



Samoa, American — Va-PoReg Country Report

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12/02/1899 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA]: In 1872, the chief of the eastern Samoan islands granted permission to the United States to establish a naval base in exchange for military protection. Subsequently, in 1878, the U.S. Navy constructed a coaling station in Pago Pago Bay for its Pacific Squadron and appointed a local Secretary. The origins of American Samoa can be traced back to the Second Samoan Civil War and the Tripartite Convention of 1899, where Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom reached an agreement. The Convention was signed on 12/02/1899 and resolved international rivalries by dividing the Samoan archipelago between Germany and the U.S.¹ The eastern Samoan islands became U.S. territories, ultimately forming American Samoa, and the U.S. formally took control the following year, particularly focusing on the strategic harbor of Pago Pago.² In the Treaty of Cession of Tutuila in 1900, several chiefs from the island of Tutuila pledged allegiance to the United States and formally transferred the island to American control. The final ruler of Manu'a, Tui Manu'a Elisara, endorsed the Treaty of Cession of Manu'a in 1904. These agreements were subsequently confirmed by the United States through the Ratification Act of 1929.³ After World War II, the U.S. Department of Interior sponsored Organic Act 4500, aiming to incorporate American Samoa. However, the attempt was thwarted in Congress, largely due to the efforts of American Samoan chiefs. Their resistance led to the establishment of a local legislature, the American Samoa Fono, situated in the capital village of Fagatogo. Over time, the Navy-appointed governor was replaced by a locally elected one.⁴

01/01/1952 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: The American Samoa Fono was reformed this year and the number of members for the House of Representatives was reduced to 18 which were all elected by secret ballot for the first time.⁵ LIED does not treat American Samoa during its colonial time. On 07/01/1967 a constitution was enacted, which granted American Samoa a higher degree of self-government. Notably, the U.S. Territory of American Samoa is listed as a non-self-governing territory by the United Nations. A listing which is disputed by the territorial government officials, who do consider themselves to be self-governing.⁶ The governance system follows a structure of a presidential representative democratic dependency, where the Governor of American Samoa serves as the head of government. Legislative authority is vested in the American Samoa Fono, while the judiciary operates independently of the executive and legislative branches.⁷ The head of government in American Samoa is the Governor, who, along with the Lieutenant Governor of American Samoa, is elected together on a single ticket through popular vote for a four-year term.⁸ American Samoa operates as a parliamentary democracy, maintaining the preservation of political rights and civil liberties. However, corruption poses a significant challenge, and although investigative journalists are active, the fear of substantial fines for defamation may lead to self-censorship. Additionally, there is a notable underrepresentation of women in politics within the country.⁹ In March 2022 the parliament and judicial council adopted reforms aimed at combatting corruption.¹⁰ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. V-Dem, LIED and FH do not register American Samoa. In comparative perspective, American Samoa is a borderline case, however, should still be classified as an indirect rule colonial regime because it lacks international sovereignty and remains an unincorporated territory under United States authority. While it possesses a locally elected legislature and governor, these institutions

operate under delegated authority, and ultimate sovereignty rests with Washington. This arrangement mirrors the logic of indirect rule: traditional and local elites are granted limited autonomy in administering internal affairs, yet the overarching legal, political, and foreign policy powers are controlled by the colonial metropole. Thus, despite elements of self-government, American Samoa's dependent status and absence of full independence justify its continued classification as an indirect rule colonial regime.

Indirect Rule Colonial Regime as of 07/01/2025 [of USA, Liberal Democracy] continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripartite_Convention

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_American_Samoa#European_and_American_Colonial_Division_of_the_Samoan_archipelago

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_American_Samoa#Colonization_by_the_United_States

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_American_Samoa#Current_status_of_the_territory_and_attempts_of_incorporation_in_the_United_States

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Samoa_Fono

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_American_Samoa#Current_status_of_the_territory_and_attempts_of_incorporation_in_the_United_States

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_American_Samoa

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Samoa#Government_and_politics

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/san-marino/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/san-marino/freedom-world/2023>