

Definition: **Samoa** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

1 or formerly **Navigators Islands** islands SW cen Pacific N of Tonga Islands; divided at long. 171°W into American, or Eastern, Samoa & independent Samoa *area 1209 sq mi (3143 sq km)* see American Samoa **2** or formerly **Western Samoa** islands SW cen Pacific W of American Samoa; formerly administered by New Zealand; an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations since 1962 * Apia (on Upolu Is.) *area 1100 sq mi (2850 sq km), pop 179,186*



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Summary Article: **Samoa**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Country in the southwest Pacific Ocean, in Polynesia, northeast of Fiji Islands.

Government Samoa is an independent republic within the Commonwealth.

The 1960 constitution, which went into effect in 1962, provides for a parliamentary system of government, with a constitutional head of state, a single-chamber legislative assembly, the Fono, and a prime minister and cabinet drawn from and responsible to the assembly. The head of state is

elected by the assembly for a five-year term. The head of state appoints the prime minister and cabinet on the basis of assembly support.

The Fono has 49 members, 47 directly elected by universal suffrage, but only members of the Matai (elected clan leaders) are eligible to stand for election, and two places in the Fono are non-Matai and are chosen by non-Samoans, mainly Europeans. The Fono has a life of five years. Political parties are personality-based groupings.

History The original inhabitants were Polynesians, and the first Europeans to reach the island group of Samoa, in 1722, were Dutch. In the 19th century, Germany, the UK, and the USA had conflicting interests in the islands and administered them jointly from 1889 until 1899, when they were divided into American Samoa and Samoa. Samoa was a German colony until World War I and from 1920 was administered by New Zealand, first as a League of Nations mandate and from 1946 as a United Nations trust territory.

Independence Samoa was granted internal self-government gradually until it achieved full independence, within the Commonwealth, on 1 January 1962. The office of head of state was held jointly by two traditional rulers, but on the death of one of them, the other, Malietoa Tanumafili II, became the sole head of state for life. The prime minister at the time of independence was Fiamē Mata Afa Mulinu'u. He lost power in 1970 but regained it from 1973 until his death in 1975. In 1976 the first prime minister who was not of royal blood was elected, Tupuola Taisi Efi.

In 1979 the opposition politicians came together to form the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) which won the 1982 election, Va'ai Kolone becoming prime minister. Later that year he was replaced by Tupuola Efi. Efi resigned a few months later when his budget was rejected and was replaced by the

new HRPP leader, Tofilau Eti Alesana. The HRPP won a decisive victory in February 1985, and Tofilau Eti Alesana continued as prime minister. In late 1985, he resigned and Va'ai Kolone returned to lead a government of independents and members of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), recently formed by Tupuola Taisi Efi. The 1988 general election produced a hung parliament with Tofilau Eti Alesana emerging as premier.

Following the introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1990, Tofilau Eti Alesana was returned for a further three-year term in the 1991 general election, and Va'ai Kolone resumed leadership of the opposition. Tofilau Eti Alesana made wholesale changes to his cabinet in May 1991, bringing in Fiame Naomi as the first woman to serve in a Samoan cabinet. During 1993 two new parties were formed: the Samoa Democratic Party (SDP), led by Sir Togiloa Peter, and the Samoan National Development Party (SNDP), led by Tupuola Taisi Efi and Va'ai Kolone. Tofilau Eti Alesana was re-elected as prime minister in April 1996.

The country's name was officially changed from 'Western Samoa' to 'Samoa' in July 1997, despite protests from American Samoa, which considered that it would undermine its identity. One reason for the change was that 'Samoa' had been used by the United Nations (UN) ever since the country's entry into the organization in 1976.

In November 1998 the 74-year-old Tofilau Eti Alesana resigned as prime minister, on health grounds, and was replaced by Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, of the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), who had been deputy prime minister and who was an economist who had worked for the European Economic Community. Tofilau remained senior minister without portfolio before his death in March 1999. Under Malielegaoi, the HRPP won general elections held in March 2001, March 2006, and March 2011. The HRPP governments have promoted sound financial management, closer relations with China, Japan, and New Zealand, and development of education and tourism, which generates a quarter of GDP. The government's decision to switch the road driving side from right to left in September 2009 led to large anti-government demonstrations and the formation in 2008 of an opposition Tautua Samoa Party (TSP).

In May 2007 the head of state, Malietoa Tanumafili II, died at the age of 94. He was succeeded by the 69-year-old Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, a former prime minister 1976–82, who was elected head of state by the legislature in June 2007 for a 5-year term and was designated Tufuga Efi. With this change, Samoa moved from being a constitutional monarchy to a republic.

In September 2009, a tsunami caused by an undersea earthquake claimed more than 150 lives in Samoa and caused economic damage. In May 2012, Samoa joined the World Trade Organization (WTO).

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