

TONGA

Date of Elections: April 14,1978

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of Parliament on the normal expiry of their term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The unicameral Parliament of Tonga, the Legislative Assembly, comprises 23 members: the King, the Privy Council (six Ministers and two Governors), 7 hereditary nobles elected by their peers and 7 representatives who are popularly elected. Elected members hold office for 3 years.

Electoral System

All literate citizens of Tonga who are at least 21 years of age are entitled to vote for popularly chosen members. Male electors must in addition be taxpayers and not be nobles. Disqualified from voting are the insane and persons under summons for debt.

Qualified electors who are not in debt for a larger amount than is allowed by law may be chosen as representatives of the people. The parliamentary mandate is incompatible with all offices of emolument under the Crown except those of Minister, Chief Justice, Governor and Mayor.

As mentioned above, parliamentarians include seven nobles chosen by the nobles of the Kingdom and seven representatives of the people. The Legislative Assembly determines how both classes of representatives are apportioned amongst the various districts.

The Speaker of the Assembly is appointed by the King.

Upon the death or resignation of any representative of the nobles or the people, the Speaker commands that the nobles or electors of the district which he represented elect a representative in his place.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Tonga, a constitutional monarchy, achieved full independence within the British Commonwealth in June 1970. Elections to the Assembly were previously held in May 1975.

There are no political parties in the country. A unique feature of the legislative system is that the Privy Council, or Cabinet, members sit *ex-officio* in Parliament. The Prime Minister is Prince Fatafehi Tu'ipelehake, the brother of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.