

Unit 40: Samoa: In search of favourable winds *Terry Tevita*



Figure 40.1 Map of Samoa

Facts

Population:	219,998 (July 2009 estimate)
Land Area:	2 934 sq km
System of Government:	Independent nation, parliamentary democracy
Main Sources of Income:	copra, cocoa, fishing, car parts, tourism, remittances from Samoans in New Zealand and USA, aid from Australia, New Zealand, and other sources.

GLOSSARY

Paternalism	treating others as inferiors, in a fatherly/motherly manner
Petition	a request to parliament signed by a large number of people
Aristocracy	nobility; having higher status determined by family and hereditary

Traditionalist	those who support the old ways
Diversification	to find (multiple) ways to achieve a goal
Bankruptcy	inability to continue business due to financial loss
Progressive	to adopt new ideas; to change with the times

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Explain the traditional Samoan system of authority
- List at least two aims of the Germans in Samoa in the late 19th century
- Describe the early New Zealand government in Samoa
- Identify important moments in Samoa's journey to Independence from the 1930s, and plot these in a timeline
- Identify the weaknesses and strengths of the Samoan government in each decade after Independence in 1962

This unit on "My nation: My government" looks at traditional forms of government before the arrival of Europeans in Samoa. It also looks at attempts to govern Samoa prior to the gaining of independence and the issues faced by the Samoan government after independence.

Waiting for favourable winds

The Independent State of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa) lies near the equator in the South-West Pacific, just east of the International Dateline. Samoa, an archipelago, consists of nine volcanic islands. Of these, only four are inhabited, including the two large islands of Upolu and Savaii. A tropical climate allows a wide range of animal (fauna) and plant (flora) life to flourish.

Of the 165,000 residents, 88% are of pure Samoan descent, while the remainder of the population are mixed Samoan/Chinese and Samoan/European descent. An old Samoan proverb "*Ua logo i tino matagi lelei*", advises "to await favourable winds". When ancestral Samoans took a chance and planned a voyage, they would wait for the appropriate winds to carry them to their chosen destination. Using their extensive knowledge of ocean currents, star formations, and migratory patterns, these Samoans would reach their destiny with a surprising success rate.

Early Settlement

Archaeological evidence suggests that the archipelago was initially settled by Polynesians around 3,000 years ago, probably from Southeast Asia. Oral history records regular contacts with neighbouring Tonga and Fiji, and to a lesser extent, other groups of the South Western Pacific. Through the centuries, a distinct culture (fa'a Samoa) and an intricate system of leadership and

decision-making developed. This has since proved to be enduring despite new and foreign influences.

The largest political unit in Samoa was the *nuu* (village). Each village had its own *fono* (internal government) and *faalupega* (rank of authority). A village was comprised of several *aiga* (extended family) headed by a *matai* (titled chief) who represented his *aiga* at the village *fono*.

In the 19th Century, villages banded together into districts and sub-districts to pledge their support for paramount chiefs who had lineage in these villages. These districts and sub-districts are today's electoral constituencies.

Imperialism - German Era

Samoa's independence was shattered in 1889 when a tripartite administration by Germany, Britain and the USA was established to establish order and bring an end to war. This was unsuccessful, and in 1899, the three powers agreed to allow Germany to annex Western Samoa. The eastern islands of Tutuila and Manu'a became US territories,

Germany followed three broad aims. The first was to protect the interests of the largest German plantation company (*DHPG*), who was importing Melanesian and Chinese indentured labourers. The second was to protect the welfare of indigenous Samoans. The third aim was to encourage economic development amongst the Samoans.

However, this was to be achieved by breaking down Samoan institutions of authority and the leadership powers of the *matai*. Many Samoans therefore refused to cooperate with the German administration, and as a result rebels were either imprisoned or exiled to other German Pacific territories.

New Zealand administration of Samoa

On the outbreak of WWI in 1914, the New Zealand government sent a naval fleet that seized Samoa. By 1921, under a League of Nations resolution, Western Samoa was made a mandate of New Zealand. The New Zealand administration was initially hailed as the "coming of age". However, it soon became a nightmare for both sides and a combination of circumstances led to

resentment and growing tensions between Samoans and the New Zealand government. The main areas of dispute were'

- An influenza outbreak in 1918 which killed 22% of the population. NZ was blamed for failure to set up a proper quarantine.
- The administration interfered in village affairs,
- The administration disregarded traditional leaders
- New Zealanders had a paternalistic attitude towards Samoans.
- There was discrimination against European-Samoans of mixed descent.
- The work of the *Mau* movement to achieve *Samoa mo Samoa* (Samoa for Samoans)

The peaceful campaigning was shattered Sunday 15th December, 1925. During a *Mau* procession through the streets of Apia, the NZ police over-reacted and opened fire un-necessarily on the crowds. Eleven members of the *Mau* were killed, including their revered leader, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III. Samoan Independence now became the *Mau* movements' sole objective.

Road to Independence

In 1936, a new Labour government took office in New Zealand. This was a significant step towards independence for Samoa, as the Labour Party had always supported the *Mau*. World War II intervened but promises were made of a change of status after the war. By 1946, self-government was inevitable. As Samoa was now a UN Trusteeship, a UN delegation visited Samoa and outlined several administrative recommendations, which resulted in the *Samoa Amendment Act* of 1947. New Zealand was left with the role of preparing Samoa for Independence.

The Act then led to a restructuring of the administration. By 1959, the government was based on a combination of democratic principles and traditional Samoan systems of authority. *matai* (titled chief) were given the privilege to vote. On January 15th 1962, the people of Samoa witnessed the end of an era and the birth of a new nation - the Independent State of Western Samoa.

After independence – winds of change

Since independence, Samoa's economic development and political manoeuvres have reflected a cautious approach. Due to a lack of mineral resources or major products to export to the world, in the first two decades Samoa depended on foreign aid from New Zealand, Australia, Japan and donor agencies such as the UNDP, FAO, EU, and others.

Continuing economic tensions also forced the country to embark on risky economic projects. Promising ventures turned out to be nothing more than “huffs and puffs”. Like many voyages of old, most of these enterprises met with disaster. The most famous of these were the *WSTEC* bankruptcy, the *Polynesian Airlines* fiasco of the early 1990s, and the collapse of the *Western Samoa Coconut Products (WSCP)* project.

Samoa became independent with two broad views shaping its policies; a 'conservative' attitude in preserving centuries-old customs and traditions, and a 'progressive' approach in strengthening and broadening its economic base, especially in agricultural development. To achieve these goals, the government focused on developing the education system, improving the roads, and increasing the shipping links and aviation services.

Because of the importance of traditional authority outlined in the Constitution, a Lands and Titles Court was established in 1963 to settle and resolve any disputes relating to land. In the same year, the joint Head of State *Tupua* Tamasese Meaole died leaving *Malietao* Tanumafili II as the sole holder of the office for life.

During the first ten years of independence, the economic situation in Samoa was often been described as "disastrous". Political leaders who were initially full of hope and aspirations now faced the reality of:

- A decline in global export prices (copra and cocoa)
- The devastation of banana and coconut plantations by diseases and pests.
- Customary ownership of land was seen as a hindrance to large scale economic prosperity.
- A hurricane in 1966 destroyed 80% of crops and houses and killed ten people.
- Increasing dependence on imported goods, creating a rising trade deficit.
- A large portion of the population (65%) that was below the productive working age (18 years).

Rising inflation and an increase in the cost of living occurred.

By 1967, another problem occurred that many now interpret as leading directly to the contemporary economic situation in Samoa. A steady flow of Samoans, especially amongst the skilled and professional sectors of the community, departed for New Zealand, Hawaii and Australia leaving a crucial gap to be filled back home. Samoa's "Treaty of Friendship" with New Zealand coupled with a demand for unskilled workers abroad also meant that many un-skilled Samoans migrated on three-month permits but then chose to overstay indefinitely.

On the political front, the introduction of party-politics in 1980 and a move to wider suffrage (the right to vote) changed the face of Samoan politics forever. Prior to 1980, leaders gained their position

through traditional status and personal merit. Now they had to follow party policy and win the votes of electors.

The introduction of television in the early 1990s sparked a “Cultural Revolution” across Samoa. Traditionally, female beauty was described as sturdy-built, stalwart, and wholesome; but foreign trends were followed. Slim and petite became popular and Bulimia and anorexia, unheard of before, became common sicknesses in Samoa.

Independence had been vigorously sought, but it seemed that Samoa had changed too much.

Government Policy

The policy towards the outside world of Prime Minister Mata’afa Faumuina Mulino II's (1962 - 1970) was of "caution". Western Samoa did not join any global organisations (i.e. UN and Commonwealth) for it felt the expenses would outweigh the benefits. Though it often came up in discussions, Samoa did not establish any military forces for there was no visible threat and the government could never afford the huge cost. Unlike other Pacific Island groups, Samoa did not make an aggressive drive to attract tourists.

The traditionalists felt tourism might have a negative impact on Samoan culture and values. The Mata’afa government’s main policy was to develop a good education system, producing educated Samoans capable of running a modern government. In doing so, another dilemma came about - the educated elite started to question the privileges and powers invested in the Matai, especially regarding voting rights.

1972 - 1980s

The elections of 1971 saw a brief change of hands in the Samoan Prime Minister. Mataafa was replaced by *Tupua* Tamasese Lealofi IV, a doctor. His inexperience meant he suffered a landslide defeat in 1973. In 1976, Tupuola Efi, an ambitious outspoken idealist took over the reigns of government. In 1977 Western Samoa entered the realm of party politics with the establishment of the *Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP)*.

The 1970s saw major reforms in Government Policy, especially in trying to resolve the economic problems of the 1960s. Contrary to past attitudes, the government poured substantial resources into promoting and strengthening the tourist sector by upgrading *Faleolo International Airport*, increasing

airline services to the islands, opening a government-funded hotel and offering "tax holidays" to attract foreign investment in tourism.

To further strengthen and stabilise the capitalist economy the government encouraged diversification of the agricultural sector. It promoted crop-farming but also ventures in poultry, pig, cattle production, vegetable growing and ocean fishing. After environmental concerns were raised, Western Samoa set up reserve areas such as the "*Le Pupu National Park*" to protect fragile forestry, marine resources and water supplies.

To raise standards and proper sanitation, a network of clinics and district hospitals were established in close associations with women's committees in the villages. Rising inflation and meagre wages in the early 1980s resulted in an unbearable cost of living for many and Samoa suffered a phase of civil unrest.

On 6 April 1981, the Public Service Association went on a month-long strike halting airline, postal, shipping, and medical and fire services. After negotiations and concessions by government, the country returned to normal but deep divisions and bitter rivalry remained.

A cloud of political uncertainty swept over Samoa in 1983, when a landmark court decision deprived Prime Minister Vaai Kolone of his seat. The Head of State appointed Tupuola Efi as Prime Minister. At the end of the year, his budget was rejected by parliament and in turn he was replaced by Tofilau Eti Alesana.

1990s

In a plebiscite in 1991, the public voted overwhelmingly in favour of a Universal Suffrage Bill that enabled every citizen over 21 years of age the right to vote. Surprisingly, it was also a victory for tradition. *Matai* titles that were being ridiculously exploited for political gain under the old voting system were able to reclaim their old authority.

The decade also saw progress in the tourism sector, light manufacturing and an exciting money-making ocean fishing venture. The decade was also marked by new government initiatives such as strengthening the private sector and privatizing many government agencies. *Samoa Water Authority*, the *Electric Power Corporation* and *Telecommunications* were sold to private companies.

Low points in the decade include a string of protest marches in 1994 - 1995 sparked by the introduction of a 10% GST (Goods and Services Tax), and allegations of government mismanagement and corruption.

In 1996, the *National Airline (Air Polynesia)* had accumulated debt of more than 200 million tala (US\$44m). This threatened to push the government into bankruptcy. The political assassination of charismatic Public Works Minister, Luagalau Levaula Kamu on July 23rd 1999 cast a cloud of political uncertainty on Samoa and threatened much vital foreign investment to the country.

Questions and Activities

1. In the 1960s, why did many Samoans, especially in the (20-45 age group) migrate to NZ?
2. What was the major problem faced after independence?
3. List the three well known failures of the 1960-1980 period.
4. How many islands are uninhabited?
5. List the political units in Samoa:-
 - *nuie*
 - *fono*
 - *faalupega*
9. What happened in:-
 - (a) 1890
 - (b) 1914
 - (c) 1928
 - (d) 1921
 - (e) 1925
10. When was the Land and Titled Court established?
11. What happened on 7th April 1981? (answer in 30 words or less words)



Figure 40.2. McDonalds restaurant in Samoa – an example of Western influences on culture and diet in Samoa today.



Figure 40.3. Government Buildings, Apia



Figure 40.4. Buses take Samoans to and from Apia