

FAST Party wins Samoa's crisis election

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Official results from Samoa's early general election held on August 29, indicate the Fa'atuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST or "Samoa United in Faith") Party has secured a decisive victory. FAST has a four-seat majority in the 56-seat parliament and will form government.

FAST won 30 seats, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP)—which held office continuously for over 40 years until 2021—got 14 seats, the Samoa United Party (SUP) three and there are four Independents.

The HRPP has already announced plans to legally challenge the results, accusing FAST of vote-buying, electoral irregularities, and procedural flaws.

The South Pacific country, with a population of just 217,000, operates an undemocratic electoral system in which only holders of the elite Matai title (a traditional family or clan leader) are able to stand for office. The legal voting age is 21 years. Before polling day, 81 percent of eligible voters, 102,000 people, had registered to vote.

The election followed six months of political turmoil. FAST, which won office as a new party in 2021, returns to power without its co-founder and outgoing prime minister Fiam? Naomi Mata'afa, who was dumped as leader in January in an inner-party revolt.

Fiam?, who was due to remain in office until April 2026, contested the latest election under her newly formed SUP. Except for Fiam? and ex-cabinet minister Leatinu'u Wayne Sooialo, her former cabinet members have lost their seats.

The last parliament was dissolved on June 3 after Fiam?'s minority government failed to have its 2025 Budget approved. Fiam? had survived two no-confidence motions in February and March but was forced to call the snap election when MPs from the opposition HRPP and the FAST majority joined forces to vote down the budget.

FAST split after Fiam? removed party chairman

La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Polata'ivao Schmidt, who was Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, from Cabinet. Leuatea then ejected her from party membership.

The crisis erupted after Leuatea publicly confirmed he was facing criminal charges, including conspiracy and an attempt to defeat or pervert the course of justice, and three counts of false statements causing harm to a person's reputation. Leuatea refused to resign as minister, whereupon Fiam? relieved him of his portfolio and removed three ministers and 13 associate ministers who supported him.

Leuatea is contesting the charges in court. He will become prime minister, notwithstanding the criminal charges hanging over him and a reputation as a populist Trump-style figure.

The Sunday after the poll FAST held a religious "thanksgiving service" with hundreds of supporters to celebrate its victory. Leuatea offered an "apology to Samoa" for the "uncertainty" caused by the political turmoil. He declared that "FAST has prevailed because we are blessed by God... This is God's timing for FAST, the era of God-centered leadership has begun."

In 2021 Fiam? had been installed as the country's first female prime minister, presented as a "moderniser" and backed by Australia and New Zealand, Samoa's former colonial ruler. Legal challenges and constitutional manoeuvring following the election left Samoa without a functioning government for 45 days. The standoff was only finally resolved after the Supreme Court ordered the swearing-in of all the MPs.

FAST's 2021 victory was a major shift in Samoan politics which was ruled as a virtual one-party state since formal independence in 1962. The result reflected growing political instability and social crises across the Pacific under the combined impact of the coronavirus pandemic, popular opposition and rising geo-political

tensions.

Fiam? ruled over a deteriorating economy, increasing social tensions and a deepening cost-of-living crisis. According to the Samoa Bureau of Statistics consumer prices are up almost 30 percent from 2022.

In a May Budget preview, the *Samoa Observer* declared the cost of living was “not making life any easier for most people.” While minimum wage earners were struggling, pay rises for civil servants and nurses were urgently needed, plus an increase in social benefit payments. Meanwhile the agriculture sector’s contribution to GDP had slumped by almost 11 percent and fisheries by more than 50 percent, forcing an increased reliance on imports.

In late March, Fiam? declared a 30-day state of emergency amid continuous power outages and electricity rationing. Many people lost work and incomes. The economic impact of the crisis—brought about by faulty and storm-damaged infrastructure—was estimated to have cost up to 16 percent of Samoa’s gross domestic product.

According to the 2023 Samoa Poverty and Hardship Report, 21.9 percent of the population lives below the basic-needs poverty line, 3 percentage points higher than in 2013?14. Poverty is highest among private sector workers and those in subsistence agriculture. Unemployment is officially 9.4 percent.

Conditions in the health system are dire. The national hospital is falling apart and understaffed. A potentially deadly whooping cough outbreak was declared in November followed last month by a dengue fever outbreak which forced school closures. A deadly but preventable measles epidemic in 2019 killed 83 people, mostly young children.

The FAST Party’s victory will ensure neither stability nor resolve the desperate situation facing the working class and rural poor. The basic issue facing all factions of the ruling elite now is how to further impose the burden of the economic crisis on the population.

The election campaign saw all the establishment parties making unrealisable and uncoded promises—in fact lies—to address the cost-of-living crisis. FAST pushed a range of populist initiatives—including free hospital services, monthly allowances for pregnant women, and cash for low-income families. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) attempted to ask Leuatea how he would fund these promises, but

he cancelled the planned interview.

Fiam? fended off criticism over her handling of the power-outage crisis and inflation, saying her government’s actions were “measured” compared to the lavish promises of her opponents. Her policies included free education and healthcare, the return of traditional land to villages, and pension increases. Fiam? also promised to remove tariffs and duties from basic food items.

HRPP leader Tuila?epa Sailele Malielegaoi, a former prime minister, also weighed in with unfunded pledges, including annual 500 tala (\$US182) payments for every citizen and building a 32-kilometre (20-mile) bridge between the two main islands, airily declaring it could be paid for and constructed with Chinese backing.

The real state of the economy is dire. The International Monetary Fund reported in April that Samoa’s growth had fallen from 9.4 percent in 2024 to an estimated 5.4 percent in 2025, and 2.6 percent in 2026. President Trump’s 10 percent tariff will have a devastating impact. More than 22 percent of Samoa’s exports go to the US and American Samoa, a US colony. Washington’s suspension of the USAID program and withdrawal from the World Health Organisation creates a deep funding gap across the entire Pacific.

Samoa’s foreign policy did not feature in the campaign, despite the intensifying confrontation and US-led drive to war against China across the region. While FAST’s manifesto said nothing about major foreign policy issues, the new government is likely to keep to the country’s One China policy along with its emphatic support for Israel.



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