

# Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa's tumultuous tenure has ended — what's next?



Samoa's Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa addresses the nation

*Photo Credit: Government of Samoa/Leota Marc Membre*

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Samoa's Head of State, His Highness Tuimaleali'ifano Vaaletoa Sualauvi II, **has officially dissolved Samoa's Parliament**, effective 3 June 2025, following the **defeat of the government's** 2025–26 budget. This action, taken upon the advice of Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa, signals the conclusion of her leadership and initiates the process for new general elections.

**The budget bill's failure**, with 34 votes against, 16 in favour, and two abstentions, underscored the challenges faced by Fiamē's minority government. The defeat was the culmination of the internal party conflicts and political instability that have plagued her administration in recent months.

Fiamē's tenure as Prime Minister **began in 2021**, marking a historic moment as she became Samoa's first female head of government. Her leadership was characterised by a commitment to democratic principles and cautious engagement with foreign investments. However, internal divisions within her Faʻatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST) party, including factions driven by the leader of the FAST party, Laʻauli Leuatea Polataʻivao, in January 2025, eroded her parliamentary support. Though she survived two no-confidence motions earlier this year, the budget's rejection proved insurmountable.

**In a statement to the nation**, Fiamē acknowledged the parliamentary decision and confirmed that the Cabinet would continue in a caretaker capacity until the formation of a new government. She also emphasised the importance of maintaining governmental functions and adherence to constitutional provisions during this transitional period.

The upcoming elections, mandated to occur within 90 days of Parliament's dissolution, will determine the future direction of Samoa's leadership.

But how did Samoa get here? It brings to an end a tumultuous 2025.

For some context, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), under the leadership of Tuila'epa Sailele Malielegaoi, had always harboured quiet disapproval of the FAST government. The HRPP had always held a suspicion that had it not been for the deliberate assistance of the court and its judiciary, most of whose decisions favoured FAST, the FAST party would never have been in government. They had in mind the initial decision of the Supreme Court on 8 July 2021 that declared the FAST government illegal and therefore void. However, that decision was later overturned by the Appeal Court on 23 July 2021, confirming the legitimacy of the FAST government as sworn in on 24 May 2021. There were also controversial legal issues associated with the appointment of additional seats for women in compliance with article 44(1A.a) of the constitution.

Following the result of the Appeal Court on 23 July 2021, the HRPP was vigilant in performing its opposition role in parliament. When the Speaker refused to swear in the 18 HRPP members in the first session of parliament on 14 September 2021, the HRPP contested the Speaker's decision in the Supreme Court and won. **When its leader and party secretary were suspended** by parliament on 24 May 2022 for alleged contempt of parliament, they contested the decision in court and won again. The HRPP continued to press its case in the courts and in the media.

Undoubtedly, the defeat of Fiamē's budget was a great disappointment to Fiamē and her cabinet as they were unable to complete the parliamentary term. There was so much hope and promise that the FAST government would deliver for a better Samoa, and after much criticism of Tuila'epa's leadership and several government policies under his long prime ministerial tenure of over 20 years, it has ended abruptly in this way.

Many of the promises made to the voters in the campaign period leading up to the 2021 general election remain unfulfilled. Fiamē took up the prime ministerial position in an atmosphere of heightened euphoria as the first female to have held that position not only in Samoa but the Pacific. She is the celebrated daughter of the first Prime Minister of Samoa, the first Pacific Island nation to have emerged from the yoke of colonialism when it gained independence in January 1962. However, with so much negative media publicity against Fiamē and her cabinet as a minority government — to which **La'auli and his FAST faction** contributed — Fiamē's political image is greatly tarnished.

One of Fiamē's most significant achievements was the passage of the Constitution Amendment Act 2025, which aimed to reverse judicial changes made by the previous HRPP government. Despite HRPP protests over the Speaker's deciding

vote, the Supreme Court upheld the law on 9 May 2025. That ruling is now under appeal, leaving its future uncertain.

Since the split between La'auli's FAST faction and the Cabinet in January 2025, La'auli has openly criticised Fiame's leadership and the party's direction — despite having supported many of the same decisions prior to his dismissal on 10 January, following police charges. These include allegations of conspiracy, fabricating evidence, harassment via electronic communication, and defamation. His attacks on Fiame appear aimed at undermining her credibility while consolidating support for his faction ahead of the next election.

Widely regarded by his base as the founder and spiritual leader of FAST, La'auli has maintained strong grassroots backing, including from the Samoan diaspora in the US, New Zealand and Australia. Far from damaging his reputation, the criminal charges seem to have reinforced his status among supporters, somehow bolstering his image as a divinely favoured leader and potential future Prime Minister.

Uncertainty, however, clouds La'auli's political fortunes. On 26 May 2025, the day before Fiame's budget was defeated in parliament, the court hearing relating to police allegations against him started in the district court. The result of that hearing will determine the future of La'auli's political career.

Tuila'epa and the HRPP no doubt welcome the outcome of the past few days. Fiame's leadership and the FAST government's overall hold on power have always been perceived as politically unjustified. For many of Tuila'epa's supporters, the FAST government was certain to fall. It was just a matter of time.

The defeat of Fiame's budget ends abruptly what has always been a turbulent parliament. After having absorbed much criticism from both the HRPP and La'auli's FAST faction, now acting like a pseudo-opposition, much damage to Fiame's leadership and political image has been inflicted. Although she still enjoys strong support from her constituency, her chances of enjoying the same political support she had in the period leading up to and after the 2021 general election are deeply dented and her success will be difficult to repeat.

Gifted with oratorical eloquence and tested traditional leadership at the family, church, village and parliamentary levels, La'auli has always been able to weave his way out of challenging political situations. Should he succeed in his current defence against the police lawsuit, his popularity will undoubtedly increase exponentially as he and his party prepare for the next general election later this year.

The result of the next general election will be interesting. Will the HRPP take up the mantle of power again? Will Fiame have a second prime ministerial term under a

different party? Will La'auli be the next Prime Minister?

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