

Tonga

Country:

[Tonga](#)

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

2

Civil Liberties:

2

Aggregate Score:

75

Freedom Rating:

2.0

Overview:

Political Rights: 31 / 40 [Key]

Civil Liberties: 44 / 60

A new government headed by longtime democracy activist 'Akilisi Pohiva of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands took office in January 2015 following general elections in November 2014.

However, the prime minister soon became entangled in a series of controversies. The first involved Pohiva's appointment of his son as his personal assistant. Pohiva claimed that only his son could help him with his health needs and that he was paying him out of his own salary. By September, lawmakers were questioning the use of public funds to pay for the son's travel expenses. Pohiva was also criticized for serving as foreign minister as well as education minister. In October, opponents asked the king to remove him and his deputy from the education portfolio, alleging nepotism, corruption, and bullying of staff. At year's end, Pohiva still held both cabinet posts.

The year's most prominent dispute involved ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In March, the parliament declared its readiness to ratify the treaty, and Pohiva was a supporter. However, some lawmakers and religious groups raised concerns that ratification would force Tonga to change laws governing the male-only succession to the throne and to legalize same-sex marriage and abortion, though nongovernmental organizations supporting the treaty insisted that this was not the case. After a number of protests and petitions, Pohiva said in September that the government was backing away from its bid to ratify

CEDAW. Instead, he proposed passing legislation that would allow a referendum on the issue. No date had been set by year's end.

Citing concerns about online pornography and other internet content that could be harmful to children or the community, the parliament unanimously passed legislation in October to create a new regulatory body with powers to take down or block offending material. The regulator would also assume some media oversight functions currently performed by the Ministry of Communications. It remained unclear how the new laws and agency would affect access to information and freedom of expression in practice.

In November, 'Etuete Lavulavu, the minister of infrastructure and tourism, was ordered to work without pay for five months after an audit found evidence of abuse of office, though he avoided impeachment. As of December he faced trial on separate charges that he had bribed voters and engaged in illegal campaign spending to secure his seat in the 2014 elections.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Tonga, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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