



BARBA GAINING ITS INDEPENDENCE ON 1 JANUARY 1962. COMPARED TO THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN OTHER PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES, BARBA HAS BEEN RELATIVELY PEACEFUL AND STABLE.

[IN ITS 40 YEARS OF POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE, BARBA HAS UTILIZED HELP FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND ITS LIMITED LOCAL RESOURCES TO MAINTAIN A RELATIVELY HAPPY AND PEACEFUL SOCIETY ALTHOUGH THERE ARE ROOMS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SOME SECTORS OF SOCIETY.]

THE ISLAND GROUP

Sāmoa is a group of volcanic islands which extends for 225 miles on an east-west line in the central Pacific in an area bounded by latitudes 13 degrees and 15 degrees south, and longitudes 168 degrees and 173 degrees west.¹ The eastern group of islands, comprising the islands of Ta'ū, Olosega, 'Ofu and Tutuila form the unincorporated territory of American Sāmoa, while the western group comprising Upolu, Savai'i, Manono and Apolima form the Independent State of Sāmoa. The people of these islands have a homogeneous language and culture and any variations in such are hardly recognizable to be of any significance.

POPULATION

Sāmoa's population of 176,710 represents a 10 per cent increase since the last census in 1991. Fifty-two per cent are males and 48 are females. The annual growth rate is 1 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of the population live in the Apia Urban Area, 29.8 per cent in North West Upolu (an increase of 35 per cent since 1991), 23.7 per cent in the Rest of Upolu (which includes Manono and Apolima Islands) and 24.0 per cent in Savai'i.² Together with the Apia Urban Area, North-West Upolu is now home to 51.8 per cent of Sāmoans. The growth rate since 1991, from highest to lowest, are 2.6 per cent (North West Upolu), 1.3 per cent (Apia Urban Area), 0.2 per cent (rest of Upolu) and Savai'i (whose growth rate has declined from 0.4 per cent in 1991 to -0.5 per cent in 2001).³ The highest portion of the population, 54.7 per cent, are those aged 15 to 64, followed by the age group 0-14 (40.7 per cent) and 65 and over (4.5 per cent).⁴ Of the total population in 2001, 99 per cent identified themselves as Sāmoans, the other 1 per cent were non-Sāmoans.

APIA URBAN POPULATION

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MAP COURTESY OF PLANNING AND URBAN MANAGEMENT AGENCY (PUMA)



PHOTO BY CAPT. JEFF HUNTER DURING POLYNESIAN JET'S LAST FLIGHT 1 NOV 2005

ECONOMY

Compared to the steady growth in GDP, foreign aid inflows have been quite steady averaging 11.9 per cent of GDP annually for the eight years 1995 to 2002. Government external debt, on the other hand, averaged 72.6 per cent with the latest figures showing a decline to 54 per cent, while foreign remittances averaged 21.0 per cent. Overall, these figures show that the economy overall has maintained a healthy balance between domestic production and growth and these provide major fuels of economic activity. The census 2001 data also shows that foreign aid, government overseas borrowings and foreign remittances are the main resources that fuel the local economy. The total combined value of foreign aid, government external debt and foreign remittances have consistently exceeded GDP in the six-year period between 1995 and 2001. Of all the active persons 15 years and over, 95 per cent were reported as employed and 5 per cent were unemployed. The latter consisted of a little over 2,600 persons seeking paid employment at the time of the 2001 Census. About 88 per cent of the unemployed population comprised young adults aged 15 to 34 with 58 per cent in the age group 15-24 alone.

RELIGION

The 2001 census records the number of religious denominations from the biggest to the lowest as follows: Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa – CCCS (34.8 per cent), Catholic (19.6 per cent), Methodist (15.0 per cent), Latter Day Saint (12.7 per cent), Seventh Day Adventist (3.5 per cent), and Others (14.5 per cent). All the major denominations have decreased in number since 1991 except the Latter Day Saints which has increased from 2.9 per cent to 3.5 per cent in 2001. Those belonging to Other denominations have also increased from 5.9 per cent in 1991 to 14.3 per cent in 2001. The CCCS has decreased from 42.6 per cent, Catholic from 20.8 per cent, Methodist from 16.9 per cent. The other denominations have also increased from 5.9 per cent in 1991 to 14.3 per cent in 2001. The other denominations include the Assembly of God (6.6 per cent), Jehovah's Witness (0.8 per cent), CCCJS (1.0 per cent), Nazarene (0.4 per cent), Protestant (0.2 per cent), Baptist (0.2 per cent), Full Gospel (0.8 per cent), Voice of Christ (0.4 per cent), Worship Centre (1.3 per cent), Peace Chapel (1.3 per cent), Anglican Church (0.2 per cent), Community Church (0.3 per cent), Elim Church (0.1 per cent), Sāmoa Evangelism (0.1 per cent), A'oga Tusi Pa'ia (0.4 per cent), Baha'i (0.5 per cent), Muslem (0.0 per cent), Others (0.1 per cent), Not stated (0.1 per cent).⁵

HISTORY

Exponents of the Austronesian culture left South East Asia about 7,000 years ago travelled southwards through the coastal areas of Papua New Guinea continuing down towards the south Pacific where they reached the Fiji-Sāmoa-Tonga triangle about 3,000 years ago. In Sāmoa, the Austronesian culture adapted and developed in accordance with local conditions. The impact of continuous inter-Island migration after the Austronesians had settled the Pacific Islands also influenced local developments shaping them into the Sāmoan culture that existed at the time the Europeans made first contact with the locals in the late 1700s. The 1800s was a politically difficult time for the Sāmoans as the three foreign powers Great Britain, Germany and the United States of America (USA) competed for territorial possessions in Sāmoa against the technologically powerless Sāmoans. The result was a division of the island group by Germany and the USA between themselves while Great Britain traded off her Sāmoan interests for possessions elsewhere in the Pacific. In 1900, the western group came under Germany rule, who surrendered control of the group to New Zealand at the start of World War One in 1914. The establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and the implementation of its anti-colonial policies resulted in Sāmoa gaining its independence on 1 January 1962. Compared to the political situation in other Pacific Island countries, Sāmoa has been relatively peaceful and stable. In its 43 years of political independence, Sāmoa has utilized help from the international community and its limited local resources to maintain a relatively happy and peaceful society although there are rooms for improvement in some sectors of society.



MALUA
THEOLOGICAL
COLLEGE,
CENTRAL ICON
OF SAMOA'S
CONGREGATIONAL
CHRISTIAN
CHURCH
PHOTO BY SKIV JOHNSTON

WINNING SAMOA'S
2006 GENERAL
ELECTION
CONTINUING 23
YEARS IN
POWER: THE HUMAN
RIGHTS
PROTECTION PARTY
[HRPP]



GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Sāmoa adopted a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. From independence in 1962 until the introduction of universal suffrage in the 1991 general election, only *matai* (chiefly titleholders) could stand as candidates and vote in elections. The change in the electoral system gives all Samoan citizens aged 21 years and over the right to vote in parliamentary elections while still restricting the right to stand as candidates to *matai* only. Parliament comprises the legislative assembly and the head of state, whose written consent is required before a bill can become law. Whilst the incumbent Head of State's term is for life, his successor will be elected by parliament for a term of five years. General elections are held every five years. The legislative assembly comprises 49 seats, two of which represent descendants of non-Sāmoan descent. Elected by the legislative assembly in its first meeting after the general election, the Speaker presides over parliamentary sessions. A deputy speaker and prime minister are also elected at the same time. The prime minister, who is the leader of the caucus section of his/her political party, selects 12 other members of parliament to form his cabinet. Cabinet ministers have portfolios headed by chief executive officers of government ministries and state-owned enterprises. An independent judiciary comprises the Chief Justice and the President responsible for the criminal court system and the Land and Titles court system respectively. The constitution not only blends custom and tradition, and democratic institutions and practices, but it also recognizes the division of state power into the three independent branches of legislators, executive and judiciary.

Endnotes

¹ Gilson 1970, p. 1

² Report of the Census of Population and Housing, 2001, p. 7, 9, 10

³ Report of the Census of Population and Housing, 2001, p. 10

⁴ Report of the Census of Population and Housing, 2001, p. 17

⁵ Report of the Census of Population and Housing, 2001, p. 22-23

INDEPENDENCE

Sāmoa became the first Pacific nation to gain independence when it raised its own flag on 1 January 1962.

