by taking Observer status.

⁶⁶ Interview with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Speaker of Parliament in Kiribati, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

4.4. Non-electoral citizen and civil society participation

The literature consulted in the theory chapter shows that we can expect a relatively high degree of citizen participation in small states due to the closeness between the people and their representatives (Dahl and Tufte 1973, Ott 2000, Anckar 2001), although one must keep in mind resource imbalances that might prejudice the interaction in favor of one of the participants (Paavola and Adger 2006:605-606).

4.4.1. Government policy of consultation

The Kiribati Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) Strategy states that “as the impacts of climate change reach into all aspects of life in Kiribati, broad public consultation and participation in planning and implementation are needed for sustainable responses” (Government of Kiribati 2005). It goes on to state that the government will “maintain periodic national and island-level consultations with communities to keep them informed of what appears to be happening from domestic and external information to be happening to the locale climate”.

During the first phase of KAP, two national consultations were held in Kiribati in 2003, which brought together national and local government representatives, as well as representatives of elders, women and youth groups of all major inhabited islands. The consultations culminated in a “national consensus on the meaning of vulnerability and a national prioritization of coping strategies”, according to a World Bank policy note (Bettencourt et al. 2006:20).

The first consultation during the second phase (KAPII) of the program was held in late 2007, and had the expressed aim “to identify main issues related to climate change and sea level rise from stakeholders, discuss ways and means of adapting and planning appropriate strategies to overcome or minimize them” (Tebano 2008:8). It was attended by representatives from all the major islands, as well as the urban town councils and major denominations.

A 2008 survey carried out in connection with the KAPII showed that 11 percent, or 92 of the 837 asked had “attended a consultation/workshop on climate change or biodiversity issues eg fisheries, agriculture, water linked to climate change [*sic*]” and of these, nearly half did so on South Tarawa (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:19). The authors of the survey report conclude that the output of the consultations attended is limited at best, and that most don’t even remember who organized it. Worth noting is that the same numbers, 11 percent, also “thought they were consulted by the government regarding climate change adaptation strategies”, while 61 percent did not feel consulted. Of course one may discuss whether an 11

percent attendance is positive or negative. Certainly, in any Western country, I suspect that such a rate of participation in government awareness activities would be seen as a major success. On the other hand, Kiribati has a far smaller population, and especially on South Tarawa, the distances are small. The report authors are not clear as to whether they consider the participation rate a success, but instead state that

“[c]onsultations/workshops are regarded as the most effective ways of bringing about adaptation in behaviour (together with laws and their effective implementation). To date there have not been many consultation/workshops on climate change and related environmental issues on the islands visited.” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:6)

As such, it seems that there are attempts from the government’s side to involve stakeholders in the climate change policy formation process, but that it has met with limited success, and seemingly failed to reach out widely to the population. The same survey also found that 42 percent “did not think that the central/local government were doing things to help them to adapt to climate change locally ie on their island [*sic*]”, whereas 33 percent did. A quarter of those asked did not know what was being done. Again one may discuss whether these numbers are high, low, or as expected, but based on the wording in the report, it falls short of the government’s goals.

4.4.2. Individual non-electoral citizen participation

The one instance of direct petition by citizens that can be related to climate change that I have been able to find is in a question asked by Teatao Teannaki, a former president and a member of the BTK party, to the government during the 12th meeting of the Ninth parliament in April 2011. It concerned citizens of the Tebunginako village in Abaiang requesting to be relocated to “somewhere safer and more secured from destruction caused by coastal erosion and sea level rise”.⁶⁸ Apparently, they made the request directly during a ministerial tour of the island, and MP Teannaki wanted to know whether their plea was taken seriously, something the government confirmed.

This illustrates that citizens are feeling the effects of climate change and willing to interact with the government on the issue. Nevertheless, I have found little evidence of citizen participation in the broad climate change policy formation in Kiribati in the form of meetings, demonstrations, op-eds and other mechanisms of non-voting vertical accountability.

⁶⁸ For more on the Tebunginako case, see Morton (2009).

According to Teweiariki Teaero, few pieces are written on climate change in the Kiribati newspaper, and those who are are usually by concerned citizens like himself or Claire Anterea of KiriCAN.⁶⁹ The one instance of a rally on the issue was in connection with the Tarawa Climate Change Conference in 2010, and will be discussed more closely in the section on *Civil society organizations* below.

Andrew Teem, senior policy advisor to the President on risk, furthermore explained that most climate change policy is developed at the government level, but in the implementation phase, the stakeholders at the local level are usually involved (Office of the President 2011).⁷⁰ It is nevertheless unclear as to whether the recipients of projects at this level fully appreciate the issue of climate change in connection with for example coastal erosion, or if it just them seeing an immediate problem, and then seeking remedies for that specifically, as in the Tebunginako case above (see Claire Anterea in Williamson 2011; also personal interviews with Claire Anterea and Pelenise Alofa)⁷¹.

In the above-mentioned KAPII survey, 87 percent stated that they had heard about climate change prior to the survey. Also on more specific questions, a high number of the respondents showed an awareness of climate change related issues. However, many had trouble identifying direct consequences of climate change, and 46 percent agreed that “Living for today is more important than worrying about the effects of Climate Change in 50 years time”. According to the authors of the survey report, this resonates with the I-Kiribati cultural sentiment of “n na katia”, basically meaning “living for today” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:15). This is supported by Teaero, who puts it like this:

“Life is hard in Kiribati, on the outer islands, you know, and therefore they don’t want to worry about all these things and fantastic scenarios of glacial melting and all that, and what Anote Tong is doing in New York and New Zealand an all over. But then that is *immaterial to their immediate needs*.” (my emphasis).⁷²

This may suggest that there is some distance between the ambitions and the practices of the current government on climate change, and that it has not been able to involve its

⁶⁹ Personal communication with Teweiariki Teaero. I have, however, not been able to consult the national newspapers myself, as these are only available in I-Kiribati. For more on KiriCAN, see *Civil society organizations* below.

⁷⁰ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

⁷¹ Interviews with President of KiriCAN, Pelenise Alofa, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012, and KiriCAN activist Claire Anterea, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

⁷² Interview with Teweiariki Teaero, Suva, 2 February 2012.

citizens beyond raising the awareness to a level where most acknowledges that the phenomenon exists. However, a reservation must be made about this tentative conclusion. The survey which much of this is based on was conducted in early 2008, when the KAP was still early in its second phase, focusing on awareness-building and pilot implementations. Much may have changed in the over four years that have passed at of the time writing. Especially the Tarawa Climate Change Conference of 2010 and actions by the increasingly active climate change NGO sector on Kiribati, both of which will be discussed more closely in the next section, might be important in deepening the climate change awareness of many citizens. I therefore turn my attention to what is being done in the civil society sector to engage in a discourse on climate change.

4.4.3. Civil society organizations: collective action or government tool?

Presidential advisor Andrew Teem claims that the government tries to involve local NGOs as much as possible, and that they have “a very strong relationship”.⁷³ However, from the government’s point of view, there is a need to develop the capacity of the NGOs, which they try to do by assisting with the information and material they want.

Slightly more than 20 local NGOs are gathered under the umbrella of the Kiribati Association of Non-Government Organisations (KANGO), which is funded primarily by the government.⁷⁴ These include community and women’s organizations, church groups, social welfare and charitable organizations and worker’s associations (KANGO 2010). However, due to limited information it is difficult to ascertain whether these seek to influence the political agenda, or if they are strictly apolitical. Furthermore, many non-governmental organizations in Kiribati are organized by churches, but these seldom have political aspirations beyond typical social welfare and moral issues (Macdonald 1998:36).⁷⁵

There is one particular NGO in Kiribati that deals specifically with climate change: KiriCAN. After the COP 15 meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009, it was formed on the back of the Kiribati Climate Change Connections to join the global Climate Action Network International (CAN International). The CAN International (2012) claim to have over 700

⁷³ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

⁷⁴ The Commonwealth Network (2011) cites 39 organizations, while KANGO (2010) lists 35. However, the current Executive Director, Tata Teitiaua, told me that they had a little over 20 members in 2011. According to him, the negative trend is due to problems with the misuse and abuse of money under the former administration. Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

⁷⁵ Religion and religious affiliation is not such a big issue in Kiribati politics, although church-affiliated publications sometimes take political stands (Van Trease 1993b:84-85).

member organizations in more than 90 countries, and works “to promote government and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels”.

KiriCAN has 60 NGO member organizations, and works as an umbrella for already existing organizations that wants to work on climate change.⁷⁶ The membership is quite broad, and Amon Timan, a representative for one of the member organization told me that “KiriCAN deals with climate change, and it’s the one that everyone wants to be a part of”.⁷⁷ Their work is mainly funded through running projects for donors, as well as contributions from local corporations and individuals.

KiriCAN combine international advocacy work with local awareness-building and concrete initiatives, but their activities are mostly limited to South Tarawa. According to the activists I talked to, the organization see itself as sort of a grassroots movement for the government on climate change.⁷⁸ Outgoing KiriCAN President Pelenise Alofa gave examples of the organization going into the field to identify environmental problems which they conveyed back to the government, who then acted upon the advice. However, she perceives the voice of KiriCAN to be stronger internationally than nationally, and has personally attended several of the last COP meetings and is also regularly invited to give talks abroad. When going to international meetings, the organization cooperates closely with the government, giving Kiribati a voice both inside and outside the negotiations. In addition, foreign media reporters come quite often to Kiribati to do stories on climate change, and these usually seek out KiriCAN.

The organization often works through churches and local councils.⁷⁹ An interesting case in point, which Alofa and KiriCAN activist Claire Anterea holds forth as the networks biggest concrete success is a rainwater collection program they did on South Tarawa and the Kirimati Islands in cooperation with New Zealand Aid. 14 big water tanks were set up adjacent to large buildings, such as schools, maneabas and churches. The rainwater was then drained from the roofs into these tanks, and thus the communities were given access to communal fresh water. The tanks were essentially handed over to the communities upon completion, with the message that it was theirs to look after and manage. Alofa claims that

⁷⁶ Interview with Pelenise Alofa, KiriCAN President, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012. See also Wragg (2011).

⁷⁷ Interview with Amon Timan, Catholic Communications Organization and board member of KANGO, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012, also interview with Claire Anterea, KiriCAN activist, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

⁷⁸ Interviews with Pelenise Alofa, , and Amon Timan, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012, as well as interview with Claire Anterea, KiriCAN activist, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

⁷⁹ Interview with Pelenise Alofa and Amon Timan, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012, and Claire Anterea, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

this approach worked well, and that the feedback from those affected has been very positive.⁸⁰ They are now hoping to use the same approach in a new project aimed at cleaning up South Tarawa, which is heavily polluted due to overpopulation and lack of sanitary infrastructure. As is evident, KiriCAN is in practice more of a broad environmental movement, at least domestically, rather than just focused on climate change. I find worth quoting Alofa's explanation for this in its entirety, as it illustrates the interwoven nature of the challenges faced by Kiribati:

“I say ”we may not survive here, not because of the air pollution in the atmosphere, the global warming, but we also may not survive if we contaminate our environment.” We couldn't live in our own environment, because rubbish is everywhere. Part of the climate change work is cleaning up; we need to clean up, especially in Tarawa.”⁸¹

This might also be part of the explanation for the lack of civil society organizations and individual citizens trying to influence the broad climate change policies: they have more immediate and visible threats to worry about.

An illustration of KiriCAN's work on awareness-raising is found in relation to the Tarawa Climate Change Conference. KiriCAN held a two-day workshop ahead of the conference, and during it they gathered a large crowd from church groups, institutions, NGOS, and individual citizens for a rally outside the parliament building where the meetings were held. According to their own estimates, more than 1 000 people participated in the rally held in support of the government (Alofa 2011).

In general, Alofa states that KiriCAN is “very closely associated with the government”.⁸² KiriCAN activist Claire Anterea agrees and argues that the organization is involved in face-to-face interactions at the ground, while the government focuses on the more cost-effective, but perhaps alienating national radio.⁸³ Thus, in some ways KiriCAN acts as an intermediary between the people and the government on climate change. However, there might be a danger than instead of representing the grassroots in a bottom-up fashion, as prescribed by the definition of societal accountability (Lindberg 2009:14, Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003), KiriCAN might instead constitute another top-down link, acting as an

⁸⁰ Unfortunately, I have not been able to find New Zealand Aid's review of the project.

⁸¹ Interview with Pelenise Alofa, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012.

⁸² Interview, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012.

⁸³ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

advocacy network for the government. However, both Alofa and Timan insisted that KiriCAN feels free to criticize the government if needed, but that so far, this has not been necessary.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, domestically, KiriCAN seems to be focused on concrete, on-the-ground initiatives, and not so much in policy-making. Indeed, President Alofa denies the organization being involved with politics and claims that they will have no problem with whoever comes into power the next time around. Bearing in mind the lack of major apparent disagreements between the opposition and the government on climate change policies, this is not surprising.

Other non-governmental actors, such as village councils and the unimane might also be communicating their perspectives on climate change to government actors. However, in the interviews I made this did not come up. Additionally, it seems that KiriCAN have brought under its fold most organizations who are active on climate change, at least on Tarawa, and thus acts as an intermediary between the member organizations and the government, be it top-down or bottom-up. In conclusion, it seems that citizen involvement in climate change adaptation is more concrete, on-the-ground, than aimed at influencing policy.⁸⁵

4.5. Non-domestic actor influence and interactions

So far I have presented the interactions on climate change between domestic actors in Kiribati. However, as discussed in the theory chapter, another dimension can also be an important part of the equation: the discourses held with non-domestic actors, such as foreign governments, regional forums and multilateral organizations. The literature consulted suggests that these might hold significant sway over Kiribati's policy-making, directly or indirectly. Furthermore, their influence could cause the government to be torn between pleasing donors or doing what it thinks is best. I will therefore conclude this chapter by presenting the results of my inquiry into the interaction between primarily the government and non-domestic actors on climate change.

4.5.1. Dependent on foreign assistance

Kiribati very much depends on foreign assistance. External grants accounted for 33.9 percent of the country's revenues in 2010, and this is projected to rise to over 38 percent in 2012 (IMF 2011a:24). Of the AUD 59 million coming in from abroad in 2009, the largest contributors

⁸⁴ Interview with Pelenise Alofa, and Amon Timan, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012.

⁸⁵ Interview with Andrew Teem, Office of the President, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

were the EU with 12.7 million, Australia with 11 million, and Taiwan with 10.6 million (IMF 2011b).⁸⁶

According to Andrew Teem, the work Kiribati can do domestically is “very much determined by the funding that is available”.⁸⁷ He explains this as meaning that the government is not necessarily able to do what they think should be done, but must rather try to please donors. Thus, they are beholden to donor priorities and he admits that this puts the country in a disadvantaged position most times. He goes on to explain how the money coming in from major partners, like the EU and Australia, is usually channeled through regional organizations and is earmarked for specific activities, which might not be the priority of the government. Acknowledging that the country is facing capacity constraints which make it hard to meet donor requirements in terms of fiduciary and financial management, he would nevertheless like to see more open funding for the government to spend at its own discretion.

Dr. Willy Morrell, Natural Resources Adviser at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), supports Teem in that a lot of the climate change funding comes in through regional organizations such as his own, but he thinks the level of funding the countries are receiving for adaptation now is about as much as they are able to handle at the moment.⁸⁸ However, he argues that the lack of capacity does not necessarily come from an unqualified workforce, but rather the serious limitations imposed by the smallness of government agencies. He explains how environmental agencies might have employees who are very capable, but when there is only three or four of them, they have a hard time engaging in all the conventions and the like, since their absence in effect reduces the workforce of the agencies by perhaps as much as a third. Therefore, PIFS is working to set up a pool of expertise on climate change for the Pacific region, so that the smaller countries can have access to highly qualified personnel when it is needed, without having to have them in-house. This might counter another problem he sees as acute for the smaller countries, namely that when expertise is built up in a person, she becomes attractive to other actors such as aid organizations and international agencies who can offer a much better salary and career opportunities, and thus she leave her government job and sometimes even the country.

Another aspect of the regional groupings is that with member states ranging from Australia, with a population of just over 22 million and a GDP (PPP) of almost USD 918 billion, to Niue, with an estimated 1 269 inhabitants and a total GDP (PPP) of just over USD

⁸⁶ Unfortunately, I have not been able to discern how much of this funding that has a climate change component.

⁸⁷ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

⁸⁸ Interview, Suva, 31 January 2012.

10 million (CIA - The World Factbook 2012b, d), one may rightfully ask the question of whether organizations such as PIFS is dominated by its larger members. However, Dr. Morrell does not see this happening.⁸⁹ He admits that it is important to keep in mind the “great variation in terms of individual countries ability to engage on the international scene, and to really analyze and develop climate change policy and environmental policy.”, and continues by saying that “some of the larger countries (...) just got a larger population and a lot more resources to analyze, trying to keep on top of all the international policies and negotiations.” Nevertheless, although this might shape the interaction in the Forum, Dr. Morrell insist that they strive to find common ground, unifying the voices of the large and small member states on both climate change and other issues.

Theirry Catteau, attaché at the Delegation of the European Union to the Pacific, told me that one must not be naïve and think that there is such a thing as a “free gift”.⁹⁰ The work the EU does in the region, and he thinks this can be generalized to other donors as well, always have a level of self-interest. However, for the EU, Catteau does not see that self-interest as conflicting with the interests of the recipient countries. Talking specifically about “access” to the small Pacific countries votes in multilateral UN agencies, he explains how they share a common interest with the EU on climate change for more mitigation and more assistance to those who are affected, something which he argues the EU has been spearheading in international negotiations. He adds that the union also has a continuous presence in the region through the overseas countries and territories (OCTs), such as French Polynesia, Wallis and Fortuna and the Pitcairn Islands, which themselves are subject to climate change threats⁹¹. Thus, both the EU member countries and the Pacific island states have an interest in joining forces in international climate negotiations.

In the next section I will discuss whether the reliance on foreign assistance makes Kiribati accountable to foreign actors

4.5.2. Feeling accountable to external actors?

Kiribati participates quite actively regionally and internationally in climate change forums. As discussed in the theory chapter, regional and sectoral organizations, such as PIFS, SPREP and AOSIS, have strong climate change agendas agreed to by the member countries (Barnett and Campbell 2010:101-109). Knowing that there are few domestic actors actively holding the

⁸⁹ Interview, Suva, 31 January 2012.

⁹⁰ Interview, Suva, 15 February 2012.

⁹¹ See Sear et al. (2011) for a climate change vulnerability assessment of the British OCTs.

government to account for their overall approach to climate change, they might feel more obliged to follow external norms and conventions. Thus, the intense focus of the Tong government on climate change internationally might be more the result of international pressure and positioning, rather than an effort to transmit the concerns of the Kiribati people. This is certainly the accusation that they are met with by prominent oppositional figure Teburoro Tito, who blames President Tong for using climate change for self-promotion. He states that “the President, of course, he likes to travel and be a big figure now from the small island states”, and say that some of the stories the President is telling abroad and to the international media, such as the Kiribati population looking to leave their country, is simply not representative of the people.⁹²

In the environmental management plan (EMP) for phase three of the KAP, it is stated that “[a]s required by the World Bank Safeguards Policies, public consultations were undertaken during the preparation of EMP” (Office of the President 2011:27-28). Although this might not mean anything “sinister”, it nevertheless shows an emphasis on meeting the requirements of donors. In fact, Tata Teitiaua, the Executive Director of KANGO, which is one of the organizations participating in the phase three consultations, told me that his feeling was that government are allocating seats for NGOs in steering committees because it is a requirement of donors and not necessarily because they want NGO input.⁹³

As mentioned in the introduction, the Kiribati climate change portal (www.climate.gov.ki) is another interesting case. The Office of the President of Kiribati has launched a web portal called “Climate change in Kiribati”, which according to President Tong is “designed to bring you information and updates on our situation in Kiribati” (Government of Kiribati 2011b). It consists of news clippings, articles and reports detailing Kiribati’s struggle with climate change. The portal seems to be aimed abroad to give the Kiribati government’s perspective on the issue of climate change. When asked about this, presidential advisor Teem explained that “the original thinking [behind the portal] was to get an avenue

⁹² Interview with Teburoro Tito, Member of Parliament, Ambo, 11 February 2012. Here it is worth noting that the 2008 survey consulted earlier asked “If necessary, in the long term, would you be prepared to move with your family to...?”, with 74 percent answering that they were prepared to move to “another country” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:22). Compared to the about 20 percent being ready to move further from the beach or to another island, this certainly seems to demonstrate that the support for the government policy of planning for a worst-case scenario involving relocation of the entire population is stronger than Tito is claiming.

⁹³ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

where international individuals and organizations wanting to look for more information on Kiribati and climate change to go”.⁹⁴

By informing the rest of the world of the situation in Kiribati, one also achieves the added bonus of justifying the aid being given to the country to help it adapt. A very telling quote from the “Climate change effects” section clearly illustrates their perspective:

“It is doubtful that any other country feels the effects of climate change as much as we do. In Kiribati, the entire nation faces real danger—our own survival is at stake as a people, as a unique and vibrant culture and as a sovereign nation” (Government of Kiribati 2011a).

Thus, it may seem like the Kiribati government seeks to inform and justify its calls for adaptation funding and an international agreement on mitigation through the portal and the activities of President Tong abroad. This is not problematic *per se*, but it might serve to demonstrate how the government at least feels doubly accountable to both external actors and its own population. Dr. Dan Orcherton of the Pacific Centre for Environment & Sustainable Development (PACE-SD) at the USP claims that climate change has become “the golden calf in italics” in the Pacific region, where all governmental organizations are trying to align their work with that concept, although it does not always fit. However, his colleague, research fellow Viliamu Iese argues that the region does not have an alternative, being developing states in need of aid. He agrees that at the moment, “everything is climate change” because that is the focus of donors now, but also holds that if the money goes directly where it is needed, that is not problematic.⁹⁵

Summing up, the Kiribati government is working closely with non-domestic actors, perhaps to no surprise given its activities internationally. However, evidence that this happens counter or at the expense of their own population is not present, despite the claims by oppositional strong-man Teburoro Tito. Yet, one cannot ignore the fact that Kiribati is very much dependent on foreign support, and as stated by Andrew Teem, this puts them in a disadvantaged position most times. The government must work to please donors and partners, which includes justifying continued assistance through initiatives such as the climate change portal and the persistent advocating internationally. Unfortunately, capacity constraints mean that sometimes their work stop short of fruition, as demonstrated by the portal not having

⁹⁴ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

⁹⁵ Dr. Orcherton and Mr. Iese were interviewed simultaneously at USP campus, Suva, 1 February 2012.

been updated for a while.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the statement by the Executive Director of KANGO, Tata Teitiaua, that he feels NGOs are consulted and included because it is required by donors and not because the government wants their input might indicate that the latter is being stretched too thin in trying to please too many at once, reducing the wholeheartedness of each attempt.

4.6. Summary of results

In this chapter I have presented the results from my research into the *chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati*. Although qualifications can be made, most sources consulted states that voters do not consider climate change explicitly when choosing their representatives, despite the KAPII survey demonstrating that most acknowledges the issue. Furthermore, in parliament, debates on climate change are rare, and when the issue is mentioned, it is usually by government or its supporters. The opposition are, however, more likely to raise concrete issues like coastal erosion, without linking it to climate change. Along those lines there is little citizen participation on climate change in Kiribati beyond concrete issues that are of local and immediate interest, and questions can be raised as to whether recipients of government adaptation projects fully appreciate the link to climate change. Civil society activities are seemingly gathered under the umbrella of KiriCAN who quite active on climate change. However, they too mostly operate on the “street level” and profess to be purely apolitical. In general, the executive seemingly dominates the interaction on the issue vis-à-vis both ordinary citizens, civil society organizations and parliament.

However, the executive interacts closely with non-domestic actors, who they depend on for both financial and technical support. Therefore, one can argue that it is the non-domestic actors that truly shape the debate on climate change in Kiribati. This last point is perhaps the most controversial. It follows the argument of Baker (1992, in Ott 2000:46) that “if a majority of the capital budget of a small country comes from abroad, then there is a real question about who has the ultimate decision making authority over both policy and priorities in these countries”, and will be discussed more closely in the next chapter. It aims to use the literature consulted in the theory chapter to develop plausible explanations for the findings presented here, and place them in a larger context.

⁹⁶ This was used as an example of the internal capacity problems by Andrew Teem. Nevertheless, he expressed hope that they would be able to start using it again soon. Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

Chapter 5 – Discussion: hypotheses for explaining the lack of discourses

In the previous chapter, I set forth some claims about the chains of climate change discourse in Kiribati. In this chapter, I will draw on the literature presented in the theory chapter to generate hypotheses explaining this *executive dominance* and reliance on foreign actors in Kiribati. I find that structural conditions lead to capacity constraints that limit the ability of political actors to engage the government in broad-based climate change discussions. Furthermore, institutional factors such as the lack of an institutionalized party system and the absence of an independent civil society and mass media works to give the incumbent a clear advantage in the political game. This reduces the political space and contributes to fewer options for voters and less criticism of government policies from the other political actors. The trend is further accentuated by climate change being a *valence issue*, meaning that most people are in agreement that something must be done. Here it is also noted that the Kiribati “culture of consensus” can be a factor, although there are signs that this is waning. Finally, the reliance on foreign assistance means that the political space becomes even more narrowed, as the Kiribati government must work to please non-domestic actors in order to secure support in the struggle with a series of development issues, of which climate change is just one.

I end this chapter, and my thesis, by discussing the implications of my results, defining the case population, acknowledging limitations and give suggestions for further research.

5.1. Structural conditions leading to lack of capacity

One aspect of Kiribati that was held forth by most people I talked to during my fieldwork was that the country suffers from a lack of capacity due to underdevelopment and a low population base. This can be a significant factor in explaining the lack of broad-based climate change policy discussions.

5.1.1. Capacity constraints limiting citizen participation

In the theory chapter, I discussed how both Dahl and Tufte (1973) and Ott (2000) cites increased citizen participation in decision-making processes as one of the advantages of being a small state. Yet, in the climate change policy-making of Kiribati, this does not seem to be the case. Apparently, it is not an issue that voters consider at election time or one that elicits participation beyond the immediate concerns of one’s village or island. This is more in line with Paavola and Agder’s (2006:605-606) claim that political-economic factors, such as inequality and lack of capacity are obstacles for equal participation in climate change policy formation at the national and sub-national level. This is certainly relevant in Kiribati, where

the majority is involved in subsistence activities and few go beyond the compulsory primary education (UNESCAP 2007, Asian Development Bank 2000:5).

The previous chapter showed how the government is claiming to actively seek citizen input and consult stakeholders in the policy process, but that it is unsure whether they have succeeded in this. The authors of the 2008 KAPII survey report states that “[t]o date there have not been many consultation/workshops on climate change and related environmental issues on the islands visited.” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:6). Furthermore, I found little evidence of citizen participation through meetings, demonstrations, op-eds and other mechanisms of non-voting vertical accountability. At the same time, villages are included in the implementation phase, but it is unclear whether the recipients of projects at this level fully appreciate the issue of climate change in connection with for example coastal erosion, or if it just them seeing an immediate problem, and then seeking remedies for that specifically.

According to I-Kiribati political commentator Teweiariki Teaero, most people in Kiribati do not worry much about climate change and climate change policies since they have more pressing concerns. In his words, what “Anote Tong is doing in New York and New Zealand and all over (...) is *immaterial to their immediate needs*.” (my emphasis).⁹⁷ The President himself supports this and states in reference to climate change that “in the minds of the people it is not very urgent maybe because it does not touch on their stomach nor their earnings and income” (Matau 2012). According to Barnett and Campbell (2010:178-179),

“Without contemporary evidence such as eroding shorelines or more frequent or intense cyclones and droughts, many communities are instead concerned about more immediate livelihood problems”.

Thus, it seems that Paavola and Agder’s (2006:605-606) argument has validity in Kiribati as well, and therefore, citizen participation on climate change policy-making is not as high as expected by the literature on small states, owing in part to structural conditions such as underdevelopment and lack of educational capacity.

5.1.2. Capacity constraints favors incumbent

Capacity constraints also affect the relationship between government and parliament. I will argue that being the incumbent offers clear advantages vis-à-vis private members of parliament due to access to government funds and the public employees. First of all,

⁹⁷ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

economically the government of Kiribati pretty much runs everything. It owns most major businesses and according to the IMF (2012), government expenditure accounts for over 86 percent of the gross domestic product in 2010. Seventy-three percent of the people employed in the cash economy were public sector employees in 2006 (UNESCAP 2007).⁹⁸ Well over half of these are employed by the central government, whilst public enterprises and island councils account for the rest.

The government's dominance in the economic sector carries over into politics as well. According to the Clerk to Parliament, Eni Tekanene, the total budget for parliament is AUD 2.2 million, which is meant to cover all expenses, such as staff salaries and sitting and travel allowances for private members.⁹⁹ Although not comparable, the total amount of money spent by the government departments in 2010 was over AUD 70 million. Furthermore, the budget of parliament is controlled by the government, and thus they set the ceiling on parliamentary spending. This means that at least in theory, the former are able to restrict the oversight capacity of the latter. The resource asymmetry is made even clearer if one consider the number of staffers available to aid in drafting legislations. Even though the ministries have relatively few employees to handle their tasks, ministers still have a much larger support staff than the private members in parliament. According to Tekanene, there are two staffers available to assist the 33 private parliamentarians in researching and drafting bills. Thus, the government have more resources available than parliament to promote its agenda.

Another factor that could weaken parliamentary capacity, as well as the entire public sector, is a requirement that candidates to parliament cannot be "acting in, any public office" (Constitution of Kiribati, Section 56f). According to Brechtefeld (1993:45-47), this has meant that middle-level public servants are forced to resign their jobs if they want to run for office.¹⁰⁰ Clearly, in a country where most skilled workers are employed in the public sector, this might cause some of the best qualified candidates to think twice before giving up their relatively lucrative jobs in order to run for political office. By running, they risk standing empty-handed if they lose. Additionally, overseas employment might be even more lucrative for those with the necessary qualifications, and through this, the country are missing out on some potential political talents. Ott (2000:38) argues that with the government dominating

⁹⁸ It is worth noting that only slightly more than one third of the labor force are counted as cash workers and that the majority, 58 percent, are employed in subsistence activities. The cash private sector is small, but growing.

⁹⁹ Interview, Ambo, 6 February 2012.

¹⁰⁰ The wording of the law leaves room for interpretation, both in terms of who it refers to and what they must do. See Brechtefeld (1993:45-47) for a short discussion.

most sectors in small states, “few avenues of upward mobility do not involve the government”. Thus I would expect that when both human and economic resources are scarce, this favors the government vis-à-vis other political actors. Indeed, according to several of the well-informed sources I consulted, who did not want to be directly quoted on this issue, MPs often lack a clear understanding of their roles as elected representatives and does not have the will and capacity to challenge the government.

This is supported by a now slightly dated Kiribati Legislative Needs Assessment report written in 2001 on commission from the UNDP (Malifa 2001). The report highlights the need for more qualified staff to assist private MPs. It also cites several shortcomings in the parliaments willingness and ability to effectively and critically oversee government action (Malifa 2001:30-31). One of the major inhibiting factors on the performance of parliament is the constraints on human resources, as the members generally lack an understanding of the role of parliament vis-à-vis government (Malifa 2001:47). The report concludes that “the impact of this assessment is that the Kiribati Maneaba, its members and its legislative staff are in much need of training etc [*sic*] of good governance, accountability and transparency” (Malifa 2001:55). However, it was not until a second report in 2008 found many of the same problems that something began to be done.¹⁰¹ UNDP are now working with the Kiribati parliament to improve its capacity, and according to the Speaker of Parliament, parliament and the government take the findings and recommendations of the second report seriously and are trying to rectify the inadequacies uncovered.¹⁰² According to UNDP Governance Analyst Brian Lenga, the ability and willingness of parliament to oversee the government are increasing.¹⁰³ Yet, the lack of skilled personnel and support staff for private members still means that the government dominates parliamentary proceedings.

5.2. Institutional factors leading to executive dominance

Furthermore, there are a set of institutional factors that work with the capacity constraints to strengthen the executive dominance in Kiribati politics. In the next section, I will argue that these contributes to the lack of a climate change discourse in Kiribati, and can be found in the government’s relations to voters, parliament, civil society and the media.

¹⁰¹ The report, penned by Jon Fraenkel, apparently came to many of the same conclusions, but I have not been able to get ahold of a copy of it to verify this.

¹⁰² Interview with Hon. Taomati Iuta, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

¹⁰³ Interview, Suva, 15 February 2012.

5.2.1. Lack of cohesive party structure weakening opposition

First of all, the lack of an institutionalized party system clearly favors the incumbent vis-à-vis the opposition. It provides incentives for supporting government, meaning that the latter are seemingly able to muster parliamentary support even when the voters do not offer it. Thus parliament is weakened in its ability to oversee government activities and this offer part of the explanation as to why climate change is not a prominent feature of parliamentary debates.

As discussed in the theory chapter, Müller (2000) explains how parties perform important ex ante and ex post controls on candidates for political offices, and that without those controls one increases the risk of representatives not being sufficiently qualified to hold office. Deprived of the party program that party candidates often commits themselves to, there is also a greater chance that the candidate does not have a clear mandate to act in accordance with and thus might be more prone to opportunism. It is conceivable that a representative put in parliament by his constituency based on personal merits or a single issue may not feel as obligated (or have access) to a pre-defined political program.

The absence of party loyalty and its effects are evidenced by the relative ease with which President Tong was able to regain parliamentary backing even though his party lost the majority in the general election in 2011.¹⁰⁴ First of all, according to Eni Tekanene, there is a block of independent members who will more or less always support “whoever runs the country during that term”.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, four independent or oppositional MPs have accepted ministerial posts in Tong’s third government, bringing with them some of their associates into the government fold. Thus, due to lack of party identification and loyalty, the government was able reclaim the majority the voters deprived them of. However, one must also keep in mind that parliament have been able to oust two sitting president’s through votes of confidence, which might suggest that although the lack of a cohesive party structure aids the president in gathering parliamentary support, if he pushes it too far, it may turn around to bite him further down the line.

The tendency to support whoever is in government might be strengthened by the electoral system, which has individual candidates running for office in majority-elections. This means that each candidate has a stake in getting as much as possible for his own constituency if he wants to be reelected, which is probably easiest to achieve by being associated with those who control the treasury. Furthermore, since they do not have a solid

¹⁰⁴ The same happened after the 2003 election, according to Neemia MacKenzie (2004:6).

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Ambo, 6 February, also personal correspondence.

base, parties have fewer resources to draw on when not in power, both in terms of money and manpower. This was mentioned as an important factor by Teburoro Tito.¹⁰⁶ They cannot rely on a stable membership base contributing time and capital to counter the incumbent's access to government funds. This could also partly explain why presidents are usually reelected for the maximum number of terms.¹⁰⁷ Although I have found no evidence that the government have used public funds to retain their positions, securing your first term seems far more difficult than staying in office.¹⁰⁸

The 2001 Kiribati Legislative Needs Assessment largely supports my assumptions (Malifa 2001). Through consultations and discussions with MPs, it emerges that the executive dominates the parliament through holding a majority of the seats and controlling its agenda. Oppositional parliamentarians feel that they are “drowned out by the majority political party control the government has in the Maneaba” (Malifa 2001:15). This is in line with Strøm's (2000) contention that parliament does not function fully as a mechanism of horizontal accountability in parliamentary systems and my findings of an *executive dominance* in the Kiribati political system.

5.2.2. Civil society weakened by lack of independence

The advantage of being the incumbent also carries over into the civil society sector. In the theory chapter, I showed how both Schmitter (1997) and Diamond (1994) warned of civil society organizations becoming too closely associated with political actors. This would cause them to “lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions” (Diamond 1994:7).

As shown in the previous chapter, KiriCAN, the umbrella organization that gathers groups who wants to work on climate change in Kiribati, is indeed “very closely associated with the government”, to use their own words.¹⁰⁹ The same is the case with KANGO, the umbrella organization for Kiribati NGOs. The executive director, Tata Teitiaua, told me that the organization is dependent on government funding and frankly stated that “we are quite aware of our role, our major role as a watchdog [over government]. But there is no way we

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Jeremia Tabai sat four terms, three of which came about by elections post-independence, between 1979 and 1991. Teatao Teannaki served one term between 1991 and 1994, while Tebruroro served three terms between 1994 and 2003, although he lost a vote of confidence shortly into the third. Finally, the current president, Anote Tong, was reelected for his third term in the beginning of 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Still, accusations of vote-buying connected with a culture of gift-giving by candidates are prevalent, as are accusations of clandestine foreign influence through corrupt political candidates (Neemia MacKenzie 2004).

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Pelenise Alofa, KiriCAN President, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012.

can do that at the moment, because of the support that we need from the government.”¹¹⁰ He said that this was a problem that extended to most NGOs in Kiribati. Firstly, they are not aware of their role vis-à-vis government. Secondly, most depend on financial support from the government, and are thus not as independent as one might prefer. This is certainly in line with the claim of Baldacchino (1994:69-70 in Srebrnik 2004:334) presented in the theory chapter that “[t]he distinction between state and civil society becomes close to a theoretical quirk” in small states.¹¹¹

I also presented the claim from Benedikt (1967 in Ott 2000:37-40) that multiple roles leads to government dominance, and several authors who warned of elite capture of civil society organizations (Ottaway and Carothers 2000, Sharma 2009). This might make the lack of independence for the latter even clearer. In a small state like Kiribati, one can expect that members of society meet each other in various social roles. Thus it becomes harder for civil society organizations to be independent of the state, as the likelihood for the members in one being associated with the other increases, especially when the politico-bureaucratic elite is as small as it is in Kiribati. For instance, several board members of KANGO are senior civil servants in various government ministries, and thus they are working closely with the government in their professional capacity. Moreover, Teitiaua told me how his predecessor was the wife of a government minister.¹¹² Lastly, as I was in Kiribati, the wife of the current President was made patron of KANGO. Obviously, these multiple roles might affect the organization’s attitude and space for action vis-à-vis the government.

Adding to this, Teaero told me how NGOs, such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and even religious organizations are now being used as stepping-stones into politics by political newcomers.¹¹³ The organizations serve the dual purpose of demonstrating the organizational capacity and attitudes of the would-be candidate, as well as being the ground forces of their campaigns. The newly appointed Minister of Education, Maere Tekanene, who won her parliamentary seat for the first time in the 2011 general election, explained how she used her network in the relatively well-organized and influential women organizations in the campaign.¹¹⁴ On the positive side, this enhances the link between the elected and her

¹¹⁰ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹¹¹ However, when asked whether she feels free to criticize the government, Pelenise Alofa of KiriCAN states that “[t]here is nothing to stop us, but fortunately with climate change, we speak the same language. We have the same concerns, the same problems.” Interview, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012

¹¹² Interview with Tata Teitiaua, executive director of KANGO, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹¹³ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Bikenibeu, 7 February 2012.

constituency, and it ensures a minimum of organizational experience on the part of the candidate in the absence of parties performing *ex ante* and *ex post* controls (Müller 2000). However, the downside is that the NGOs involved might perceive themselves as having a stake in keeping their candidate in office, and thus lose the ability to criticize government performance. Following Diamond's (1994) strict definition of civil society, by seeking office for their candidates, they even stop being part of civil society and start being part of the political society. As mentioned, according to him, by doing this they "lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions" (Diamond 1994:7). However, whether there is a realistic alternative to this in small states like Kiribati is a different question, especially considering that building ones political career on the back of a civil society organization is far from unheard of in the much larger Western democracies as well. Either way, one cannot escape the fact that Kiribati is a small country with limited human resources, which affects the relations between citizens, organizations and politicians.

The NGOs discussed here, and according to the executive director of KANGO, NGOs in Kiribati in general, lack the capacity and the independence to challenge government policies.¹¹⁵ This means that the latter dominates the interaction with the former. Thus, although KiriCAN interact with the government on climate change, they apparently take on the role as their grassroot movement, implementing government policies on the ground. They therefore become part the discourse running top-down from government to citizens, seemingly without much policy-input the other way.

Here it is worth noting that the closeness between government and civil society organizations might mean that there is another actor that takes on the role as mediator between government and the masses. In the theory chapter, I showed how Larmour (1992), Lawson (1996) and Linnekin (1997) argues that one cannot ignore the traditional power structure when analyzing politics in the region. Larmour (1992:108) claims that when NGOs become too closely associated with government, traditional structures steps in to set "powerful limits on state actors". As discussed, the unimane still have substantial influence in Kiribati. However, later in this chapter I will argue that their impact is getting weakened by an increasing awareness amongst people of the state having ultimate jurisdiction. Also, despite evidence from the 2008 KAPII survey that the unimane have less knowledge on climate change than the rest of the population, and even in some instances rejecting the phenomenon altogether, they do not seem to consider the issue important enough to base their decision of

¹¹⁵ Interview with Tata Teitiaua, executive director of KANGO, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

who to support on it. Thus, I find little evidence of the unimane stepping in for government-associated NGOs to hold the government accountable on climate change.

5.2.3. No independent media outlet

The lack of independent checks on government activities is further evidenced by the absence of an independent and critical mass media in Kiribati. Granted, according to Freedom House (2011a) both freedom of assembly and freedom of speech is generally respected in Kiribati. However, they have along with several other monitors such as Reporters Without Borders (2011) raised concern over the media situation in the country. A controversial law in 2002 made it possible for the government-appointed Newspaper Registration Office to shut down any publications against which a complaint was filed, and it was speculated that the measure was aimed at the only independent newspaper, Kiribati Newstar, published by former president Tabai (Reporters Without Borders 2003). According to the 2004 Annual Report on Kiribati by Reporters without Borders, despite vows to the opposite, newly elected president Tong had not repealed the law by the end of 2003 (Reporters Without Borders 2004). Teburoro Tito, who was president when the law was first implemented, insists that despite the protest from the then opposition, now that the latter are in government, they have kept most of the regulations intact.¹¹⁶ In 2005, there was also a case of a radio journalist on an affiliate of the public broadcaster being fired for denying to reveal his source on a story of corruption involving a public official (Reporters Without Borders 2006). Despite this, the 2011 Freedom of the Press survey by Freedom House lists the country as “Free” (Freedom House 2011c).

According to Teaero, there are two main components to the lack of a critical and independent media in Kiribati.¹¹⁷ Firstly, some members of government do not look kindly to the government-owned outlets criticizing them. Secondly, journalists are not properly trained, and therefore not aware of their rights and responsibilities. Teaero told me how the few journalists who had training and was doing investigative journalists eventually found conditions in Kiribati unbearable and chose to emigrate. Furthermore, the only media with a national coverage is a radio station run by the state-controlled Broadcasting and Publication Authority, and according to Teaero, they do not dare to “rock the boat”. Moreover, the Kiribati Newstar, which is considered independent, only have limited circulation and is as mentioned owned by former president and now government-party strong-man Tabai.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

With the one media outlet with national coverage not daring to “rock the boat” and the only “independent” newspaper being owned by a leading figure in the government party, the media situation in Kiribati can be considered at least part of the reason for climate change policies not being discussed more. Without an arena for articulating the concerns of citizens vis-à-vis power-holders (Diamond 1994) and force the government to give accounts and justify their action (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003, Lindberg 2009:14), it clearly becomes harder for critical voices to be heard.

5.2.4. Summary of institutional factors

When the lack of independent media is coupled with the non-governmental sector pinning themselves too close to the government to be able to scrutinize and criticize the latter’s actions, and parliament seemingly lacking the will and capacity to do the same, the executive is effectively free to act in accordance with their own agenda.

I will therefore argue that institutional factors interact to create an *executive dominance* in Kiribati, especially on climate change-related questions. This means that the government is able to set the agenda, control what is being done and dominate the debate on the issue. For the time being, Kiribati has a government that uses this dominance to push an active climate change agenda both domestically and internationally. However, when Tong leaves office by no later than 2016 after completing his third and final term as President, this might change. Since there is seemingly no broad foundation for pursuing the issues as vigorously as his administration has done, the initiative could fade if the next President has different priorities. Furthermore, even if there was broad public activity and support on the issue, the structural and institutional factors discussed tenders towards executive dominance, meaning that a new administration will be relatively free to formulate their own policies on the issue. In this context, the “politicians own values may carry the day”, to use the words of Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b:3). President Tong’s attitudes towards climate change has certainly shaped Kiribati politics, and he has stated that “I think this is the role for the leadership, to look ahead of the people and but [*sic*] it does not remove the reality and the urgency and also the serious impact it will have on our people.” (Matau 2012).

Still, there is one factor that makes it unlikely for Kiribati to see a drastic change in their climate change policy even after Tong steps down. That is the fact that the issue seems to be a so-called *valence issue*, meaning basically that everyone agrees. This is what I will focus on in the next section.

5.3. Climate change: a valence issue?

When there is little discussion on an issue that is still seemingly important, such as with climate change in Kiribati, one reasonable explanation is that it is a *valence issue* (see for instance Stokes 1963, Green 2007). This means that it is an issue that the voters, and through them probably their representatives, all believe is important to do something about, and therefore, it is not an issue that divides the population to the extent that it becomes a political cleavage. Instead, it at most becomes an issue where voters rate the performance of the present administration to see whether one will be better off by giving someone else a go at it. Thus, the ideological and political space is narrowed.

Harrison and Sundstrom (2010b) certainly consider this the case. They state that “hardly anyone is in *favor* of global warming!” and that most voters in almost all countries support action to address climate change (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010b:8, italics in original). Although this is in relation to mitigation, I believe it is a valid claim when considering adaptation as well. If one have accepted the premise that the threat is real and impending, then one probably also supports taking steps to alleviate it.

As shown in the previous chapter, climate change is apparently something that most I-Kiribati sees as a threat, and probably something that needs to be dealt with. In the 2008 survey, 91 percent agreed that climate change was already happening, and 85 percent believed it to be affecting their island. At the same time, 43 percent answered that they did not know what caused climate change (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008). Thus, it seems that climate change is an issue that the general population is aware of, although they lack in-depth knowledge. But if everyone more or less agrees on this, then there is no need to discuss it in parliament or election campaigns. As long as the current government is doing a satisfactory job, and one expects the opposition to be able to the same if they take office, other issues becomes determinants of who one votes for. Certainly, the people I interviewed seemed to almost unanimously consider this the case.

The Clerk to Parliament, Eni Tekanene, told me that “there is no real disagreement on climate change” in parliament, and that whatever rumblings there are, they are only minor details.¹¹⁸ The Speaker of Parliament, Taomati Iuta, said basically the same thing, but held out on key oppositional figure as opposing the climate change policies of the government: the before-mentioned Teburoro Tito.¹¹⁹ As explained earlier, Tito told me that he very much

¹¹⁸ Interview, Ambo, 6 February 2012, also personal correspondence.

¹¹⁹ Interview, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

supported the government's work on climate change, but that they were taking it too far.¹²⁰ This indicates that there is some disagreement among the political elite, but that it is concerned with minor details rather than the issue in general. As shown in the previous chapter, when the opposition raise issues that can be related to climate change in parliament, they only point to concrete instances of coastal erosion or sea-level rise. As I briefly discussed, this can be in their electoral self-interest. Furthermore, it can also be seen as evidence for climate change being a valence issue. Since the political elite agree that climate change is a major threat that has to be dealt with and that government is doing a good job in general, then all that is left for the opposition is to point to those individual instances where the government's action can be questioned. As such, I will propose that the lack of a discourse on the broad climate change policies of the government in the Kiribati parliament is at least partially caused by the valence nature of the issue.

Climate change being a valence issue would also explain the lack of issue-based voting connected with it. In the theory chapter I briefly discussed how Anckar amongst other things considered a "uniform problem setting" as a result of smallness a factor in explaining the weakness of political parties in small island states. This potentially reduces the distance between potential candidates, and thus, politician becomes more alike in their message. According to Benedikt (1967 in Ott 2000:39-40), in small states political issues become structured around personal encounters and relationships and not ideology and therefore it becomes difficult to establish a viable opposition. Mainwaring (2003:23) claim that when no clear political alternatives exist, there is less incentive to sanction incumbents for voters. In Kiribati, there is an opposition, but it is not institutionalized and its members are susceptible to crossing the aisle given the right incentive. Also, at least on climate change, there does not seem to be a lot of disagreement. Thus, the absence of climate change as an issue in the electoral channel might be because there is not clear division between the political alternatives on the issue, and hence, the voters consider other topics when casting their vote.

In 1998, Macdonald (1998:37) wrote that "[t]he concentration on personalities in I-Kiribati politics has not encouraged public debate on broad policy issues". This is supported by Teaero, who contends that there is a lack of issue-based voting in Kiribati in general, and that personalities are more important than issues.¹²¹ Teaero feels that there has been a convergence of the political spectrum in the time after independence. When the major battles

¹²⁰ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹²¹ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

had been fought and the more routine everyday life of running the country began, the major cleavages dissolved to the point where he claims that there are no clear policy alternatives for the electors to choose from. The splits between the parties are based more on personal ambitions and clashes of personality than on issues.

However, he sees climate change as having the potential of becoming the issue that once again provides clearer political alternatives. The one point of disagreement that he mentions and that I also found in my interview with former President and leading oppositional figure, Teburoro Tito, is the question of whether Kiribati should pursue a policy of migration as an adaptive strategy.¹²² One of the few climate change statements of the campaign came from Tito, and was focused on the government using it as an issue to attract electoral support (Teaero 2012a). However, for the time-being, it seems that the political space in Kiribati is limited on any issue and that most politicians agree on the general course on climate change. Therefore, Mainwaring's (2003:23) claim that when no clear political alternatives exist, there is less incentive to sanction incumbents for voters, might be part of the explanation.

Thus, climate change being a valence issue can be seen as at least part of the reason for its absence in the electoral, parliamentary and civil society channel of interaction. Apparently, the voters do not consider it, parliament hardly discuss it beyond concrete instances, and the major NGO goes along with government and professes to be purely apolitical. On the ground, citizens, like parliament and KiriCAN, are willing to engage with government on the issue, but only at the "street level" (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010b:7), meaning in the implementation of measures that are of immediate concern to them.

5.3.1. The power of the elders: challenging the uniformity?

However, there is one group that does not seem to be in synch with the rest of Kiribati society when it comes to climate change: the unimane. As will be shown, their attitudes stand against the notion of climate change being a valence issue. In the theory chapter, I explained how these councils of elders still hold substantial power, at least the village level. According to Teaero, they have a strong influence in deciding who a village votes for in elections.¹²³ Potential candidates, both for parliamentary seats and the presidency have to convince the elders that they are suitable, which is often based on personality rather than issues. When they decide who they prefer, most villagers usually follow their decision. Thus, their attitude

¹²² Interview with Teburoro Tito, Ambo, 11 February 2012. The point was also mentioned by the President of KiriCAN, Pelenise Alofa. Interview, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012.

¹²³ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

towards climate change should have some bearing on how the issue is treated by both the voters and the politicians.

An indication of their preferences might be detected in the 2008 KAPII survey report.¹²⁴ It is stated that “there were islands where unimwane were in denial and even verbally attacked the team leader [of the survey] in maneaba during a traditional welcome” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:14). A quote included have an unimane stating that

“You are a new generation we’ve lived here thousands of years. You’re immature. We’ve had problems like this before, it’s just climate trends, it will be OK....I don’t trust the government, maybe this is just a plan to make us relocate away from our island” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:14).

Of the 837 people who answered the survey, 31 respondents claimed to have a unimane leadership position, and of these, 68 percent answered that they do not know what causes climate change. 16 percent blamed burning fossil fuels and 6 percent deforestation. 10 percent gave other answers, such as climate change being “God’s decision” or caused by movement of the moon, or simply that they did not believe in the phenomenon (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:25,39). Comparably, 31 percent of all those asked attributed climate change to the burning of fossil fuels, 16 percent to deforestation, 43 percent did not know and 26 percent gave other answers. The elders’ lack of awareness is noted by the report authors, who states that “the unimwane, community leaders (older men) may know the least about climate change, yet have power to sway community opinion” (Kaiteie and Hogan 2008:6).

Thus, it seems that the unimane is not considering climate change as being an important issue, be it due to religious and cultural beliefs, skepticism towards modern science or simply lack of knowledge. Therefore they probably do not instruct candidates to act upon it. In fact, if we consider the strong resentment shown in the quote from the survey cited above, candidates are seemingly better of opposing policies on climate change.

Yet, I will argue that two factors contribute to the unimane’s attitudes on climate change not disrupting the national unity. Firstly, their influence is weakening, and secondly, their opposition to climate change-related policies is exaggerated. Either one could help explain why there is not more climate change discussions. To the first, Macdonald (1998:20) contends that the power of the unimane is strongest on the outer islands that have seen the

¹²⁴ Unfortunately, I was not able to interview any unimane due to difficulties obtaining access owing largely to time and resource constraints.

least development. Therefore, the unimane are truly influential in limited areas of the country. In addition, Teaero told me how the power of the unimane is being successfully questioned by those who feel wronged by their decision.¹²⁵ He mentions two specific examples where the unimane's power to sanction the breaking of community norms and laws have been challenged in court, and where the elders have lost. Thus, Teaero describes a growing awareness, even on the outer islands, of the national political system having ultimate jurisdiction, which enables people to resist the traditional power of the unimane.

Furthermore, Macdonald (1998:23-24) claims that the unimane have left national politics those who are younger and more educated. Thus, broad-based climate change issues might not be on their agenda, and therefore, they do not consider the attitude and actions of their potential representatives on that particular issue when deciding who to support. Instead, they focus on the personality of the would-be candidate, as well as the immediate needs of their village or island. They are therefore more likely to make demands on more concrete topics, such as increased coastal erosion or flooding, even if they do not recognize the link to climate change. This may also be part of the explanation of why these are more prominent in parliamentary debates than the overarching concept of climate change.

To the second suggestion, that the unimane's resistance to climate change is exaggerated, stands the continued support of president Tong from the elders on his home island. According to Teaero (2012b), president Tong has a very strong backing from them, so either different unimane have different perceptions of climate change, or the elders on Tong's island choose to look beyond the issue when choosing their preferred candidate. Either way, it demonstrates that climate change activism does not rule out getting the support of the elders.

I expect these factors collude to make the attitudes of the unimane towards climate change uncovered in the 2008 survey less influential on the national debate on the issue. Thus, I will reiterate the statement that in Kiribati, climate change is a valence issue, and this offers part of the explanation why it is not more prominent in the interaction between the actors on the political arena. Below I will discuss how this might be further accentuated by a culture of consensual decision-making.

5.4. Culture: Cohesive monoculture?

In the theory chapter, I presented the view of several authors who argued that there is a culture of consensus in the Pacific in general, and in Kiribati in particular (see Meller 1990,

¹²⁵ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

Van Trease 1993b, Larmour 1994, Macdonald 1998, also Anckar 2001:275-277). Meller (1990:68) argues that some of the reason for Kiribati not having a stable party structure is that most Micronesians are culturally uncomfortable with direct disputatious confrontations and that they prefer dealing with disagreements in indirect manners. He describe how some parliamentarians choose to be independents because they believe policy decisions should be made through traditional consultative and consensus procedures, rather than through polarized debates and confrontations. Anckar (2001:277) supports this notion, and states that political parties have a bad reputation in the region due to the behavior they are seen as eliciting. He explains how the voters in many small island states are “no Lipset-Rokkan voters” whose identity is formed through industrialization and nation-building. Instead they are socialized in villages and clans, giving interests and values that are difficult to translate into party platforms.

When interviewing elite actors to gather data for my thesis, several mentioned this aspect of Kiribati culture. Teairo talked about a “culture of not wanting to stand out”, which also affected politics.¹²⁶ Speaker of Parliament, Taomati Iuta, took this even further and told me how he saw representative democracy as inherent in the I-Kiribati culture, referencing the unimane system where the village elders meet to make unanimous decisions.¹²⁷ At the same time, he fears the increasing divisiveness of party politics, which he sees as based mostly on self-interest and personality clashes and having a potential for violence. However, Teburoro Tito argued against the uniformity being as pervasive as some claim.¹²⁸ He agreed that there was a strong tendency for ruling through consensus, but at the same time he thought it was mistaken to believe that this did not involve debating. He told me how there could be very hot debates in the maneabas, but that these were nevertheless conducted in a respectful manner. Nonetheless, my informants saw the consensus aspect of Kiribati culture being on the defensive, and contended that politics was becoming increasingly conflict-ridden.

Yet, since climate change has an inherent “valence nature” (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010b:8), it is evident that even remnants of a culture of consensus can contribute to the issue not being widely discussed. When the government has formulated its policy, these two factors collude to limit disagreement, something that is further exuberated by the institutional factors leading to executive dominance discussed above.

¹²⁶ Interview, Suva, 2 February 2012.

¹²⁷ Interview, Ambo, 9 February 2012.

¹²⁸ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012

Furthermore, Anckar's (2001:277) claim that Pacific voters are more focused on clan and village issues can help explain why discourses on climate change in Kiribati are more focused on concrete instances of coastal erosion and sea-level rise. He describes how politicians are expected to take care of local matters and that this is what they are rated on at election-time. Therefore, national politics, including party building, is relegated to secondary importance by most representatives. Thereby a circle is created where parties remain weak, and politicians cross the aisle to support whoever can provide the most benefits for their constituency, as discussed above. Anckar (2001:277) concludes that this is negative spiral for parties, meaning that because these are seen as weak and insignificant, there is no incentive to commit oneself to one and thereby strengthen it.

A finale note should be made that it is unclear whether the cultural factors discussed here are specific to Kiribati or whether they can be traced to some form of island or smallness culture. Certainly, Anckar (2001) consider the last to be the case, or at least that these traits can be found in several small and island states independent of each other. I believe further research is needed to uncover the exact causal mechanism at play here. However, this lies beyond the scope of this thesis, and I therefore turn my attention to the final potential contributor to the lack of climate change discourses in Kiribati: whether the issue is *externally driven*.

5.5. Is climate change an externally driven issue?

In the previous chapter, I put forth the claim that it might be the non-domestic actors that truly shape the debate on climate change in Kiribati. This could offer an explanation why the issue is not more prominent in the discourses between the domestic political actors: the issue is externally driven and mainly occupies the interactions between the government and foreign actors. By this I mean that it is primarily raised, discussed and acted upon by these two. In the theory chapter, I presented several potential aspects of Kiribati's foreign policy and dependency on foreign actors that might suggest a restriction on their ability to formulate policies freely, based on characteristics such as smallness and economic dependency. In this next section, I will consider these propositions in light of the new empirical evidence acquired.

For instance, Harrison and Sundstrom (2007) talks about how normative pressure being applied by foreign governments and NGOs might influence domestic climate change politics. I theorized that Kiribati's participation in regional groupings such as SPREP and

PIFS, which both to some extent has set forth climate change adaptation as a regional priority, might make its leaders compelled to take action to avoid embarrassment when meeting their peers. This is similar to what Lindberg (2009:14) calls reputational accountability, where actor's reputation among equals might be damaged if she is deemed to act contrary to established norms and practices.

The data consulted in the previous chapter suggest that the Kiribati government is eager to give accounts of their plights and work on climate change to outside actors, as evidenced by the Kiribati climate change portal and President Tong's continued activism on climate change on the international arena. Teburoro Tito certainly holds the view that at least part of the reason for President Tong's activities abroad is that he "likes to travel and be a big figure now from the small island states", and that some of the stories being told by him abroad do not necessarily represent the opinions of the people.¹²⁹ There is also the statement from the executive director of KANGO that he felt that NGOs were included in steering committees due to donor requirements, rather than a genuine wish for input.¹³⁰

However, one can also argue that there is really no alternative. As discussed by both Vandenbosch, Vital and Leary (1964, 1967, and 1967 respectively, in Ott 2000), small states such as Kiribati have a stake in regional and international cooperation that makes them more prone to advocating along those lines. Since they often lack the political, military and economic muscles to influence other states, they have the most to gain from recognition of state sovereignty and a peaceful international climate. This is probably even clearer in the climate change debate, where one can expect that the small island states, which are set to be the first victims of sea-level rise and more extreme weather patterns, have an inherent interest in securing a binding, international agreement that will either mitigate the threat, or at least compensate them for their dire faith. Furthermore, being amongst those with the least greenhouse gas emissions, small island states also have the least to lose from binding cuts.¹³¹ Admittedly, it is hard to see how the government can adopt any other position internationally given its lack of power. In fact, according to Barnett and Campbell (2010:109), the moral authority small island states are able to exert on the climate change issue gives a leverage that they lack on other issue, and this is a capital that the Kiribati government seems to be using to the fullest. It might be problematic if they stray too far from their own population, but as

¹²⁹ Interview, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹³⁰ Interview with Tata Teitiaua, Executive Director of KANGO, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

¹³¹ The members of AOSIS emit slightly more than 0.5 percent of the annual global emissions of greenhouse gases (Sem 2009:12).

Viliamu Iese, research fellow at the PACE-SD at USP, told me “We don't have an alternative. When we are developing, if we see an opportunity for extra funding, we have to take it”.¹³²

This leads into another important point in the literature on small states: their dependency on foreign assistance. Baldacchino (1994 in Srebrnik 2004) claims that small states are often dependent on outside consultants due to domestic human resource constraints, and Baker (1992 in Ott 2000:46) that “if a majority of the capital budget of a small country comes from abroad, then there is a real question about who has the ultimate decision making authority over both policy and priorities in these countries”. This is definitely a pertinent question to ask in Kiribati where external grants accounted for 33.9 percent of the country's revenues in 2010 (IMF 2011a:24).

The President's senior policy advisor, Andrew Teem, told me how the government sometimes has to go against their own preferences and priorities in order to please donors, who they rely on for funding for almost all projects, both on climate change and other issues.¹³³ He explained that donors come into the country saying “this is what [Kiribati] need to do” and the money following the statement can only be used for that activity. This reliance on foreign assistance puts the Kiribati in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis donors most times, according to Teem. In support of this, Dr. Dan Orcherton of the PACE-SD claims that the Pacific region is locked into a cycle of “*aid-iction*” (his word, my emphasis), where many countries rely too much on foreign aid and expertise for running development projects.¹³⁴ However, he sees this as changing and is encouraged by the fact that local ownership and participation is becoming more pronounced.

Evidence of the reliance on foreign assistance and how that shapes the Kiribati agenda can be found in the reforms being implemented by The Ministry of Finance in Kiribati. They are trying to build up the accountability practices to a level where the country can be eligible for so-called budgetary support.¹³⁵ The reform makes the government accountable to an external actor who may influence policy-making. For instance, democratically sanctioned policies can be stopped by the Ministry of Finance, who can be more motivated to fulfill budgetary standards set externally than meeting the wishes of the people.

¹³² Interviewed together with Dr. Dan Orcherton, Suva, 1 February 2012.

¹³³ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

¹³⁴ Interviewed together with Viliamu Iese, Suva, 1 February 2012.

¹³⁵ Interview with Tiimi Kaiekieki, Director of Planning, National Economic Planning Office, Bairiki, 10 February 2012. Budgetary support can very shortly be defined as monetary support being transferred directly into the budget of the receiver, where one does not distinguish between this and other financial sources.

However, attaché at the Delegation of the European Union to the Pacific, Thierry Catteau, argues that the criteria for being eligible for budgetary support are not too intrusive, and that they are “common sense”.¹³⁶ The EU delegation is spearheading the work in this field in Kiribati, and according to Catteau, budgetary support is becoming the preferred way of providing aid. It also answers the call of Teem presented in the previous chapter for funding that can be spent more at the government’s discretion, and thus, it can be seen as reinforcing the sovereignty of national governments. Also worth noting is that Catteau is adamant that the most important principle for the EU when providing assistance is that their actions must be sanctioned by the receiving government and aligned with their priorities. He told me that “this is about Kiribati, but can be generalized to all Pacific, African and Caribbean countries: what we do is decided with the government.”

Still, he admits that Kiribati is a particularly challenging country, since the recipient ministries often are very small, making aid coordination difficult. Talking about the region in general, he explains how there are a lot of actors in the region, and a lot of programs in one sector, “but then you have maybe only five people in the aid coordination unit. That gives you an idea of the challenge, the pressure you put on the receiver.”¹³⁷ The EU has therefore taken on the role of doing donor coordination in Kiribati through meetings that are held every two years, where all donors in the country can meet and see what others are doing so there is no unnecessary overlap. This resembles what Pastor (1999) talks about when he describes how the international community can act as a surrogate for domestic institutions that are not functioning properly. Although this is critical and has to be done, it nevertheless shifts the balance of power away from the elected government and into the hands of aid donors. Catteau still argues that one has to be realistic in one’s approach to the region, and that the most important thing is that services are delivered to those who need them. Furthermore, he stresses that the EU are focused on ensuring local ownership of projects to the fullest extent possible.

Summing up, it seems definitive that Kiribati needs non-domestic actors. They are dependent on both financial and human assistance, and this probably shapes the priorities of domestic political actors. Climate change does not seem to be special in this respect, and it blends in with the other challenges the country have been facing more or less continuously

¹³⁶ Interview, Suva, 15 February 2012. Catteau lists three requirements the country has to meet: 1) Stable macroeconomic environment, 2) The existence of a National Development Plan or Strategy for the country, and 3) Public Finance Management (PFM) Reform. Another point he mentions that is becoming increasingly more important and might be included as a fourth criteria is so-called “good governance”, translating roughly into transparency, accountability and rule of law.

¹³⁷ Interview with Thierry Catteau, Suva, 15 February 2012

since independence, such as underdevelopment, lack of natural and human resources, overpopulation of the main atolls, distance from large markets and vulnerability to external shocks. On these issues, donors have interacted with the Kiribati government for a long time, and according to Dr. Willy Morrell of PIFS, the new focus on climate change does not mean that the old partners are pulling out of other issues.¹³⁸ Climate change adaptation is not peeling of funding from other projects, but instead comes in as additional assistance.

Thus, it might be that it was foreigners who first brought the issue of climate change into the consciousness of the Kiribati political elite, but it is seemingly something they have embraced and made their own, although they continue to rely on outside assistance. This is probably the case on most other issues as well, and the question therefore becomes one of overcoming the capacity constraints of the country, rather than the political elite “selling out” to non-domestic actors. As repeated several times, Pastor (1999) talks about how the international community can act as a surrogate for domestic institutions that are not functioning properly. In Kiribati, this is certainly the case, evidenced by the EU taking on the role of donor coordination due to the lack of domestic capacity to do it.

5.6. Tentative conclusions: drawing causal inferences to explain the chains of climate change discourses

This thesis has been aimed at uncovering the *chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati*. An exploratory single-case study was done using data triangulation with a main emphasis on elite and expert interviews conducted during fieldwork on Fiji and Kiribati in early 2012. Building a theoretical and analytical framework from literature on accountability and responsiveness, I separated between four dimensions of discourses on climate change: the *electoral channel*, the *state actor interactions*, *non-electoral citizen participation*, and finally, the *non-domestic interactions*. This was supplemented by previous research on small and island states, cultural and historical aspects related to politics in the Pacific, as well as studies on domestic climate change policy formation.

The results of my data collection were that in general, discourses on broad climate change-related issues were not present either in the electoral channel, the state actor interactions or in the non-electoral citizen participation. Most sources consulted claims that the voters do not consider climate change explicitly when choosing their representatives. Furthermore, climate change is not a topic that is discussed often in parliament, and when the

¹³⁸ Interview, Suva, 31 January 2012.

issue is raised, it is usually by government representatives or supporters. Yet, KiriCAN, the umbrella organization that has seemingly gathered most civil society activities on climate change under its fold, are quite active, but functions more as a broad environmental organization. Furthermore, they are “very closely associated with the government” to use their own words and they see themselves as something similar to a grassroots organization of the government.¹³⁹ Still, these actors are apparently more focused on concrete issues like coastal erosion, without necessarily linking it to broader climatic changes. The opposition does question the government on specific events that could signal shortcomings in government adaptation activities. The same is true of citizens who focus on events that are of immediate local interest, although it is unclear whether they appreciate the link to the broader issue. Still, the KAPII survey shows that most acknowledges that climate change is happening, but they might lack an in-depth understanding. KiriCAN too operate mostly on the “street level” and profess to be purely apolitical. In general, the executive seemingly dominates the interaction on the issue vis-à-vis both ordinary citizens, civil society organizations and parliament. At the same time, the executive interacts closely with non-domestic actors, who they depend on for both financial and technical support.

Although my study is meant to be exploratory and primarily descriptive, focused on uncovering how political actors interact on climate change in Kiribati, I have nevertheless chosen to make causal inferences from the material I have collected. In this chapter I have tried to set forth potential causal explanations for the lack of climate change discourses in Kiribati and why the government is so dominant in the interactions that do exist. I do this following the advice of King, Keohane and Verba (1994:8-9) that the goal of scientific research is to make inferences beyond the data observed. I believe this adds value to my study, since moving beyond pure description allows for generating hypotheses about the relationships observed which might have relevance for a larger class of cases than the one I have focused on. By drawing on the previous literature on small (island) states, climate change policy-making and accountability theory, I have been able to place my research within a larger framework to set forth causal hypotheses explaining the *executive dominance* and *reliance on foreign actors* in climate change policy formation in Kiribati.

I have demonstrated how structural and institutional factors contribute to the executive dominance and lack of climate change discourses in Kiribati. Socio-economic factors reduce

¹³⁹ Interview with KiriCAN President, Pelenise Alofa, Bikenibeu, 10 February 2012, and activist Claire Anterea, Ambo, 11 February 2012.

citizen participation and the absence of a solid party system means the government is able to retake the parliamentary majority even when it is not offered by the voters. When coupled with capacity constraints favoring the incumbent in terms of personal and resources, and the MPs not necessarily being aware of their role as elected representatives, parliament is further weakened in its ability to oversee government actions. In general, it seems that the private members lack the will, capacity or political space to engage the much stronger government on the issue. Therefore, the latter are able to hold something resembling monologues explaining their actions. Using the language of the accountability literature consulted in the theory chapter, it seems that the government is willing to give accounts of its actions, but that parliament lacks the ability to both signal preference and sanction policies, and thus, the government stands relatively free to do as it pleases. This is accentuated by civil society organizations and the mass media being dependent of the government for financial assistance, thus not having the sufficient operational freedom to truly keep a check on the rulers. This reduces the political space and contributes to fewer options for voters and less criticism of government policies from the other political actors.

I have also presented evidence for climate change being a *valence issue*, meaning that there is little disagreement on the general course the government should have. Furthermore, remnants of a culture of consensus also contribute to making the issue less contested. Finally, the reliance on foreign assistance means that the political space becomes even more narrowed, as the Kiribati government must work to please non-domestic actors in order to secure much needed technical and financial aid. These factors seemingly work together to make climate change policies not widely discussed amongst political actors in Kiribati. This is somewhat surprising, given the government's activism on the issue internationally.

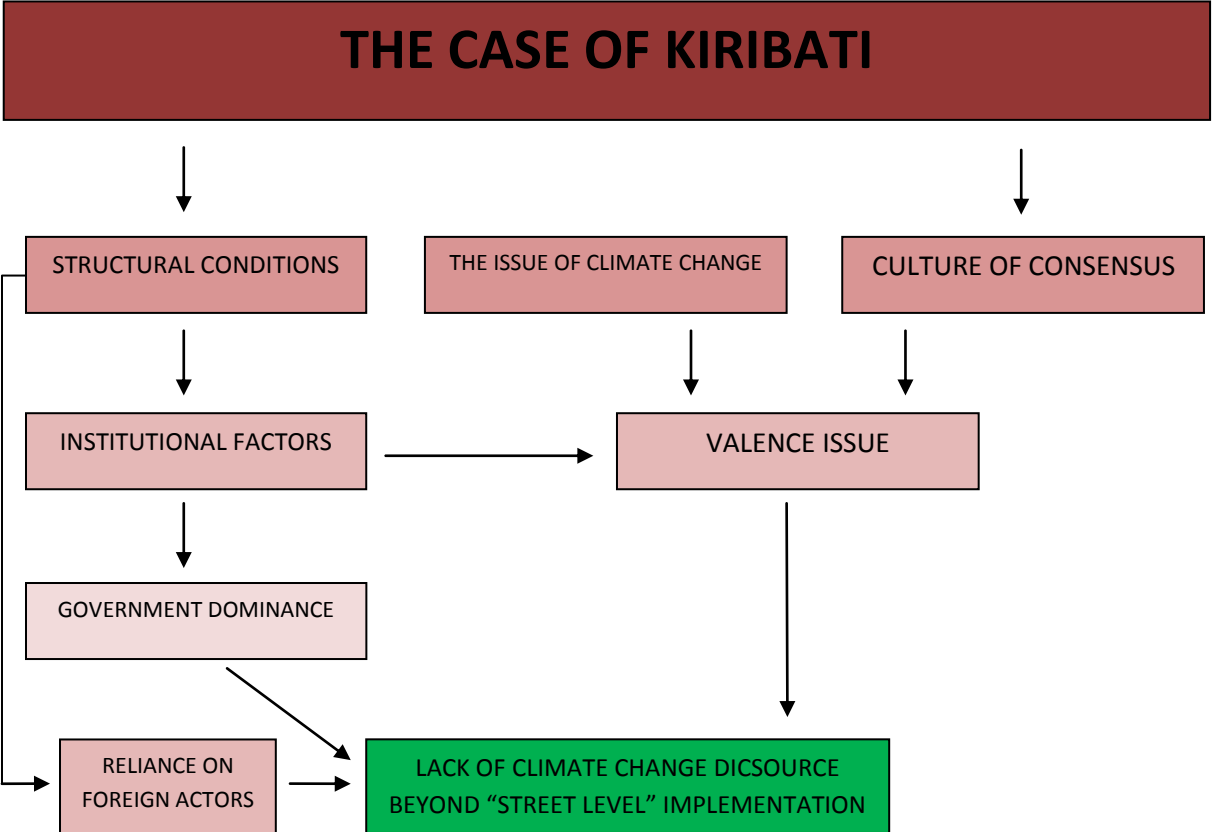
However, some of these factors also contributes to an increased focus on concrete, "street level" incidents of events that could be tied to climate change, such as coastal erosion and sea-level rise. Most citizens focus on their immediate needs, while the valence-ness of the issue means the opposition is left criticizing the government for the specific instances where they can be judged to have not done enough. This is enhanced by demands for serving local instead of national needs by the unimane, as well as clan and village devotion being more important than party loyalty. Furthermore, the absence of an institutionalized party system works together with a majority election system to give representatives incentives for prioritizing securing as much as possible for their constituency instead of furthering national interests. This is probably easier if one is on good terms with those controlling access to

public funds, since there is very little capital to be found outside the state apparatus and state-owned enterprises. Considering these factors, it is less surprising that broad climate change policies are not discussed more in the interaction between political actors.

Most of these causal chains can probably be drawn even further if we consider the broader structural conditions under which these functions. Certainly, most of the literature consulted in the theory chapter has a structural perspective: smallness, islandness and/or isolation leads to conditions that make politics susceptible to the phenomena discussed. In that respect, my findings on climate change policy-making and discourses does not seem to be special, but rather coincide with general trends in small and island states.

The model below is an attempt to illustrate the hypothesized causal chains discussed in this chapter for explaining the lack of climate change discourses in Kiribati.

Figure 2: Hypothesized causal chains explaining the lack of climate change discourses in Kiribati



5.7. Implications: what does this mean for the structures of accountability in Kiribati?

In arriving at my conclusions, I make implicit suggestions of what can be expected of Kiribati as a democratic state. By building on accountability theory, I compare the country to a democratic ideal where the different political actors interact formally or informally to arrive at collective decisions that are “in the best interest of the public” (Pitkin 1967 in Manin et al. 1999b:2). In the theory chapter, I showed how *electoral accountability* prescribes that elected officials are accountable “first and foremost to the citizens whose votes put them in office” (Mainwaring 2003:8). However, I also discussed how this is more complicated in the real world, since government holds an informational advantage over the voters. Along the same lines, I discussed how citizens can check the power of state actors via the media, civil society organizations or other forms of collective action. This *societal accountability* can ideally impose costs on political actors by exposing bad performance and wrongdoings (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003). In addition, the different state actors should ideally hold each other *horizontally accountable* on behalf of the people (O'Donnell 1994, 1999a, 2003, see also Gloppen et al. 2003), although this mechanism is somewhat weakened in parliamentary democracies (Strøm 2000). Even so, I argued that the ability for parliamentarians to demand that government representatives explain and justify their actions (i.e. give accounts) to the parliament is one of the central tenants of the parliamentary system, although their ability to sanction it depends on who has the parliamentary majority (Mainwaring 2003:11, Kenney 2003).

In Kiribati, it is hard to conclude confidently how closely the situation resembles the ideal based on my data. Certainly, the political actors do not stand on an equal footing in their interactions. Structural and institutional factors favors the incumbent vis-à-vis the rest, and this shapes the discourses that are held, also on climate change. In a country with strained human and financial resources where the government dominates most sectors, “few avenues of upward mobility do not involve the government” to cite Ott (2000:38). This gives the government a clear advantage over other actors as the educated labor force are primarily concentrated in government positions. However, it is hard to see how one can easily change these structural conditions that are inherent to the country's smallness and isolation. Here non-domestic actors are playing, and must continue to play, an important role in strengthening the capacity and ability of all political actors in Kiribati. Some projects, like the UNDPs efforts to increase the legislative and scrutinizing capacity of the parliament, are already in place. Other major partners like New Zealand, Australia and the EU are also involved in

improving the educational, financial and governing sector in the country. Analyzing the suitability and performance of these efforts lies beyond the scope of this paper, but I will nevertheless reiterate presidential advisor Andrew Teem's statement that the work Kiribati can do domestically is "very much determined by the funding that is available".¹⁴⁰ As such, even though I raise questions of whether the Kiribati government is acting *more* accountable to outside actors than to their own people, the donors are still a vital part of political life in Kiribati and one that cannot easily be replaced. Finally, having seen how climate change seemingly is a *valence issue* in Kiribati, I will argue that evaluating the accountability and responsiveness of the Kiribati government should probably be done on a more contested issue, since most people agree on the general course that must be taken on climate change. This would give a better picture of the strength of the government vis-à-vis actors that do not necessarily agree with their policies.

5.7. Concluding remarks: limitations of the data material, case population and suggestions for further research

In this thesis, I have used data from several sources to construct what Yin (2003:98, italics in original) calls "*converging lines of inquiry*", meaning that several sources of evidence points in the same direction. Through interviewing centrally placed political, organizational, bureaucratic and academic persons I have been able to secure inside accounts of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This has been corroborated by documentary, archival and to a certain degree observational data to secure insight into the *chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati*. However, the argument can always be made that one should have done more interviews, talked to other people or consulted other data sources. For me, a major drawback has been that I was not able to get interviews with people at the sub-national level, such as the unimane, village councils and the "people on the street". I therefore had to gauge their attitudes, actions and beliefs through proxies such as political commentators and experts, as well as relying on data collected by others, such as the KAPII survey. This is of course not ideal, as it becomes harder for me to assess the reliability of the data. At the same time, I was to a certain degree able to triangulate the different sources, leading to my conclusions being based on a wider set of evidence. This demonstrates one of the key advantages of doing field research for generating data: even if one does not perform formal interviews with all potential informants, being at "the scene of the crime" and talking informally with people you might

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Bairiki, 8 February 2012.

still uncover new perspectives that can be used when doing interviews or searching through written material. Thus, when the informal chats basically gives the same story as the secondary or tertiary sources consulted, I feel that the reliability is strengthened.

Another potential limitation of my study is that my data is highly specific. At the outset the aim of my research was to explore the chains of climate change discourses in Kiribati, doing what George and Bennet (2005:75) calls a heuristic case study, meaning that it “inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths”. In the methodology chapter I argued for why this was best done through a single-case study using multiple sources of data, but with a primary focus on elite and expert interviews. This ensures that my findings are highly valid for my particular case, but at the same time, their relevance beyond the immediate context under which the data was generated is unsure. Yet, in the same chapter I also argued that Kiribati could be seen as an extreme case “prototypical or paradigmatic” of the phenomenon of interest (see Gerring 2007:101), thus indicating that the findings could be relevant for a larger population of cases. In that discussion, I particularly mentioned Tuvalu and the Maldives as two other potential cases which I could have chosen to study the domestic climate change interaction in internationally active and highly threatened states. I chose to follow Ragin (2004), who argues that cases might not be “pre-determined” at the outset of an investigation. The population is formed as the case-oriented research progresses and conditions for an outcome begin to appear. These conditions limit the representativeness of findings by asking “what conditions are necessary for this outcome”, from which the population is identified. As discussed above, my general findings are largely as expected by the literature on small (island) states presented in the theory chapter. Hence I will argue that the institutional and structural factors hypothesized as leading to the lack of climate change discourses will possibly give the same outcome under similar conditions. Small states, and particularly those who are islands, tend to have few or no political parties, constraints on human resources and the absence of an independent civil society. In Kiribati, we have seen how this leads to executive dominance. Furthermore, these states are also more likely to be reliant on foreign assistance, which means that the political space becomes even more narrowed as their government must please potential donors. If this gets coupled with a culture of agreement and the valence-ness of climate change, I would expect the outcome to be the same as the one I observed. In general, these are traits that are found in most small island states, especially in the Pacific, according to the literature consulted in this thesis. Furthermore, these are also amongst those most vulnerable to some of the effects of climate

change, especially sea-level rise (Leatherman and Beller-Simms 1997, Nunn and Mimura 1997, Mimura 1999, Bettencourt et al. 2006). I will therefore argue that my findings and hypotheses can be representative for these as well. Yet, having only studied one case, I cannot know whether the features I have uncovered are the key causal features, or even if they are necessary or sufficient for the outcome (Ragin 2004:133). An important next step would therefore be to expand the sample by doing a similar study on a seemingly similar case to determine if the same factors are present and if they lead to the same outcome. This could lead to performing a structured comparison using either most similar system design on a case like Tuvalu, or perhaps a most different system design comparing Kiribati with for instance the Maldives (Landman 2003:70-75).¹⁴¹

At the same time, this thesis has covered the breadth of political life at the national level in Kiribati, and thus, time and resource constraints forced me to limit my data collection to the most obvious actors. Therefore, doing an even more in-depth analysis of just one of the political scenes might help to uncover more precisely the causal mechanisms at play (see Elster 1998, Gerring 2007:44).

In conclusion, I will reiterate the findings from Macdonald's (1998:37) study of the political actors in Kiribati, which showed that there is little knowledge of advanced policy issues beyond what he calls the "politico-bureaucratic elite" and that third parties, most often aid donors, frequently gets involved in policy formation. My research on the specific issue of climate change supports this to a large extent. Based on the discussions in this chapter, I will add that this seems to be caused by structural, institutional and cultural factors that collude to ensure an *executive dominance* and a *reliance on foreign assistance*, aided by the *valence nature* of the climate change issue.

¹⁴¹ Even if the outcome in these cases differ from Kiribati, comparisons can still be fruitful as the negative cases can help identify whether the causal factors discussed are sufficient to create a given outcome (Landman 2003:77-78).

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Appendix 1: List of interviews

Name	Organization	Position	Date	Place
Dr. Willy Morrell	PIFS	Natural Resources Adviser	31.01.2012	Suva, Fiji
Dr. Dan Orcherton	PACE-SD at USP		01.02.2012	Suva, Fiji
Viliamu Iese	PACE-SD at USP	Research Fellow	01.02.2012	Suva, Fiji
Teweiariki Teaero	USP School of Education	Senior Lecturer, also freelance journalist and political observer	02.02.2012	Suva, Fiji
Eni Tekanene	Parliament of Kiribati	Clerk to Parliament	06.02.2012	Ambo, Kiribati
Maere Tekanene	Government and Parliament of Kiribati	Minister of Education and MP	07.02.2012	Bikenibeu, Kiribati
Dr. Ueantabo McKenzie	USP Kiribati Campus	Director	08.02.2012	Bairiki, Kiribati
Andrew Teem	Office of the President	Senior policy advisor to the President on risk	08.02.2012	Bairiki, Kiribati
Hon. Taomati Iuta	Parliament of Kiribati	Speaker of Parliament	09.02.2012	Ambo, Kiribati
Rine Ueara	Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs	Chief Electoral Officer	09.02.2012	Bairiki, Kiribati
Amon Timan	Catholic Communications Organization and KANGO	Board member and activist	10.02.2012	Bikenibeu, Kiribati
Pelenise Alofa	KiriCAN	President	10.02.2012	Bikenibeu, Kiribati
Tiimi Kaiekieki	National Economic Planning Office	Director of Planning	10.02.2012	Bairiki, Kiribati
Claire Anterea	KiriCAN	Activist and Secretary	11.02.2012	Ambo, Kiribati
Tata Teitiaua	KANGO	Executive Director	11.02.2012	Ambo, Kiribati
Teburoro Tito	Parliament of Kiribati	MP for KTK and former President	11.02.2012	Ambo, Kiribati
Thierry Catteau	Delegation of the EU to the Pacific	Attaché Kiribati	15.02.2012	Suva, Fiji
Brian Lenga	UNDP	Governance Analyst	15.02.2012	Suva, Fiji

Appendix 2: Interview guides

Interview guide for politicians

General questions about his/her work

Do you feel you represent a particular group of people, geographic area or the country as a whole?

What do you see as your main responsibility as an elected representative?

Do you feel as belonging to a certain group within the parliament?

Do you feel free to criticize whomever you want?

Unimane, local councils?

Individual candidates and ministers, parliament, government, president?

Aid donors and international NGOs?

Did you participate in the recent election campaign?

If yes, how?

What topics did you feel were the most important to the voters you met?

Did you cooperate with any groups or organizations during the campaign?

What was the advantages and disadvantages of this?

Will you continue to cooperate with them between elections?

General questions on the political situation in Kiribati

Do you feel that the government listens to other actors, such as parliament, NGOs, the unimane, etc. when considering policies?

Do you feel that the government listens to its citizens when considering policies?

In general, do you feel that one can trust other politicians in Kiribati?

Some more than others?

Who are the most powerful (on the political arena) in Kiribati today?

How would you characterize the power of...

...the government

...the parliament

...the unimane

...the aid donors

...others?

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge(s) faced by Kiribati...

...in the short term

...in the long term
Other major issues?

Climate change and climate change policies

Do you think Kiribati are threatened by a changing climate?

If so, can the country do anything to prevent/adapt to the threat?

Who should pay for changes made?

In your opinion, how is the climate policies formed in Kiribati?

Who are the most important actors?

Does anyone on the subgovernmental level (NGOs, parliament, local councils) participate?

In your opinion, is it possible for ordinary citizens to influence climate policy processes?

Do you agree with the climate change politics of the Tong-government?

Why/why not?

In general, do you feel that there is agreement or disagreement on the climate policies pursued by the government?

Do you feel that climate change is sometimes used to draw attention away/excuse other problems faced?

Closing questions:

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Do you know someone you would recommend me talking to about the issues we have discussed here today?

Interview guide for NGO representative

General questions about the organization:

Could you tell me a little bit about your position in the organization?

Can you tell me a little bit about how your organization works?

Issues

Organizational structure?

Members?

Geographic coverage?

Could you tell me how the organizations work is funded?

Do you feel you represent a particular group of people?

Concerning the organization on the political arena

Do you consider your organization to be political (meaning trying to influence policy)?

How would you describe your (organizations) participation on the political arena?

Do you feel that the government listens to NGOs, (such as yours), when considering policies?

Do you feel free to criticize whomever you want?

Unimane, local councils?

Individual candidates and ministers, parliament, government, president?

Aid donors and international NGOs?

Did you participate in the recent election campaign? (Kiribati-based only)

If yes, how?

Did you feel that any of the candidates was interested in your views on certain topics?

Was any parties/candidates more interested/sympathetic than others?

Why do you think that was the case?

Will you continue to cooperate with that candidate/party between elections?

General questions on the political situation in Kiribati

Do you feel that the government listens to its citizens when considering policies?

In general, do you feel that one can trust politicians in Kiribati?

Some more than others?

Who are the most powerful (on the political arena) in Kiribati today?

How would you characterize the power of...

...the government
...the parliament
...the unimane
...the aid donors
...others?

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge(s) faced by Kiribati...
...in the short term
...in the long term
Other major issues?

Climate change and climate change policies

Do you think Kiribati is threatened by a changing climate?

If so, can the country do anything to prevent/adapt to the threat?

Who should pay if changes are made?

In your opinion, how is the climate policies formed in Kiribati?

Who are the most important actors?

Does anyone on the subgovernmental level (NGOs, parliament, local councils) participate?

In your opinion, is it possible for ordinary citizens to influence climate policy processes?

Do you agree with the climate change politics of the Tong-government?
Why/why not?

In general, do you feel that there is agreement or disagreement on the climate policies pursued by the government?

Do you feel that climate change is sometimes used to draw attention away/excuse other problems faced?

Closing questions:

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Do you know someone you would recommend me talking to about the issues we have discussed here today?

Interview guide for experts

NB: change «Kiribati» to «the region» when talking to experts not particularly concerned with Kiribati.

Begin with general questions about position and work specific to the respondent

General questions on the political situation in Kiribati

Do you feel that the government listens to its citizens when considering policies?

In your opinion, do citizens try to be involved in policy-making/political debates?

In general, do you feel that people trust politicians in Kiribati?
Some more than others?

Who are the most powerful (on the political arena) in Kiribati today?

How would you characterize the power of...

- ...the government
- ...the parliament
- ...the unimane
- ...the aid donors
- ...others?

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge(s) faced by Kiribati...
...in the short term
...in the long term
Other major issues?

Climate change and climate change policies

Do you think Kiribati is threatened by a changing climate?

If so, can the country do anything to prevent/adapt to the threat?

Who should pay if changes are made?

In your opinion, how is the climate policies formed in Kiribati?

Who are the most important actors?

Does anyone on the subgovernmental level (NGOs, parliament, local councils) participate?

In your opinion, is it possible for ordinary citizens to influence climate policy processes?

Do you agree with the climate change politics of the Tong-government?
Why/why not?

In general, do you feel that there is agreement or disagreement on the climate policies pursued by the government?

Do you feel that climate change is sometimes used to draw attention away/excuse other problems faced?

Closing questions:

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Do you know someone you would recommend me talking to about the issues we have discussed here today?