

Samoa

Samoa is a very small Oceanian country of about 200 thousand inhabitants, which maintains a single-party parliamentary democracy. Religious freedom issues persist regarding education and other matters, even though the constitution guarantees religious freedom.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
		<u>Systemic religious privilege results in significant social discrimination</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is severely restricted</u>
<u>There is a religious tax or tithing which is compulsory, or which is state-administered and discriminates by precluding non-religious groups</u>	<u>There is state funding of at least some religious schools Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in at least some public schools (without secular or humanist alternatives)</u>	<u>There is significant social marginalisation of the non-religious or stigma associated with expressing atheism, humanism or secularism Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u>	
<u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u>			

Legend

Constitution and government

The constitution and other laws and policies protect freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association. These rights are generally respected by the national government, but at the local level there is very strong pressure to conform with Christianity.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom. The constitution provides for the right to choose, practice, and change the religion of one’s choice. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private as well as government actors.

The preamble to the constitution describes the country as “an independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions.” There is no official state religion, however the constitution favors Christianity and public ceremonies typically begin with a Christian prayer.

Education and children’s rights

The constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious education in schools and gives each religious group the right to establish its own schools. Nevertheless, a 2009 education policy,

enforced since 2010, makes Christian instruction compulsory in public primary schools and optional in public secondary schools. This policy is a violation of the constitution but reflects a government decision that Christian beliefs should be taught in schools. The government institutes the policy inconsistently in government schools across the country with little if any public concern or opposition. Church-run pastoral schools in most villages traditionally provide religious instruction after school hours.

Family, community and society

There is strong social pressure applied to conform with Christianity. *Matai*, or clan chiefs, control local government at the village level, and generally enforce conformity with the village church.

Entire families have been forced to leave their villages for allegedly insulting a *matai*, embracing a different religion, or voting for political candidates not endorsed by the *matai*. Approval of the *matai* is essential for most candidates for elected office.

In many villages *matai* forbid individuals to belong to any religion other than the village church or to exercise their right not to worship. Villagers in violation of such rules faced fines and/or banishment from the village.

As a result, there is a high level of religious observance and strong societal pressure to participate in church services and other activities, and to support church leaders and projects financially. In some denominations, financial contributions often totalled more than 30 percent of family income. The issue of (de facto compulsory) tithing has recently gained media attention as some members of parliament spoke out about pressure on families to give disproportionate amounts of their incomes to churches.