



## Overview

Since establishing an office in Canberra, International IDEA's engagement in the Pacific Islands has increased to the extent that IDEA is now in a strong position to make significant contributions in support of democracy. Its work has grown from highlighting the value of International IDEA's global resources to providing expertise specific to the region based on research on government stability, inputs to the Solomon Islands government's electoral reforms discussions, and relations with various electoral and political party bodies in Melanesia.

This Policy Brief is part of International IDEA's work to increase knowledge among politicians and policy makers on how political institutions, processes and reforms can be designed to promote democracy and sustainable human development.

## About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

[www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

# Tonga in a new political order – Analysing the 2014 general election results

## Introduction

The constitutional and political reforms undertaken prior to the 2010 general election paved the way for the people of the Kingdom of Tonga to elect more representative governments that are accountable to the electorate. Tonga held its second general election since the reforms on 27 November 2014. What political bearing did the political and constitutional reforms have on the results of the 2014 general election? Could further reforms be introduced to make the government of Tonga more representative? This brief analyses the results of the 2014 general election in order to highlight those areas that should be considered by political leaders wishing to build on the foundations of political reform to consolidate democracy in Tonga.

## Constitutional and political reforms

The 2010 general election saw the end of the role of the monarch in appointing the government. The executive role of the Privy Council also came to an end. Before 2010, the Privy Council consisted, in addition to the monarch, of the prime minister, the cabinet ministers and two governors. All were appointed by the monarch and served for as long as the monarch wished them to. Parliament, on the other hand, was elected every three years. The cabinet formulated laws and introduced these to parliament, which was made up of nine elected People's Representatives, nine Nobles' Representatives (elected by the Nobles) and the cabinet ministers and governors. Laws came into effect only after the monarch gave his or her written assent.

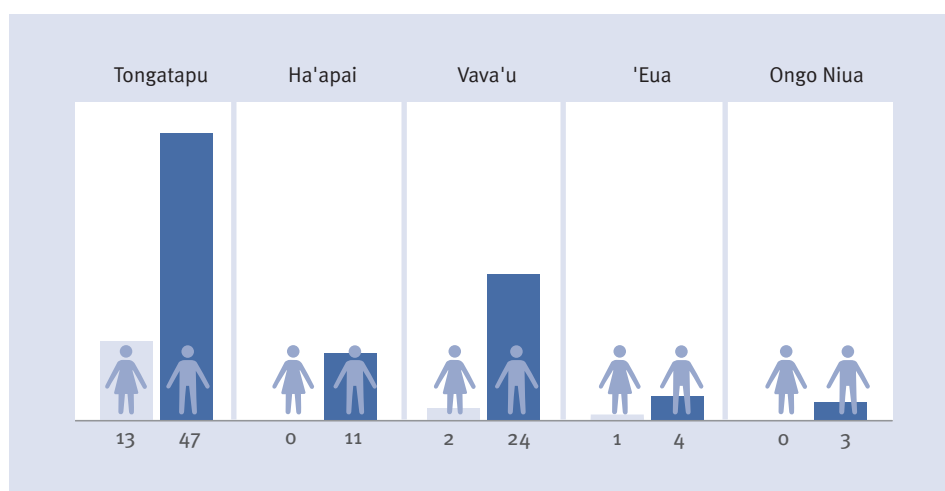
The principal source of pressure for reform was a pro-democracy movement led by Samuela 'Akilisi Pohiva, the leader of a political group known as the Paati Temokalati 'o e 'Otu Motu Anga'ofa (PTOA, 'the Democracy Party'), who is currently the prime minister. Although the PTOA calls itself a political party, there are no registered political parties in Tonga and the general norm is for independent candidates to stand for election. Minor reforms to the appointment of cabinet ministers had been introduced in the later years of the reign of King Tupou IV (1967–2006), but it was King George Tupou V (2006–12), in particular, who paved the way for reforms by setting up a committee to review the legislative system.

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In the new political order, Nobles' and People's Representatives form the government from among themselves. The monarch appoints a prime minister on the recommendation of parliament, and then the ministers recommended by the prime minister. The current government is predominantly comprised of People's Representatives. The Privy Council has supposedly acquired an advisory role to the monarch, who, except for some discretionary powers, has ceded most of his executive powers.

Since 2010, parliament has been made up of 17 People's Representatives and nine Nobles' Representatives, all of which are elected for four years.

**Figure 1 Distribution of Candidates by Gender and Electoral District, 2014 General Election**



Registered eligible voters (all those aged 21 years and above) can vote for a People's Representatives under a First Past The Post electoral system. The Nobles' Representatives are elected by up to 33 hereditary Nobles and three Life Peers, who are appointed by the monarch. In Tonga, the holder of a Noble title—who is always male—has traditional status, and enjoys legal and constitutional privileges that include representation in parliament.<sup>1</sup> The People's Representatives are elected from five electoral districts: Tongatapu, Ha'apai, Vava'u, 'Eua and the Niuas (which consists of Niuafou and Niuatoputapu). Altogether, there

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Nobles and their role in Tongan society, see Powles 2013.

are 17 single-member constituencies: ten on Tongatapu, one each on 'Eua and the Niuas, two on Ha'apai and three on Vava'u.

### The 2014 Election Results

For the 2014 general election, the Tonga Electoral Commission registered 51,447 voters, of whom 40,727—approximately 80 per cent of the adult population—cast their votes. This was a lower turnout than at the 2010 general election, when 91 per cent of the adult population voted. Of the 105 candidates contesting the 17 constituencies, only 16 were women. In 2010, 11 of the 144 candidates were women (see Figure 1). A total of 138 polling stations were set up. On the main island of Tongatapu, 60 candidates contested the ten seats (see Figure 1).

The PTOA was the only political group. It fielded candidates in 16 seats in 2014. All the other candidates were independents. The PTOA won eight seats, with 20 per cent of the votes cast for a successful candidate, down from 11 seats in 2010. This included six seats on Tongatapu, down from nine in 2010. Its candidates won one seat each on Ha'apai and 'Eua. As in the 2010 election, the PTOA failed to win seats on Vava'u and the Niuas. Independent candidates won nine seats, with 21 per cent of the votes cast for a successful candidate in 2014. Five incumbent People's Representatives were re-elected, including the Deputy Prime Minister and two ministers, representing a turnover rate of 71 per cent.

In 2014, winning candidates accounted for just over 40 per cent of the total votes cast. In other words, approximately 60 per cent of the votes cast were for unsuccessful candidates, including the 16 women candidates. Just four candidates won with over 50 per cent of the votes cast in their constituencies. Most of the successful candidates won between 30 and 49 per cent of the votes. At present, the fact that many candidates are being elected with less than 50 per cent of the votes does not seem to be an issue, unlike elsewhere in the region where it has led to changes in the electoral system.

### Turnover and share of the vote

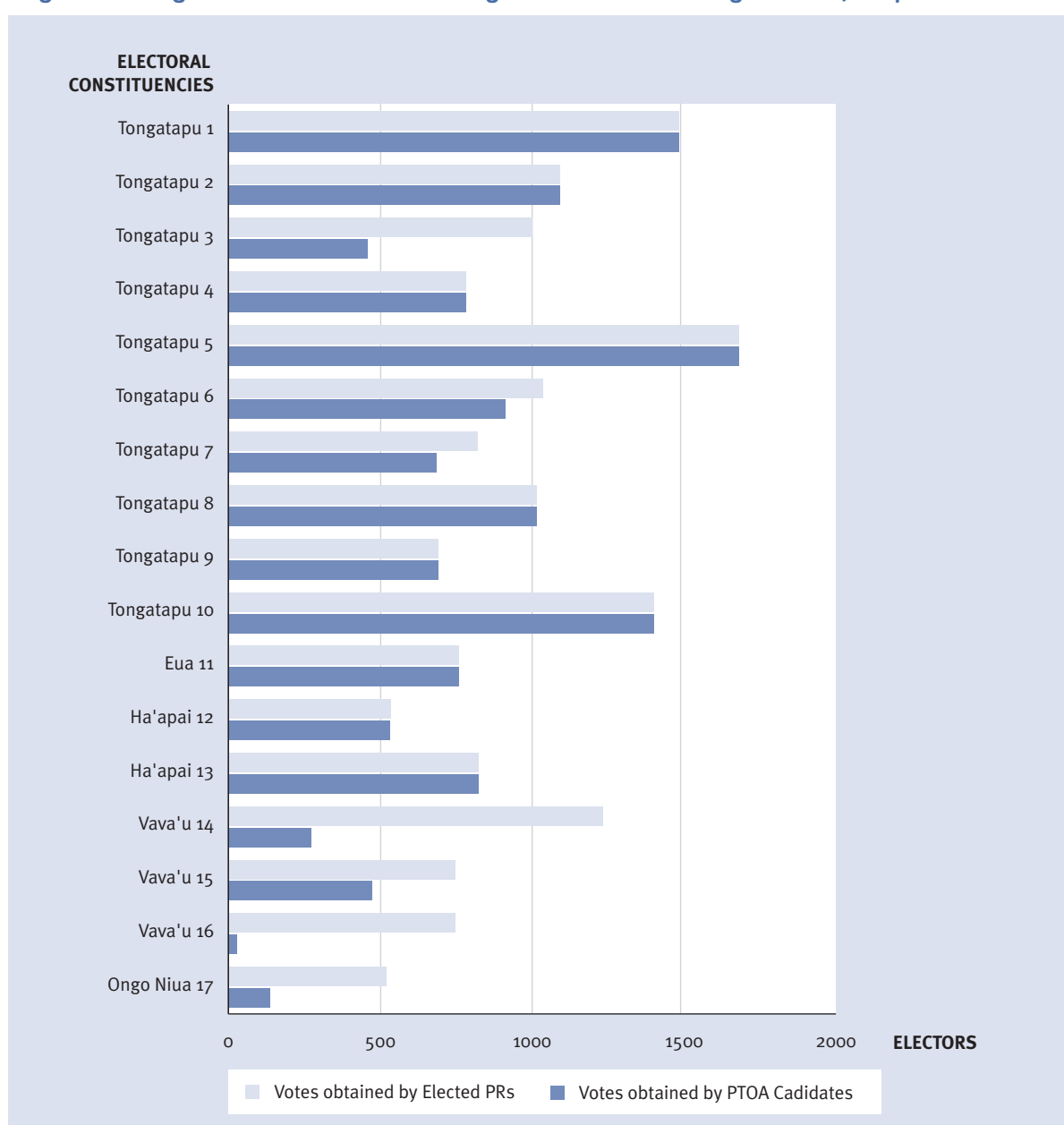
Candidates appear to have received votes from electors in their own family, village and kinship networks, as well as through ex-student associations and church groups. However, votes were split where there were several candidates from the same village. Apart from three People's Representatives, all the incumbents contested their seats, but most were edged out. Five incumbents were placed second to the winner.

As the only political group to contest the elections, PTOA performed strongly, and picked up 29 per cent of the vote. Independent candidates, including 15 of the 16 women candidates who stood for election, received 71 per cent of the votes,

but independents were only elected in nine seats. Similarly, in the 2010 election the 11 successful PTOA candidates collectively obtained approximately just 28 per cent of the votes cast.

Politically, tenure as a member of parliament cannot be guaranteed at each election. In both 2010 and 2014, the number of new People's Representatives elected to the Legislative Assembly was higher than the number of incumbents re-elected: 11 new People's Representatives were elected in 2010, and 12 in 2014. Programmes on parliamentary proceedings and the workings of government will be important for equipping new parliamentarians with representation and law-making skills.




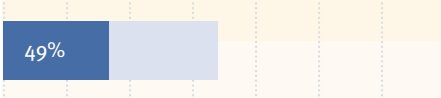




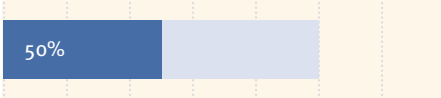




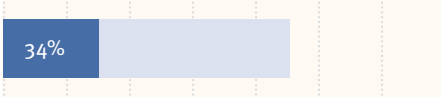




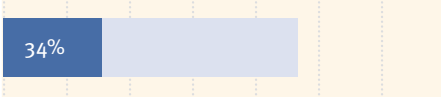






**Figure 2 Polling Results of PTOA Candidates against Elected PRs – Tonga Election, 2014 General Election**



**Table 1: Summary of Election Results for People's Representatives, Tonga 2014**

Constituencies	People's Representative (Name) Elected Status Political Affiliation	Female Candidates /Total Candidates	Voter Turnout	Number of votes		Number of Informal Votes
				■ the winning PR (numbers indicate percentage of total number of Formal Votes)	■ other candidates	
1 TONGATAPU	'Akilis Pohiva Incumbent re-elected PTOA		76%	54%		13
2 TONGATAPU	Semisi Sika Incumbent re-elected PTOA		71%	48%		9
3 TONGATAPU	Siaosi Sovaleni New PR Independent		76%	34%		6
4 TONGATAPU	Mateni Tapueluelu New PR PTOA		77%	32%		12
5 TONGATAPU	Aisake Eke Incumbent re-elected Independent		78%	58%		10
6 TONGATAPU	Poasi Tei New PR Independent		77%	36%		7
7 TONGATAPU	Sione Fa'otusia New PR Independent		76%	31%		5
8 TONGATAPU	Semisi Fakahau New PR PTOA		78%	39%		3
9 TONGATAPU	Penisimani Fifita New PR PTOA		77%	29%		7
10 TONGATAPU	Pohiva Tu'i'onetoa New PR PTOA		80%	46%		6
11 EUA	Tevita Lavemaau New PR PTOA		83%	35%		1
12 HA'APAI	Viliani Hingano New PR Independent		84%	31%		1

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Constituencies	People's Representative (Name) Elected Status Political Affiliation	Female Candidates /Total Candidates	Voter Turnout	Number of votes ■ the winning PR (numbers indicate percentage of total number of Formal Votes) ■ other candidates	Number of Informal Votes
13 HA'APAI	 Veivoso Taka New PR PTOA				
14 VAVA'U	 Saia Piukala New PR Independent				
15 VAVA'U	 Samiu Vaipulu Incumbent re-elected Independent				
16 VAVA'U	 Etuate Lavulavu New PR Independent				
17 ONGO NIUA	 Sosefo Vakata Incumbent re-elected Independent				

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Source: Final results from the Tonga Electoral Commission

Notes: PR stands for People's Representative

## Women candidates

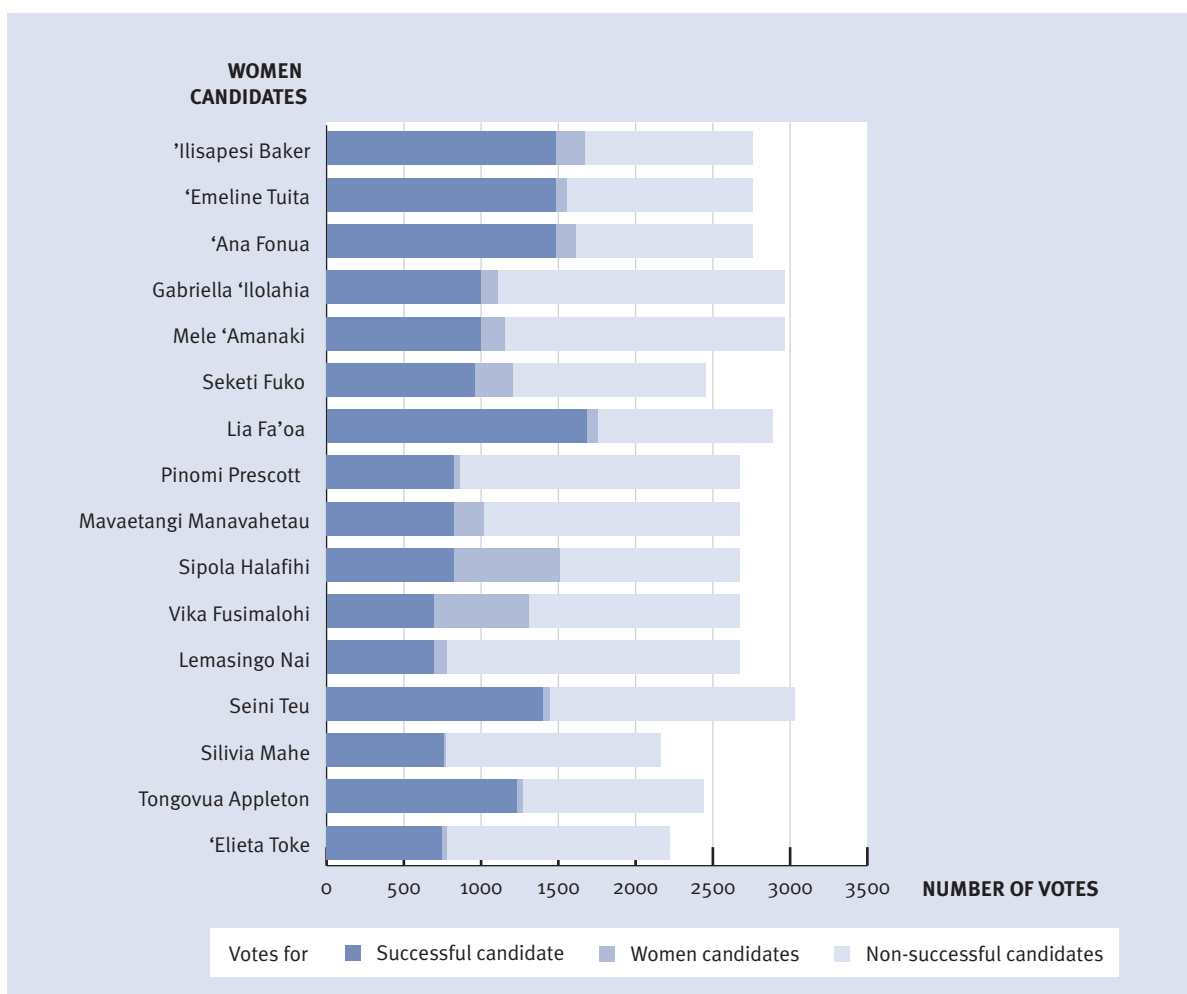
None of the 16 women candidates who stood for election in 2014 won a seat. Women candidates received approximately 7 per cent of the votes cast (see Figure 3). Although this is very low, it is an increase on 2010 when the 11 women candidates who stood for election attracted just 3 per cent of the votes cast. In addition, in an encouraging sign, two women candidates gained a substantial share of the votes: Sipola Halafihi obtained 25.6 per cent of the vote in Tongatapu 7 and came fourth, while Vika Fusimalohi obtained 23 per cent of the votes in Tongatapu 9 and came second (see Figure 3). The difference in the number of votes they obtained compared to the successful candidate was significantly lower than it was for the other women candidates.

Negative social and cultural attitudes towards women participating in politics and slow progress in developing capacity and integrating women into decision-

making and leadership roles in Tonga no doubt account for the difficulties that women candidates face in garnering support, including from women voters.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to improve the opportunities and conditions for women's participation need to be directed at all levels of decision-making in the private and public sectors in order to erode social and cultural barriers. The government's efforts to increase women's participation at national, district and town levels are encouraging.

<sup>2</sup> Four Tongan women have been elected in the past: Princess Si'ilikutapu, 1975–1977; Papiloa Foliaki, 1978–1980; 'Ofa Fusitu'a, 1993–1995 and Lepolo Taunisila, 2005–2007. Although unelected, 'Alisi Taumoepeau was appointed Minister of Justice in 2006, 'Eseta Fusitu'a was appointed Minister for Information and Communication in 2007 and 'Ana Taufē'ulungaki was appointed Minister of Education, Women's Affairs and Culture in Tu'ivakano's government in 2010.

**Figure 3 Election Results of Women Candidates**



International IDEA's engagement in Democracy and Development contributes to the achievement of the following institutional objectives:

- stronger democratic institutions and processes; and
- more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy
  - by supporting political actors, political institutions and the capacities of women and men for democratic participation and representation, effective oversight, and democratic accountability, primarily through knowledge production at the global level, and dialogues and support to reform efforts at regional and country levels; and
  - by advocating for a place for democracy in the development agenda, primarily calling on IDEA's knowledge production and dialogues at regional and global levels, and based on experiences generated at country level.



## Conclusions

Political and constitutional reforms to date mean that Tongans can now elect political leaders who can represent them, make laws and have oversight over the affairs of the nation, for which they can be held accountable at elections. However, the elections since 2010 have brought to light a number of latent and salient issues and challenges for political leaders to take note of and address. First, the continued absence of women from parliament requires improvements to the prospects for women's political participation. Second, approximately 60 per cent of the votes cast in both the 2010 and the 2014 elections were for unsuccessful candidates. Is this a concern? Could the utility of votes be improved? Third, the high turnover of elected People's Representatives in 2010 and 2014 means that relatively inexperienced parliamentarians are entering the political arena in the post-reform period. Finally, policy choices for voters are rather limited, given the prevalence of independent candidates over, for example political parties. Moving forward, the representation of all interests, including those of women, must be a priority in order to achieve the original aspirations of the reforms.

## Recommendations

- Introduce mechanisms that support an increase in women's participation in decision-making processes at every level, and support initiatives that challenge negative attitudes towards women's participation in political life.
- Examine electoral systems that reduce the number of wasted votes in the light of the large proportion of votes captured by unelected candidates;
- Support voter education programmes aimed at helping voters to decide which candidate to vote for;
- Ensure that incoming People's Representatives receive adequate support and training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities as elected representatives to the highest standards.



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