

Unit 41: Tonga - Warriors in a Constitutional Democracy

Seu'ula Johansson Fua

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Describe Tonga's relationship with England, particularly during the protectorate era
- Explain the difference between colonisation, a protectorate and independence
- Define government and its different types
- Define a constitutional monarchy and how it operates

This unit on “My nation: My government” looks at forms of government established by Tongans prior to European arrival in the islands, and the period after 1900 in which Britain established a Protectorate in Tonga.

Introduction

Government is an agency that rules a nation. The word “government” can refer to the parliament, the administration (bureaucracy) the system of elections and voting, or the policies and laws that govern what citizens do each day – or all these things. Governments need leaders, and workers and a method of making policies and laws.

These policies and laws are designed to be fair for everyone, to protect citizens from harm, and from harming others. For example, at your school, there are rules against stealing. These rules are to keep your school bags from being stolen. And when a student breaks a school rule, they are punished. Governments protect all the people – the nation – in a similar way.

Questions and Activities

1. Explain to a partner in your class what these words and phrases mean:
 - (a) Government
 - (b) “serve the country”
 - (c) “to be fair”
 - (d) “protect the nation”
2. Set up your own laws for a sporting team:
 - a) In groups, talk among yourselves about what kind of laws (make at least 3) you would like to follow in your team. (Making sure that it is fair for everyone.)
 - b) Write these laws on a piece of paper and pass it to other groups. Ask each group to say if they like the law or not. Remember to write down each group's response.

c) After this short survey, show your results on a graph. Your graph can be either a pie graph (proportional) or bar graph (percentages). Show your graph to the rest of the class.

Types of Government

A Greek philosopher named Aristotle (384-322 BC) said that, “the true forms of government ... are those in which the one, or a few, or the many govern, with a view to the common interest” of the people. Aristotle believed that a government should be fair for everyone.

It is not easy to have a government that is fair for everyone, because not every person wants the same thing. From your short survey in *Question 2*, you would have found out that not everyone in the class agreed with every law that was suggested. If it was hard for you and your classmates to put up laws for your class, imagine what it would be like to make laws for a country with millions of people.

Aristotle also talked about governments ruled by “the **one** or the **few** or the **many**”. These are the different types of government which could be established. A country ruled by **one person** is a **Monarchy**; a country where a **few people** rule is an **Aristocracy** and a country where **all the people** have a say in who governs, is called a **Democracy**..(See *Fig 43.1* below).

(Note: Another form of rule by one person is called a **dictatorship**. Rule by a few who do not have family or hereditary status to rule, is called a **cabal** or **clique**. These are usually nor democratic. They often assume rule after a coup.)

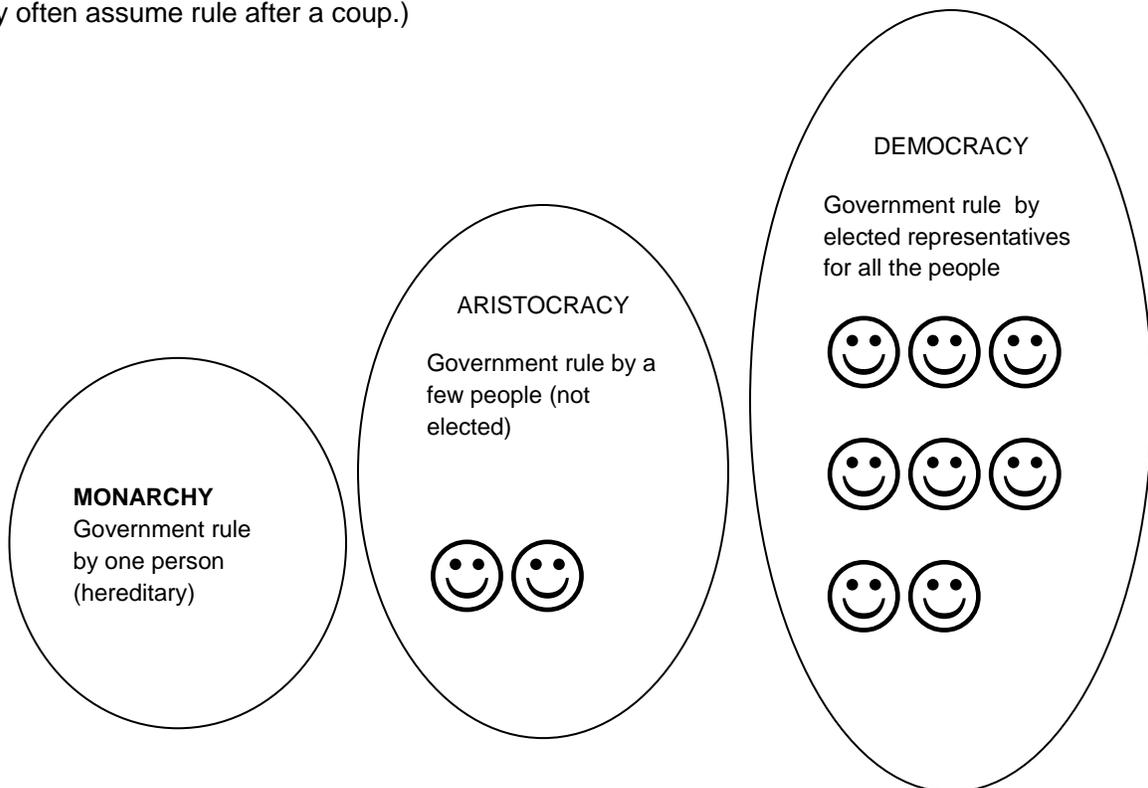


Figure 41.1. Different types of government.

In today's world there are governments with quite different origins. In the **Democratic System** of government the leaders who govern are chosen or elected by voters. Government leaders lose their position (for example, as Prime Minister), when the voters are looking for new leaders. Many countries today are democracies including some that use this word, but are not democratic. Democracies have a **constitution**, or set of basic principles that guide governments, law-makers and parliaments.

There are also **military dictatorships**, and governments that are known by their founding principles and ideologies, such as **Communist, Marxist** or **Socialist** governments. There are also nations that apply religious beliefs such as **Islamic** governments, for example, in Indonesia and Iran.

The **aristocracy or autocratic** system of government popular in the 19th century had a leader who came to power because of their personal power or because of hereditary rights and royal birth. These citizens do not elect their leader.

The few remaining hereditary rulers in the world hold a ceremonial position rather than one of real political power. Rather than the Monarch, these governments follow the guidelines laid out in their constitution. They are referred to as **Constitutional Monarchies**. Some of the Constitutional Monarchies of today include the United Kingdom, Sweden and Tonga.

Central rule in Tonga.

In early times, Tonga was ruled by chiefs. Each chief was to give land to the people of his village, and generally protect them from being harmed by other villagers. The chief also had the right to take anything that belonged to any person in his village. For example, he could take a pig or even the daughter of one of the families in the village as his wife.

There were no written laws. What the chiefs said became law. Instead of written laws, there were *'tapu'* or customary laws. These *tapu* worked to protect the mana and power of the chiefs. Ordinary people who had no chiefly blood had no right to anything even control over their own bodies. During this time, the commoner's only role was to serve the chiefs.

However, the Constitution of 1875 with central power now held by a single King of all Tonga, meant that in principle the Kings, chiefs and commoners were all under the same law. The Constitution took away some of the chiefs' and kings' power over the commoners. It also gave the commoners some rights regarding themselves and their properties.

There was a big difference between the old Tongan traditional government and the new western ideas (written laws). Tupou I knew that he needed to bring Tonga into a modern central way of ruling in order to maintain peace and independence. The only way to keep Tonga's independence was to give every Tongan a sense of personal independence.

The supreme leader was called the *Tu'i Tonga*, or King of all Tonga. This form of government relied on loyalty to the King. The following extract describes the relationship between the *Tu'i Tonga* and the people.

The Tu'i Tonga and the *Inasi* Ceremony

In ancient Tonga, there were chiefs in each village and they had a lot of power over the people of the village. Their powers were so great that they could demand and receive whatever they wanted, even if what they wanted what did not belong to them. But, the most powerful chief of all was the Tu'i Tonga. The people believed that he was especially chosen by God to be their ruler. There were no written laws. Whatever the Tu'i Tonga said was law, and any person who did not follow what the Tu'i Tonga commanded, was put to death. To help the people believe that he was a sacred King, there were several customs that separated the people from the King and his chiefs. For example, the people were told that they were not worthy of going to 'Pulotu' (Tonga's version of Heaven). Therefore, they had no soul, and it was easier for them to believe that they were not as worthy as the chiefs and King. The people also had to join each year in the 'Inasi ceremony'. In this ceremony, every tribe throughout Tonga came and presented to the Tu'i Tonga the first fruits from their harvest. Through this ceremony, the people were reminded that their ruler was sacred and that he had every right to rule in whatever way he wished. The Tu'i Tonga was almost always a man.

Figure 41.2 The Tu'i Tonga and the *Inasi* ceremony

The Founding of Tonga's Constitutional Monarchy.

In 1875, King Tupou I proclaimed that Tonga now had a Constitution. He was helped by a missionary named Reverend Shirley Baker. Tonga's Constitution created an organised government, recognised by foreign countries, and this helped deter major powers like Britain, Germany and France from interfering too much in Tonga.

Tonga's Constitution was also designed to bring peace and end the fighting between the chiefs in Tonga. Before Tupou I became *Tu'i Tonga*, there were three different dynasties or powerful family lines in Tonga, the *Tu'i Tonga*, *Tu'i Ha'atakalaua* and the *Tu'i Kanokupolu*. Tupou I fought many battles to unite all of Tonga's islands together under one leadership. In the 1870s there were still

some chiefs who were not willing to give up their powers so the Constitution outlined the different roles and powers of the central government, the chiefs and the people.

The authority of the King or Queen of Tonga is defined in the Constitution. Although they hold the highest authority in Tonga, the Constitution describes and limits their powers.

Library Research – looking for democracy?

Skills – Library and Textbook Research

Here is a simple guide to follow when you are looking for information.

Step 1: Write down your topic.

Step 2: Make a list of the key words in your topic?

Step 3: Choose the best source. Make a list of what is available - newspapers, magazines, encyclopaedia, maps, textbook etc? Which is best for finding information on Democracy?

Step 3: In the Library, there are sections for different types of resources. There is a Fiction, Reference and Non-Fiction sections as well as Subject sections (History, Politics, Science and others). Go to the shelves and browse the tiles on display.

Step 4: Using the key words from the topic, go to the Library Card Catalogue (or Computer Catalogue) and look up your key words. Once you've found the book, or list of books on the same topic, write down the title of the book, the author, and the shelf reference number. This number will tell you where the book is located in the library.

Step 5: Once you've found the book, look through the table of contents, chapter tiles and sub-titles and the index. If you find plenty of references, take the book to a desk and have a longer careful look at it.

Step 6: Make notes on any information you find. .

Step 7: If this book was written many years ago, there could be other books that have been written recently with more up to date information.

Step 8: When you record your information, remember to write down the page number, title of the book, the author and when the book was published.

(Note: Remember to keep to the topic, and do not be side-tracked by other interesting but irrelevant information.)

According to Tonga's Constitution, the "King is the sovereign of all the Chiefs and all the people. The kingdom is his". The King or Queen is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and can dismiss Parliament if he is not happy with their decisions and policies. The King and Queen can make treaties with other countries, chooses his own Ministers for the Cabinet, and can give out titles of honour. There are four major parts of Tonga's Constitutional Government:

- (i) The Monarch
- (ii) Executive (the Cabinet)
- (iii) Legislative Assembly (the Parliament)
- (iv) Judiciary

Below there is a speech, a historical document from Tonga.

A document is something written or printed in the past. It can be a speech, letter, law, or an article from a newspaper or magazine. Historical documents are very important for they provide us with a lot of information about past events and people. However, we should also be careful when we try to interpret the document, for they sometimes only give one person's point of view. They may also be incomplete or only a fragment of a bigger document. To check a document historians always ask:-

- (a) When was the document written?*
- (b) Who produced the document*
- (c) What sort of document is it: a letter, a diary, a legal agreement?*
- (d) Why was the document written?*
- (e) What unusual words are used?*
- (f) What is the "context" of the document – what else was happening at the same time?*

Questions and Activites

5. Write six questions that you would like to ask the *Tu'i Tonga* about the central government he established in 1875.
6. Carefully read King Tupou I's speech in 1875 (*Figure 43.4* below). Why was this speech being made?
7. Why was Tupou I making this change?
8. Why does Tupou I refer to a "constitution"?
9. Do you think these were his actual words? Select one statement below. In two sentences explain why you choose this statement.
 - (a) It is a speech written (in English) afterwards.
 - (b) A reporter wrote down exactly what he said at the time.
 - (c) An English Missionary wrote this for Tupou I
 - (d) In Tongan, the speech may have said different things.
 - (e) There was no version written down in Tongan, so we must believe this English version is accurate.

King Tupou I

"You are called upon to meet and deliberate on the new work to be done by the government, to pass the Constitution, and to govern the land and to have the law of the country in accordance with it. The form of our Government in the days past was that my rule was absolute, and that my wish was law and that I chose who should belong to the parliament and that I could please myself to create chiefs and alter titles. But that, it appears to me, was a sign of darkness and now a new era has come to Tonga - an era of light – it is my wish to grant a Constitution and to carry on my duties in accordance with it and those that come after me shall do the same and the Constitution shall be as a firm rock in Tonga for ever".

Opening of Parliament, 16th September, 1875.

Figure 41.3 Speech by King Topou I, Opening of Parliament 1875.

Protectorate Period 1900-1970

By the end of the 19th century, most of the Pacific Islands were colonised by Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands, France or the USA. Fiji had been colonised by Great Britain and Samoa was under German rule in the west and USA rule in the east, Tonga had remained outside most of this imperial rivalry. This was because of two main reasons:-

- (i) Tonga had already established a Constitution in 1875, and other countries recognised this form of strong and good government by Tongans.
- (ii) Germany and Britain agreed to keep Tonga neutral, so they could protect their colonies in neighbouring Fiji and Samoa.

In 1899, with other Pacific colonies being annexed, and a global competition occurring between the main powers, Britain thought it was necessary to negotiate a Treaty of Friendship and Protectorate with Tonga. The Tongan government had problems with their finance, and had a big debt so this was an excuse for Britain to intervene. To help run the government, the Tongan governments had been borrowing money from the German company *DHPG*. Tonga's increasing financial problems were due to Tupou II's own personal spending. There were chiefs who were not happy with the King's way of ruling and these chiefs, together with European traders, complained to Britain and asked for help to protect trade (and profits) and avoid future government debts.

The *DHPG* had begun to interfere in the political decisions of the Tongan government. This created rivalry between the European traders in Tonga. Germany was also a global rival of Britain. On the other hand, Britain and Germany had agreed to act together to end the wars in Samoa.

Why a Protectorate and not a Colonisation?

Britain wanted to keep Tonga neutral or independent. This was diplomatic talk, for keeping it within the British "sphere of interest". The King at that time, Tupou II, felt it would be a disgrace if he were to lose his country to Britain and he felt Tongans were too proud and stubborn to give up their land. His advisors argued that Tonga already had a Constitution, and therefore was recognised as a stable, secure country.

The Treaty of Friendship and Protection between Tonga and Britain Tonga was signed in 1900. That is, Tonga was now a British protectorate. However, Britain played a very small role in government and Tonga was virtually a self-governing state. If the King and the government wanted advice, a British Agent and Consul was there to help but Britain was not to involved with internal government affairs, traditions and customs. The 1875 Constitution was maintained.

In a Supplementary Treaty negotiated in 1905:

- (i) The King was to rule with, and through, the chiefs
- (ii) The government was to discuss with the British Agent and Consul all major government appointments, changes in existing appointments and major changes in financial matters
- (iii) Rents from government lands were to be paid to the "Public Account" and not to the King's personal account
- (iv) The British government gave Tonga a loan of £4,000 to pay its debts

Questions and Activities

10. Why did traders want a treaty between Tonga and Britain?
11. When was the Treaty of Friendship and Protectorate signed?
12. Imagine you are living in Tonga during this time (1900).
Write three short letters to the editor of your local newspaper (each of 50 words) showing how you feel about Britain controlling your country's external and foreign affairs. Write as:

- (a) a chief
- (b) a commoner
- (c) a foreign trader

Leadership under the Protectorate

Mr Basil Thomson, the British representative, was sent to Tonga in 1899 to negotiate the Treaty with Tupou II who had just inherited the throne from his grandfather Tupou I. Tupou II refused the treaty several times before he signed because he did not want another country to have control of Tonga's foreign affairs. Basil Thomson threatened Tupou II that if he did not sign the Treaty, Britain would not recognise him as the King of Tonga. Eventually after a long and difficult negotiation, the Treaty with Britain was finally signed on the 18th May, 1900.

Throughout Tupou II's reign he tried several times to have the Treaty cancelled. This made relationships between British officials and Tongans difficult. Most of the British officials saw Tongans as uncivilised and not aware of the global and imperial changes that were occurring.

Queen Salote Tupou III

In 1918, Queen Salote Tupou III inherited the throne from her father Tupou II and the relationship between Tonga and Britain improved. There also was no longer any other country interested in colonising Tonga.

New British officials were also more sympathetic and were beginning to understand of the Tongans. They did not interfere in local government matters, but they did help when they were asked. One of the British Consuls, JS Neill became a close and trusted adviser to the Queen.

Queen Salote improved the Tonga-British relationship because of her western-influenced policies on education, health, tradition and the economy. These improvements prepared Tongans for a modern future. Queen Salote died on 16th December 1965 and was succeeded by her son who became King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV on 4th July 1967.

Tupou IV and the end of the Protectorate Era

Tupou IV continued to bring modern development to Tonga through education and health. The Treaty of Friendship and Protectorate of 1900 had been revised several times. The last revision was in 1968. With each revision, there was a strengthening of the Constitution and a reduction of British influence in Tonga. Three years after he became King, on the 4th June 1970, the King declared Tonga was again independent.

Immediately Tonga joined up with such regional and international organisations such as the United Nations. With other newly independent nations, Fiji, Western Samoa and Nauru, they formed the South Pacific Forum.

During the Protectorate Era, 1900-1970 Tonga was exposed to western ideas of government. This gave Tonga a chance to revise her Constitution and make the administration more efficient. At the same time the Monarchy and the Government worked to encourage and keep Tongan culture and tradition. As Tonga moved towards the end of the 20st century, there were questions about the Constitutional Monarchy. The new King agreed to pass over some responsibilities to the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, and parliament, and ultimately to the people. A pro-democracy movement continued to ask questions about the parliament and government departments, and Tongans continued to search for the best way to protect the Tongan way of life.

Questions and Activities

13. What year was the Treaty of Friendship and Protectorate signed between Tonga and Britain?
14. Why do you think there was a need for the Supplementary Treaty of 1905?
15. How many years passed between the first treaty and full independence?
16. List the Monarchs who ruled Tonga between 1875 and 1970.
17. Choose TWO monarchs, and write a paragraph comparing their relationship with Great Britain.
18. Explain the difference between a "Protectorate" and a "Colony".