The Independent state of Sāmoa has adopted the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy to which selected elements of Sāmoan custom and tradition are incorporated. The 1962 constitution provides for 47 seats of parliament. Two more seats were added following the enactment of a constitutional amendment in 1993. Of parliament’s 49 seats, two are occupied by representatives of the Individual Voters (IVs). They are Sāmoan citizens one or both of whose parents’ descent could be traced to a foreigner. The other 47 seats are occupied by matai (chiefs) who represent electoral constituencies whose geographical boundaries have been decided primarily on the basis of existing indigenous political divisions. Election winners are decided on the first-past-the-post principle.

The electoral constituencies

At the time of substantial European settlement in the early nineteenth century, Sāmoa was already clearly divided into 11 political districts. These divisions still exist today. There are six on the big island of Savai’i. They are Fa’asalele’aga, Gaga’emauga, Gagaifomauga, Ituäsau, Palauli and Satupa’itea. There are four political divisions on Upolu Island, which are Ā’ana, Tuamasaga, Ātua and Va’a-o-foñoti. The eleventh political division is called ‘Āiga-i-le-tai. It comprises the smaller islands of Manono and Apolima between the islands of Upolu and Savai’i, and their extensions on the northwestern shores of Upolu island which make up the settlements of Mulifanua, Apolima-uta (inland Apolima) and Manono-uta (inland Manono).

In the period leading up to independence in 1962 during which incremental political and constitutional changes were introduced, the present electoral constituencies were introduced. On Savai’i island and following the order of traditional political districts already stated, the following electoral constituencies were identified from which matai were elected to the national council of matai called Fono-a-Faipule which passed ordinances by which Sāmoa was governed at the time. Fa’asalele’aga was divided into four constituencies and were called

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1 This paper is only a preliminary draft that was completed in a rush for the purpose of discussion in this conference. I have not had time to incorporate a lot of the relevant details like election figures and so forth. A lot of the relevant literature in terms of references have not been incorporated either. And the reference section has not been added either. If considered for publication, I will have time before then to include all these in the paper.
Fa’asalele’aga No. 1, Fa’asalele’aga No.2, Fa’asalele’aga No. 3 and Fa’asalele’aga No.4. The subdividing of the Fa’asalele’aga traditional political district into four electoral constituencies took into account two main factors. The first one is the number of the matai population as only matai could vote in general elections as stipulated in the Electoral Act 1963. The second consideration is the traditional divisions that already existed. For example, the boundary between Fa’asalele’aga No. 1 and Fa’asalele’aga No. 2 could be the ‘natural’ boundary between two villages, one belonging to Fa’asalele’aga No. 1 and the other belonging to Fa’asalele’aga No. 2. The point about the way electoral constituencies were drawn up is that these divisions all had a ‘traditional’ rationale behind it. Moreover, as long as electoral constituencies were drawn up like that, Sāmoan custom and tradition associated with these divisions were encouraged and perpetuated. The subdivisions of all the other 11 traditional political districts into electoral constituencies follow the same traditional and demographic principles.

As electoral constituencies were getting finalized before Sāmoa attained its independence, the question arose as to the increasingly large number of matai in some electoral constituencies. Thus the idea was mooted and later finalized into a legal/constitutional arrangement that some electoral constituencies would be given additional seats. Of the Savai’i electoral constituencies, only one deserved an additional seat. This was Fa’asalale’aga No. 1. In Upolu, three were allocated additional seats. They were Vaimauga West, Ā’ana Alofi No. 1 and Falealili. When the idea of increasing matai population in yet more electoral constituencies was brought up again after independence, it was the Member of Parliament (MP) from Sāfata constituency who argued convincingly for an additional seat for his constituency. Ironically, it was not until after the introduction of universal suffrage in 1991 that parliament, through a constitutional amendment, gave Sāfata the nod. However, before that decision could be implemented, another seat had to be added to some other constituency to maintain the odd number of seats in parliament. Sālega constituency on Savai’i Island benefited from the addition of another seat for Sāfata. At present, therefore, five of the forty territorial electoral constituencies have two seats each because of their large matai populations.

**Electoral constituencies and constituent villages**

Each electoral constituency comprises a number of villages, which can range from two big villages (as in the case of Fasito’outa and Faleāsi’u villages that make up Ā’ana Alofi No. 1 Constituency) to several villages like the 12 that make up Falealili constituency. To gain a more in-depth insight into the cultural and political dynamics operating in village settlements, I shall discuss the case of Lefaga and Falese’e’ela constituency. Lefaga and Falese’e’ela are the names of a sub-district and village respectively. As a political unit Lefaga is a sub-district of Ā’ana district. It is a sub-district because by and large, all the important matai of villages in it have genealogical connections if traced back to the highest ranked
title of Ä‘ana district called Tuiä‘ana. Though a part of Ä‘ana district, Falese‘ela village has in the past history of Ä‘ana district acquired a political status of its own, which has since been recognized in Ä‘ana and throughout the country. However, for the purpose of organizing existing traditional political units for the purpose of Sämoa’s modern state, Lefaga and Felese‘ela were grouped together into one territorial constituency.

As a territorial constituency, Lefaga and Felese‘ela comprise six villages. They are Felese‘ela, Säfa’ato’a, Tafagamanu, Sävaia, Gagaifo and Matäutu. Each of these villages has its own autonomous political organisation and associated support structures and operating procedures. For example, in Sävaia village, there are five foundation titles\(^2\). Three are tamålåti (chiefs) and two are tulafale (orators). It is the holders of these titles that dictate the affairs of the village. Although holders of both foundation and minor titles make up the village’s council of chiefs, the supreme authority in the village, it is the holders of the foundation titles that have the most influence on village decisions. However, there are also other cultural elements operating at the village level that give only certain holders of the foundation titles more say than other titleholders on village decisions. Some of which include the following. According to village history, Foundation title 1 (F1) and Foundation Title 2 (F2) are related. Therefore, at the village level only one of them, which is usually F1, speaks on their behalf. Both F1 and F2 have been split among several holders. Among the holders of F1, one is accorded seniority status on the basis that he held the title before the other three co-holders. In village council meetings, it is F1 who responds to formal speeches given by the holder of Foundation title 3 (F3), who is not related to F1 and F2. F3 is also split between two holders.

In most Sämoan villages there is a practice called Ali‘i Matua (literally, the most senior tamålåti). Ali‘i Matua status is determined by village council consensus. Consensus in this context means the agreement of the foundation titleholders, whose views in turn are usually determined by the most senior of their number (see So‘o and Huffer 2004). The Ali‘i Matua is that tamålåti, who, because of his seniority status, has the privilege of having the final say in most, if not all, important council decisions.

Let me illustrate the dynamics in village decision-making using the author’s village, Sävaia, as an example. Let’s say the issue being discussed in the village council is a decision on a parliamentary candidate the village should support in the upcoming parliamentary election. Of the five foundation titleholders, two are tulafale (orators). Normally, agenda items to be discussed in the meeting and the order in which they are discussed is the responsibility of the two orators who

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\(^2\) For the purpose of this paper, Foundation Titles are matai titles in village councils that are generally accepted and acknowledged in the village and throughout Sämoa as the names of the original matai who settled and organised the present village council of matai (chiefs). In Sävaia village, there are five of such Foundation Titles. Three are tamålåti (chiefs) and two are tulafale (orators).
sit at the front of the meetinghouse. The two tulafale alternate between meetings in carrying out that cultural responsibility. Occasionally, however, any of the three tamāli'i could raise an issue to be discussed. Once an item is put to the floor for discussion, holders of the three tamāli'i titles would then discuss the issue considering all the pros and cons before they come to some kind of unanimity. Because of the Ali'i Matua's special status, in most cases, the tamāli'i and the rest of the village council would defer to him to make the final decision on most, if not all, the issues that are brought before the village council.

The implication of this dynamic of decision-making at the village council can be extremely significant when it comes to deciding parliamentary candidates for elections. It means that it is likely, for Sāvaia village at least, that the Ali'i Matua's decision will influence the way Sāvaia voters will vote in the elections. For example, in the last general elections, Sāvaia village council made their decision on the candidate they would support in the general elections. On the other hand, if the village council decision (which as I have already argued would in most cases depend on the Ali'i Matua's decision) is not to have a binding decision as such and instead allow voters to vote according to their own conscience, then the village voters will go that way. Sāvaia made a binding decision in the 1991 general elections on the parliamentary candidate to support. Villagers who voted against the village council decision were punished after the general elections (see So'o 1993). Sāvaia made the same binding decision in the 2001 general election. This time around, however, those who voted against the village decision were not punished. Although the Ali'i Matua along with the majority of the village matai were disappointed, they could not do anything when it became clear on election day that about half of the village voted for another candidate.

The half of the village that did not vote for the candidate the village council decided upon attend another church. Of the three Christian churches in Sāvaia, two are Congregational Christian churches. The third one is a Pentecostal church. Of the two Christian churches, one is located on the coastal side of the village. This is the oldest church as it was established in the late eighteenth century. The other church is located further inland. The latter church was established in the mid 1960's as the village expanded further inland. Generally, every member of the church in the coastal area has a relative who goes to the inland church. This is why the Ali'i Matua and the majority of the village matai could not do anything about the half of the village that voted against the village council's choice of candidate. Those who voted for another candidate were their relatives. Moreover, they comprise almost half of the village. To punish these people would be like the decision-makers punishing themselves for not abiding by their own decision. For example, the Ali'i Matua is the foundation titleholder of his family half of whom attend the inland church. If he punishes those people, he is in reality punishing himself because he is the matai and father of all his family members half of whom attend the inland church. In other words, the Ali'i Matua and the other matai of the village council were being made to eat their own words
because it was their own relatives who went against their decision. Worst still from a cultural perspective the co-holder of the title the Ali'i Matua holds is a member of the inland church congregation. He also voted with the rest of his congregation members. This is very hard to accept from a Samoa cultural perspective. As co-holders, both should be supporting each other. It is clear in this case that the other co-holder was not of the same mind as his Ali'i Matua co-holder. The next question is: why did the inland congregation voted against the choice of the rest of the village?

In the two or three years leading up to the 2001 general elections in February (check), the inland church congregation were building a new residential house for their pastor. Loans for the construction of the building were guaranteed by the candidate the inland church congregation supported on Election Day. Clearly, election voters of the inland congregation were more interested in supporting the person who gave them financial assistance in the construction of their church than the candidate of the village council’s choice. After all the candidate of the village’s choice had not helped them in the construction of their pastor’s house in the way the candidate they supported did. It could be argued that it was a two-way deal. The inland congregation would have their loan guaranteed by this particular parliamentary candidate in exchange for their votes on Election Day, which is what did indeed happen. It could also be argued that the Ali'i Matua who is a member of the coastal church had no interest in supporting the candidate of the inland church’s choice because he is not a member of that congregation.

A somewhat similar situation happened in the same general elections in the next-door village Sāfa'ato'a. The majority of their village voters had supported one of their number who was one of the three candidates in the same general elections. Interestingly, this was the same candidate Sāvaia village made a binding decision to support. On Election Day, however, one of the Christian denominations in inland Sāfa'ato'a supported the candidate from Gagaifo village who was supposed to be a rival of their village member. When interviewed on Sāmoa’s national television station, an elderly man of the inland congregation (who also held one of the highest ranking titles of Sāfa'ato'a) explained that the reason why they voted for the candidate they supported was because she helped them with the purchase of materials for the construction of their church. In both these cases, village council decision were undermined by a section of their respective villages because of other competing interests that were not necessarily directly linked to the common good of the electorate or the nation as a whole.

**Qualification of Electors and Voters**

The general qualifications in order to register as an elector/voter in parliamentary elections is that one must be a citizen of Sāmoa and is not disqualified under the provisions of the Constitution or of any Act (Electoral Act 1963, section 5.a-b).
Until the passing of the Electoral Amendment Act 1990, which gave adults 21 years of age and over the right to vote in parliamentary elections, only matai had that right and were also the only citizens to contest parliamentary seats in electoral constituencies. The right to contest parliamentary seats still remains restricted to matai only. Voters who elect representatives for the two seats for the Individual Voters, on the other hand, have both the right to vote and to contest seats.

The electoral process

There are two phases of Sāmoa’s electoral process. The first phase is the general elections every fifth year to elect members to the 49 seats of parliament. The second phase is the election by parliament of the Speaker of the House, Deputy Speaker and Prime Minister. Once elected, it is the duty of the Prime Minister to select 12 parliamentarians to form his cabinet.

Let me discuss the first phase of the electoral process first. Well before independence in 1962, several parliamentarians were elected unopposed by their constituencies. In other words, no elections were necessary as the whole constituency unanimously agreed on their choice of member of parliament (MP). Unanimity was arrived at in several ways. A district meeting could unanimously agree on their choice of candidate. In some constitutions, the constituent villages might agree on a rotation principle. The rotation principle is when all the villages in the constituency agree that they would take turn in selecting one of their number to be the constituency’s MP. Using Lefaga and Falease’ela constituency as an example, it means that each of the constituency’s six villages will have its turn to select the constituency’s MP every 30 years.

As the selection of MPs becomes a competitive exercise, some constituencies adopt another practice, which is a compromise between full election and rotation. In this practice, an election will take place but constituent villages would agree to rotate in putting up candidates for the election. For example, if Lefaga and Falease’ela constituency was to adopt this practice, it means that for this election, one of the six villages would put forward the candidates for the election from whom voters of the whole constituency would choose the constituency’s MP in the general elections. This practice grew out of the original practice where, when it comes to their turn to choose the constituency’s MP, each of the constituent villages would agree unanimously on their candidate to be the constituency’s MP. Over the years, however, even a single village could not agree on a single candidate. Thus, if more than one candidate wishes to be the constituency’s MP, then it becomes the whole constituency’s responsibility to elect its MP from the candidates put up by the village whose turn it is to choose from one of their number the constituency’s MP.

As the competition to elect MPs intensified further, constituent villages could no longer hold on to the rotation principle any more. In which case, several
constituent villages can put up several candidates to contest the constituency's seat. This is now by far the most common electoral practice in Samoa. It was in the general elections of 1985 that all the seats of parliament were contested for the first time in Samoa's post-independence history.

The intensifying competition for parliamentary seats gave birth to Samoa's party system. The first post-independence parliamentary party to be formed was the Human Rights Political Party. It was originally put together after the results of the 1979 general elections were confirmed as a parliamentary rival faction whose declared aim was to oust the Tupuola government which had been in power for two consecutive parliamentary terms from 1976 to 1981. Among the prominent personalities who opposed Tupuola's government were Va'ai Kolone and Tofilau Eti who later not only became HRPP leaders but prime ministers when HRPP became the government. Unsuccessful as a parliamentary faction in its attempt to depose the Tupuola government in early 1979, Tupuola's political opponents organised themselves into a formal political party in May 1979 and call it the Human Rights Political Party. Va'a Kolone became its first leader. Later, other political parties were formed the most prominent of which is the Samoa National Development Party (SNDP), which is still the main Opposition in parliament now.

The competition among elected MPs to form the next government constitutes the second phase of Samoa's electoral process. The formation of the HRPP was a direct result of this second phase in practice. As already explained, the roots of the HRPP were in the parliamentary faction that was quickly put together after the results of the general elections in February 1979 were confirmed and before the first session of parliament convened to elect the next Speaker of the House and a new Prime Minister. The election by parliament of the country's political officers has its own interesting history as it has a direct link to the formation of political parties and the party system.

Following the enactment of the Samoa Amendment Act 1957, Samoa's legislative assembly was reconstituted and enlarged. The interesting question when cabinet government was introduced in 1959 was Samoa's choice of prime minister. The legislative assembly's choice came down to a ballot between two candidates. One was an experienced politician but had no chiefly title being a representative of the European community and the other was newcomer to politics but held one of the four highest ranking chiefly titles in the land called *tama'äiga* titles. The legislative assembly opted for the latter. When the country became independent in 1962, he became the country's first prime minister. He was Matā'afa Fiamē Faumuinā Mulinu'ü II.

The title Matā'afa is one of the four highest ranking titles in the land. Matā'afa excelled in politics as a very capable man. His humble personality, his leadership talents and the fact that he held this title made it a sacrilege to challenge his leadership. Consequently, he was elected unopposed by three consecutive parliaments as the country's prime minister. It had to be the holder
of another *tama'äiga* title who had to challenge Matä'afa's prime ministerial leadership. The opportunity came in 1970 after the results of the general elections in that year were known. This goes down in Samoa's political history as the birth of parliamentary factions when two *tama'äiga* contested the prime ministerial office. The newcomer *tama'äiga*, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV won the race leaving Matä'afa and his supporters to prepare for another contest three years later. Mata'äfa made it back to the prime ministerial seat in 1973. Unfortunately for his supporters he passed unexpectedly in May 1975, nine months before the next general elections. The Head of State, the title of the third *tama'äiga* title appointed Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV, who was one of the ministers in Matä'afa's cabinet, to see out Mata'äfa's prime ministerial term.

Another significant moment in the country's parliamentary history was the prime ministerial elections after the general elections in 1973 where Tupuola Efi, a non-*tama'äiga* titleholder and younger first cousin of the incumbent Prime Minister won the race by a two-third majority. His policies were heavily criticised in his first three years in office. Compounded by the fact that he was relatively younger than most MPs, did not hold a *tama'äiga* title, and that at the elite and conservative levels of society his character was crucified for having ousted his older and *tama'äiga* titleholder cousin. Predominantly for these reasons, a parliamentary faction rallied against him in the period leading up to the prime ministerial elections after the 1979 general elections. The HRPP tasted its first political success in the next general elections. The Tupuola government was defeated by one seat by the HRPP under Va'ai Kolone's leadership. By the next prime ministerial elections in 1985, Tupuola Efi and his supporters had organised themselves into the Christian Democratic Party, thus the beginning of Samoa's party system.

The HRPP did this in 1985, 1988, 1991, 1996 and 2001. In other words, for the HRPP at least, party leadership is elected before the start of every parliamentary term. The caucus also decides who the holders of other parliamentary offices would be. In
parliament in its first session after the general elections, the formality in making these appointments take place. Once the next prime minister's appointment is confirmed in parliament, he would then select 12 MPs of his party to form his cabinet.

**Campaign strategies**

With the establishment of the party system, campaign strategies could be classified into two main types, the individual campaign and the collective campaign as in a political party. Samoa's next general election will be in early 2006. Some individual campaigns have already started and will intensify next year as the general election draws near. It involves the individual efforts of people who are already thinking about contesting seats of their respective constituencies. Those individuals are now heavily involved in community projects. The first of phase of this type of involvement is to be part of the village council of chiefs and all village-related activities. One of my friends who is intending to contest his constituency's seat has already allowed himself to be elected president of his constituency's High School Committee. The High School Committee is now heavily involved in fundraising activities to finance a new school building. My friend and his wife are now totally immersed in all village and village church activities. For example, the wife is now the president of the Women Committee, which is responsible for all health, related activities of the constituency, among other domestic-related activities. Being involved in such village and district activities is a means by which candidates intending to contest parliamentary elections are trying to win the support of the constituency's votes. Through this process intending candidates provide opportunities to get to now their constituencies better and vice versa.

As this stage of these individuals' campaigns, they may or may not have made up their minds which party to join. Those who have already made up their minds will only officially declare their party allegiance close to the time when parties start looking for candidates to contest the elections in their party tickets. If by that time the candidates have already established a strong support base, they would use that as a bargaining tool to get party leaders to promise them ministerial posts if their party wins the most seats in the up-coming general elections.

As already alluded to, the collective campaign is that undertaken by the party as an organisation whose main goal is to win the most seats of parliament in order to for the next government. The normal process that has been adopted by parties is as follows. At a particular point before the elections, the party would start looking around for possible candidates to contest the seats of their respective constituencies. Normally, the party would look for someone who has a good support base in the constituency. Very often these people are those who are and have for some time been involved in constituency and village community projects, are current participants in village and constituency affairs, who hold
highranking titles of their villages although this has not always been the case, and have some means of financial support in order to help him/her support his/her campaign efforts. Alternatively, a person intending to contest his/her constituency's parliamentary seat could come to the party and ask to be one of the party's candidates for the general elections.

They have been cases where more than one candidates are willing to contest their constituency's seat even though all of them may all want to contest the seat under the same party ticket. In some cases, the party is successful in convincing one or some of these candidates to withdraw their candidacy. In some cases the party is not so successful. In the event that more than one candidates want to contest the same seat under the same party's ticket, the HRPP policy is that the sitting MP is given the first choice. If the sitting MPs agrees with inclusion of the newcomer in the party's list of candidates for the elections, the name of the newcomer is included, otherwise it will be excluded from the list of the party's candidates for the elections. In the event that the sitting MP does not mind including the newcomer's name in the list, the party would leave it to the candidates to fight out the elections themselves. In the last general elections in 2001, one of the cabinet ministers was defeated by a newcomer to politics.

The determining factor in the defeat of that cabinet minister is explained in terms of that constituent villages rotation principle already explained. For a long time, the constituency of the defeated cabinet minister had adopted the principle of rotation. The constituency comprises four large villages. Before his defeat the minister has already had three consecutive terms in parliament. In his first term, it was the proper term of his village to identify the candidate for the general elections. In his next two term, he had requested and obtained the consent of the villages whose proper terms they were to identify the candidates for the elections. In the last general elections, it was the turn of the village of the newcomer to identify the candidate for the elections. However, the cabinet minister refused to step down. As a result the general elections went ahead at which he was defeated.

Once all the names of candidates for the elections have been finalised, they are printed with their photographs in party's manifesto document. The manifesto is launched and distributed to the public, thus not only explaining the party's stand on certain issues and policies they will adopt should they become the next government, but also publicising the names and photographs of their election candidates. The HRPP has adopted this party campaign strategy in all the general elections and by-elections since its first election to government in 1982. The HRPP has been by far the most organised of all political parties that have been formed following the HRPP's establishment in mid-1979. I would argue that is probably the most important factor in HRPP's electoral success thus far.

Once confirmed by the party to be one of its candidates for the elections, every candidate reverts back to the individual type of campaigning, though in some
cases, with the help of the party through financial assistance and other means. An example of those other means would be the Electric Power Corporation (EPC) still trying to bring in electricity to some villages and homes who have not already have electricity or the Public Works Department (PWD) still working on some section of government road or some village's rural road on the eve of elections. Very often the village or constituency where the EPC and PWD are carrying out work at are supposed to help win over voter support for the HRPP, which is the party in government. It is not unusual therefore, that some Opposition MP would complain that the government has been utilising government workers and equipment to win them another term in government.

A few months before the general elections, the individual candidate would intensify his/her campaign efforts. The majority of candidates contesting constituency seats, if not all of them, would generally follow the same process. The candidate would have to make officially known to the constituency his/her wish to become the constituency's MP. This involves physically presenting himself before the village council. Using Lefaga and Fa'asele'eloa constituency again as an example, the candidate would have to present him/herself before each of the constituency's six villages. The candidate is normally accompanied by a member or members of his/her campaign committee. Even sitting MPs go through the same process if they want themselves re-elected in the next general elections. It is during these village visits that candidates present gifts of food, money and other goods to the villages (see So'o 1998). In terms of financial value, these gifts can range from a few hundred dollars to thousands of dollars. The bigger the gift the better. It is during these visits too that the candidate is given assurance whether or not a particular village will support the candidate on election day. In some villages, once their official positive response for support is given to the candidate, they would then all they could to ensure that all village voters would support their choice of candidate. This is why village punishment is invoked after the elections against voters who supported a rival candidate (see So'o 1993). In some villages, however, even though an official assurance of candidate support had been given, this was no guarantee of binding village support. In some cases, even the speaker who delivered the official village response may vote for a rival candidate.

Other aspects of the individual's campaign include cultivating a sense of trust between the candidate and members of his/her campaign committee. This has been a costly exercise to some candidates. Usually, one or a few members of the campaign committee are key supporters of the candidate. There have been cases where candidates have rewarded these key people of their campaign committees with pieces of land, vehicles and other highly valuable commodities (see So'o 1998).

It is a common complaint among constituency candidates that following the adopting of universal suffrage in 1991, campaigning in constituencies has become increasingly expensive. The reason being that at the time when only
matai had the vote, there were only a few voters to win over. Following the introduction of universal suffrage, however, the voting population has increased three or four fold (get details) and is still increasing between general elections. Before universal suffrage, a candidate would present his/her gifts to the village council who would in turn decide whether or not to distribute these gifts to other sub-organisations of the village such as the faletua ma tausi (wives of matai), aualuma (village girls), taulele’a (untitled men), and fafine laiti (wives of untitled men). With the introduction of universal suffrage, most election candidates are now forced to make similar presentation of gifts to all these sub-village organisations. Worse still, from the candidates’ point of view, young voters have threatened candidates that the latter either give them what they want (which in most cases were alcohol, cigarette and money) or they will vote for another candidate they could give them those 'electoral goods'. Some strong advocates of universal suffrage have confessed to this negative aspect of universal suffrage in the electoral process of Samoa.

Campaign strategies of Individual Voters is slightly different in that candidates don't have to go through village councils like candidates of electoral constituencies. Instead, they hold rallies where they explain their policies and answer voters' questions. This type of campaign strategy is more policy-oriented than that followed by the constituency candidates. The latter seems more influenced by custom and tradition rather than by policies.

Regardless of whether it is a constituency candidate or an Individual Voter candidate, the final phase of their election campaigns is the actual day of the elections. That last phase of their campaigns is transporting voters to the polling booths to cast their votes. Before the introduction of universal suffrage, this has involved flying some voters between islands in order for them to cast their votes at the constituency from which the voters hold matai titles. All the expenses of course are met by the candidates whose voter (so he thinks) is being flown across. Furthermore, on that day, it is the 'electoral responsibility' of election candidates to provide food and drinks for 'their voters'. Overall, the electoral process in Samoa has become increasingly expensive.

Another campaign strategy both the candidates for Individual Voters' seats and territorial constituencies use and are therefore similarly quality of is holding on to voters Identification Cards (IDs) and would only be handed back to the voters as the latter as they line up in the polling booths to cast their votes. Throughout the time during which voters are brought in by the election candidates to have their names registered in the electoral rolls, candidates and their respective campaign committees hold on to their IDs until election day. In most cases, the election candidates met all the expenses of bringing in voters to be registered and returning them to their homes. While at the registration headquarters, voters are given food and drinks. For all this work, candidates and their campaign committees want to be sure that the voters upon whom they have spent money would in fact vote for them come election day. It is for this reason that they hold
on these IDs until election time. The irony of it all is that no one will ever know for sure that all their voters had voted for their candidates. Perhaps one way they could find out about that is when all the voters in the booth to which they took their voters to vote on election day voted for their candidate. Unfortunately, in reality that does not and has not happened. Some candidates and campaign committees reckon they could tell on voters' face as they leave the polling booth whether or not the voters had voted for their candidate.

Both voters and candidates are sometimes guilty of allowing some voters to have more than one ID. Candidates can be guilty if in their determination to have voters vote for them, they would pretend they did not know that the voter had already been given an ID. In which situation they would try and process another ID for their voters using a different name and associated details. On the other hand, voters can be guilty if and when they mislead an election candidate or his/her campaign committee into believing that they have not had IDs processed for them yet. In which situation, the candidate or someone of his/her campaign committee would try and process and ID for that voter or voters. The voters' motivation for misleading candidates in this manner is to try and get as much material goods (food, money, etc.) from as many candidates as they could con. In other words, the price for my ID is to have the candidate give me material goods as my reward. From the candidates perspective, on the other hand, my reward for transporting voters to and from the registration booths and supplying them food and drink is holding onto voters' ID to be given out only as the voters line up to cast their votes.

Critique and possible remedies

My criticisms of Samoa's electoral system can be classified into the three broad categories of (1) coexistence of custom and tradition, and democracy, (2) a relatively weak appreciation of the common good, and (3) a generally low financial status of the bulk of voters. Problems in the electoral system arising out of the coexistence of custom and tradition, and democracy are manifold. One of which relates to the fact that in the majority of cases, candidates for territorial constituencies have to go through village councils. For candidates with limited resources, it is a burden. For the majority of candidates, this has always been a costly exercise. Although candidates have no obligation to go through this process, nor is there any legal requirement for this process to take place, most candidates go through it nevertheless if they want a better chance of winning their constituency's seat. Judging from what I always overhear the majority of voters say, the best candidate is sometimes, if not most or all of the times, judged on the basis of how much he/she had presented as gifts to the constituency.

The other problem with associating the electoral system to custom and tradition relates to village council decisions to determine the candidate all village voters must support. As explained earlier in the section on the dynamics in village
council decision-making, the majority, if not all, of these decisions are determined by one or a few influential chiefs in the village council. The other downside of this process is that some voters are punished if they exercise their constitutional right to vote for the candidate of their own choice if that choice is different to that of the village council’s. There have been cases of candidates who have won their constituencies’ seats despite not having to go through the village council. They are, however, very rare and special cases.

In the two cases I know of, both successful candidates had been expelled from their respective village councils in the period leading up to the general elections. In one of the cases, the manner in which the candidate that ended up winning the seat was so blatantly unacceptable to the majority of the constituency as shown in the results of the general elections. The constituency suspected that the two influential matai who bulldozed their view in village council to the disadvantage of the expelled candidate had been bribed by the sitting MP in order for the latter to have another term as the constituency's MP through being elected unopposed by his constituency. It was not to be the case. Worse still from he and his supporters' point of view, the expelled candidate ended up winning the seat. A similar situation resulted in the election of the other candidate whose village council also had him expelled from the village council before the general elections. The only difference is that the latter case occurred at the time only matai had the right to vote. The first case, on the other hand, took place in the last general elections in 2001 when people 21 years of age and over had the right to vote. Furthermore, the expulsion took place at around about the same time that the same village council had expelled one of the Christian Church from the village on the ground that the village did not want another new church in the village.

Other aspects of custom and tradition that have impacted negatively on the electoral system, though to a smaller degree than those aspects already discussed, relate to two of the criteria for registration as a voter in a territorial constituency. One of these two criteria is that one must register as a voter at the constituency of the matai title he/she holds. In the case of multi-titleholder, one must choose the constituency of one of his/her titles to register at as a voter for the elections. The second one of these criteria tries to incorporate into the electoral system the concept of family connections. Let me discuss this second criterion first. As of the last general elections in 2001, one is qualified to be registered in a territorial constituency if he/she is connected through the matai titleholder. This criterion then goes on to specify various qualifications in terms of in-laws and direct descendants of the matai title. The overall effect of this registration criterion is that people residing permanently in other constituencies throughout Samoa are qualified to register in any constituency as long as they qualify under these family connections.

Culturally, this criterion is justified under the Samoan concept of tautua (service). Untitled people serve their matai until the time they too are elected by their
families to hold their family title. Service in cultural terms involve people of the family who reside anywhere in Samoa but who are all contributing in one way or another to family functions and so forth. Although there are distinctly understood service like service to the church, to the village and to the family, other types of service could also be added to the list. Some of which include people from another family or another village who has resided in a particular family or village and helping out in various activities like helping out in the plantation, playing in a village team and so forth. The concept of *tautua* has expanded greatly that almost any work or activity undertaken for another person, church or village is regarded as *tautua*. As such a lot of people who would not normally come under the normally understood cultural concept of *tautua* have found their names registered as voters in several constituencies. It could be argued that due to this 'expansive' interpretation of the cultural concept *tautua* and the inclusion of wide-ranging family connections as criteria in the registration of voters, it is and has been possible that people residing permanently in other constituencies can determine the MP of a constituency. In one particular constituency in the last general elections, more than 50 per cent of its registered voters had transferred from other constituencies.

It makes a mockery of the generally understood electoral principle that a candidate is voted into parliament to cater for the interests of his/her particular constituency. As long as people who reside permanently in other constituencies determine the winning candidates of other constituencies, there are two possible negative impact on the system. One is that if I am the 'outsider' who voted a candidate in, that candidate will not be able to cater for my interests as my interests will have to be filtered in through the MP of the constituency in which I reside permanently. Second, the resident voters of the constituency whose winning candidate I helped elect will have to put up with that MP for the next five years until the next elections. The principle of resident vote channeling his/her interests to the MP he/she voted into parliament is undermined by the recognition in the electoral system of the cultural concepts of *tautua* and family connections.

Having a *matai* who resides permanently in another constituency come back to the constituency of his/her title to vote also undermines the resident-voter principle already explained. The end result is voters residing at other constituencies determining the MPs of other constituencies.

The issues of *tautua* and family connections as criteria for voter registration, unopposed elections can have a significant impact on the electoral system. In one of the constituencies in the last general elections that elected its MP unopposed, post election data clearly shows a significant 'emigration' of voters from that constituency to other constituency. It is not hard to work out that once the decision was made by the village councils of that constituency not to have an election when it agreed unanimously on its next MP, most of its voters with *tautua* and family connections in other constituencies transferred their right to vote in those constituencies. It could be argued that voters of the constituency
which had elected its MP unopposed then later transferred to vote in another constituency had indeed voted twice. Their first vote was through having their village council agree on their candidate for parliament and secondly by voting in another constituency after they had made their decision on their next MP.

Another persisting problem in the electoral system that has become increasingly critical following the adoption of universal suffrage is the geographic boundaries of territorial constituencies. The problem now is that there is an over representation of voters in some territorial constituencies and under represented in others. The root of the problem is two-fold. First, existing constituencies are subdivisions of indigenous political divisions. In all cases, cultural factors determine boundaries. The second cause of the problem is the fact that when the existing constituencies were decided, only matai was intended to be the voters. The result of these two considerations is the situation now, following the adoption of universal suffrage, where some constituencies are voter overpopulated and other under-populated.

Suggested solutions to some, if not all, of these 'cultural problems' in the electoral system have already been put forward in the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry that was set up by the HRPP government immediately after the last general elections to examine the electoral system and recommend remedies to its existing problems. On the issues of cultural service or tautua and family connections as criteria for registration as voters in territorial constituencies, the Commission of Inquiry recommended elimination of the tautua criterion and a reduction of family connections. Some members of the Commission of Inquiry in trying to arrive at a recommendation on that point preferred that the whole criterion of family connection be abolished and insist instead on residency as the only criterion for registration in the territorial constituency. Conservative members of the Commission comprised by agreeing to reduce the extent of family connections to three generations. When the report of the Commission of Inquiry was submitted to parliament, it rejected outright these two recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry. It means that the problems associated with these two criteria will persist in the electoral system.

One of the big debates in the Commission of Inquiry when trying to arrive at a recommendation on that point relates to the issue of gift-giving. It is such a complex issue because gift-giving is part and parcel of the cultural system and its associated values. The Commission finally came down to the recommendation that gift-giving would be allowed but only with the 12 months period after the results of the general elections were confirmed. In making this recommendation, the Commission had just received a Supreme Court ruling on gift-giving in one of the election petition where the Chief Justice ruled that any form of gift-giving is bribery. In arriving at its recommendation, the Commission reasoned that as long as gift-giving is allowed after the general elections, there would be no chance of the exercise influencing the results of the general elections in the next five years. Hopefully, that solution would ease the 'electoral burden' on
financially weaker candidates who might feel compelled to give in order to influence to get a better chance of winning voters. Furthermore, no candidate is compelled to present any gifts after the general elections. The Commission also redefined gift-giving in the cultural sense of o’o. In its original cultural meaning, o’o is presenting gifts to celebrate an achievement. This meaning of o’o has redefined itself throughout years political campaigning to mean giving by prospective candidates intending to contest parliamentary seats. As long o’o is redefined back (so to speak) to its original meaning, it is in line with the new arrangement recommended by the Commission that gift giving by election candidates be given after the general elections and not close to the time of the next general elections in five years time. Parliament accepted this recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry.

After considering the issue of unopposed election from both cultural and legal perspectives, the Commission of Inquiry’s immediate conclusion was to recommend in its report that elections must take place in all constituencies. However, this conclusion after second thought was considered very radical. Thus the Commission make it a general point in the report instead that elections in all constituencies must be encouraged. In other words, the Commission of Inquiry maintains the status quo although its real wish is to encourage all constituencies to hold elections. If the case of the constituency already mentioned is an indicator of what could happen in terms of transfer of voters to other constituencies if elections in some constituencies are not held, then it is clear that as long as elections are held in all constituencies, the chance voter-transfer taking place is minimised.

The Commission of Inquiry decided that the issue of voter over- and under-population would be left to the Electoral Commission they have recommended in their report to be set up. The Election Commission Office is tasked with the re-drawing of electoral boundaries. Revised territorial constituencies would still take into consideration custom and tradition in terms of geographical boundaries, but more importantly, it would also take into consideration the number of voters following the adoption of universal suffrage.

Samoa is still predominantly a family-oriented society. As a result emphasis will continue to be placed on such cultural elements as tautua, family connections, personalities and so forth. As long as that person is my matai I have the obligation to support him all the time including the time of elections. Added to these cultural factors is the fact that generally, Samoa is not a financially wealthy country. The pervasive impact of the cash economy means that every household and every individual has to resort to money to buy a lot of goods they want to have. The generally poor financial status of the bulk of the population and the continued existence of traditional institutions and values have resulted in the majority of voters looking upon material goods as the best reward for their votes. Those short-lived and immediate ‘electoral gains’ seemed more important to a lot of voters than the common good for the country. In this sense, the substantial
majority of Samoan voters, I would argue, have a very weak sense of the common good. It is my short-term, immediate and personal good that are more important than those other goods architects of political systems and policy-makers talk about in election times.

It does not mean that policies is absent all together in Samoa's electoral system. The HRPP government, which has been in power since 1982 except for a few months in late 1982 and the two years from 1986-87, has made it its practice to publicise in its election manifestos its policies for the next parliamentary term. It would be interesting to carry out a study to find out the extent to which voters decide their MPs on the basis of party policies. Even if it is the policies that has that resulted in the HRPP's electoral success, it has not eliminated the influence of cultural factors on the country's electoral system.

**Conclusion**

Samoan custom and tradition is both a strength and a weakness in the country's electoral system. It is a strength in that a means of organising voters had already existed before the introduction of the democratic process of elections. To the architect of Samoa's political and electoral systems it was only a matter of incorporating the existing system and its associated values and processes into the introduced electoral system, which they did. As long as the Samoan way of doing things is adhered to and respected, Samoans feel comfortable in their new system and will continue to perpetuate it. However, as already discussed, there are several weaknesses of the Samoan way of doing things when trying at the same time to espouse and perpetuate the democratic values for which the democratic process of elections was designed. Because of this 'values friction', the Commission of Inquiry that examined Samoa's electoral system and recommended ways of improving it made its recommendation on the rationale that the two coexisting system ought to be separated in order that the due democratic process of elections take place. It is only at this time that Samoa custom and tradition and its associated value system is allowed to be relegated to the background until after the elections. Members of the Commission of Inquiry was of the view the custom and tradition will survive and continue to be practiced for a long time to come. However, they should not be allowed to taint the electoral process.

It seems clear from the discussions leading up to political reforms before Samoa's independence that the idea of incorporation custom and tradition into Samoa's electoral system, and the whole political system for that matter, premised on the belief that in the long term, Samoan values will change to the extent political processes arising out of the interplay between custom and tradition and democracy will eventually be accepted as Samoa's new 'value package'. Although this rationale may be true given that fact that all values change and that society are constantly in a state of flux, to the majority of Samoans the process of blending the two systems into one has proven too
uncomfortable. They would rather save now the remaining values of their custom and tradition than to allow them to be lost completely in the supposedly long process of blending the two into one. In effect, the view of the Commission of Inquiry is compared to the concept of one person wearing several hats at different times where appropriate. When it is time of the democratic elections, allow its due process to take place. Cultural factors in the political equation should be eliminated or at least kept to the minimum. After the democratic elections, Samoans can go back to wearing their cultural hats. As long as the two hats are kept separate, they will not suffer the tear and wear from having them rubbed against each other in the ideal attempt of blending the two into one new hat. Only when that single perfect hat is obtained would the need to wear two separate hats in two different functions disappear. The big question, however, is: Will it ever be possible to come up with that one perfect hat? It might still be possible in the future, but we are here now and we have to deal with the problems of the present.

References
To be included