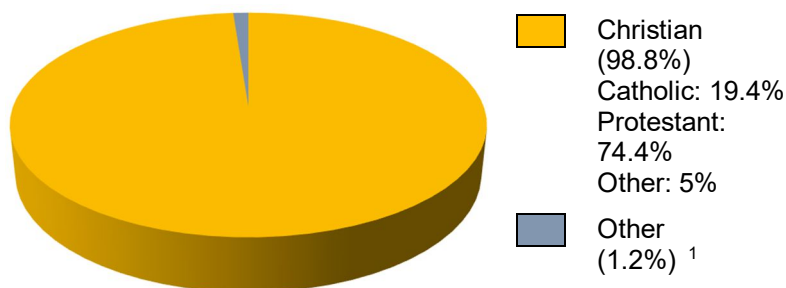
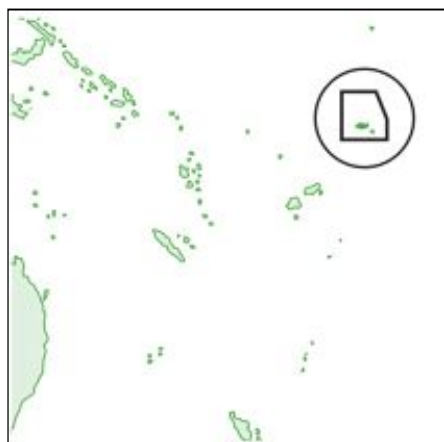


SAMOA



Area: 2,842 km ²	Population: 185,000	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Samoan, English
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Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

Samoa, a sovereign state in Polynesia, encompasses the western part of the Samoan Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. The country gained independence from New Zealand in 1962 and was admitted to the United Nations in 1976. The two main islands are Upolu and Savai'i. The nation's capital, as well as the international airport, is situated on Upolu. Savai'i is one of the largest islands in Polynesia.

The constitution describes Samoa as a Parliamentary Democracy with no state religion, yet the preamble to the constitution describes the country as "an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and tradition."² The constitution allows for the right for an individual to choose, practise or change his or her religion. However it was stated by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour's International Religious Freedom Report for 2014 that village leaders in Samoa continued to pressure others to participate in the same Christian religious group as the majority of villagers. Despite this claim, the constitution states that no persons can be forced to take religious instruction in a religion other than their own and there were no reports of significant government actions affecting religious freedom.

Incidents

In May 2014, a parliamentary committee in Samoa decided not to amend the constitutional article on religious freedom as recommended by a 2010 Commission of Inquiry and subsequent 2012 report by the Samoa Law Reform Commission (SLRC). It was also decided that concerns that the village councils had too much power over religious matters and the establishment of new churches should be addressed, though it was not made clear whether amendments would be made to the law in regards to this case. A policy enforcing Christian instruction in public primary schools was made compulsory by the government in 2014 and was made optional in public secondary schools.

The majority of Samoans are Christians, largely following Protestant denominations, though the total percentage of Catholics is estimated to be 19 percent. The non-Christian community is relatively small with no official estimates. Primarily in Apia, there are reportedly small numbers of

Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews, and members of the Baha'i faith have a major prayer centre. Native, pre-Christian beliefs in ancestral spirits still exist but are not openly professed by locals.

Religious groups are not made to register their organisation and each group is given the freedom to establish their own schools. To the chagrin of some non-Christian religious groups, prominent societal leaders have reportedly repeatedly emphasised in public that Samoa is Christian and public discussions of religious issues have sometimes included negative references to other faiths. Village leaders have traditionally not been receptive to those who challenge the accepted denomination in the community. Violation of village rules, which sometimes included the prohibition of attending churches outside of the village, could result in fines or even banishment.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

Citizens of Samoa reportedly face a high level of religious observance and societal pressure at local levels to participate in services and to support financially church leaders and projects. In some cases, financial contributions from families could often amount to more than 30 percent of their income. This resulted in media attention and provoked the aforementioned 2010 Commission of Inquiry and subsequent 2012 report by the SLRC, though no changes appear to have been made to address this concern.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_193_2.asp

² www.parliament.gov.ws/index.php/14-the-parliament-of-samoa-contents/90-constitution-of-the-independent-state-of-samoa