



**Universidad de Quintana Roo**

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**DIVISIÓN DE CIENCIAS POLÍTICAS Y HUMANIDADES**

**The Electoral Dimension as an Indicator of Democracy in Belize: Analysis of  
the General Elections (1984 - 2012)**

Tesis para optar por el grado de

**Maestría en Ciencias Sociales**

**Aplicadas a los Estudios Regionales**

Presenta

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**Universidad de Quintana Roo**

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## INTRODUCTION

The body of this research will focus on analyzing the current political situation in the country of Belize, summarizing the events of greater significance to its formation as a democratic nation with a level of governance with sufficient capacity to ensure the implementation of elections every five years or so. Therefore, the composition of Belizean political studies is necessary in the sense that its history is dominated by two main factors: a struggle to establish a system of elections that is efficient and transparent in the organizational process and in the activity of the political parties, as well as any other force involved; and securing a process of governability in which the triumphant side results as the best option to lead the Belizean people during the following five year administration. These ingredients forged a complex country in the sense that there is no equivalence between the population and therefore the interests and political actions are vast and lack of order.

Chapter one focuses on setting the historical context of the political life in Belize, from its origins as a timber settlement, going through the conflicts between the British and Spanish over the land, to the colonial era, where the settlers were pursuing a fair treatment, political and economic, from the Crown. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries proved decisive considering the social turmoil caused by the worsening of the labor crisis as a consequence of the chaotic situation of the country,

the authorities had to negotiate certain concessions with the local bourgeoisie, of political character, looking to counteract on the reserved rights the governor had and that favored the metropolitan interests.

The rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved a difficult power struggle between the political parties and the metropolis who sought to keep British Honduras under its control. As of 1950, the British Honduras became Belize and thus began its independence trail until finally becoming an autonomously sovereign State in 1981. As of then, the political game was a two party struggle between the PUP under George Price and the UDP lead by Manuel Esquivel among others. These two parties have controlled the Belizean government ever since the first universal elections were held in 1954 and have maintained it so until the 2012 process.

Chapter two focuses on illustrating the theoretical view of the investigation. It sets the conceptual bases to explain how democracy is to be grasped in the Belizean case, defining democracy according to the main political science experts. It also does a brief analysis on the political systems that are applicable in Latin American, presidentialism and parliamentarianism. The contrast between these two systems brings to a reflection that looks to explain why the Westminster model is the best option for Belizean politics.

The third chapter looks to present and scrutinize the general electoral process and institutions in charge of managing the task every five years or so. It pays special

attention to the general elections of 2008 and 2012. The 2008 elections resulted a transition period between the PUP and the UDP in which for the first time since 1998, the United Democratic Party would take over the government after the PUP had struggled internally, in the Lower House and within the Cabinet. The People's United Party was the first political institution that managed to secure consecutive terms prior to becoming an independent nation, act that the UDP and Prime Minister Dean Barrow repeated in 2012. That is, Barrow decided to dissolve Congress in February 2012, considering the leadership and identity crisis the PUP was facing, along with the slight margin of positive public opinion that the Official Party enjoyed and summoned the election of new parliamentary members for March 7<sup>th</sup> of the same year. The outcome resulted somewhat unexpected but the UDP stayed atop of the opposition. The observation of international organisms gave more credit to the development that took place and legitimized the work done by the Election Management Body (EMB) of Belize. The media and public opinion also played an important role in the suffrage game.

The idea that guided the research concerning the provisions guaranteeing the enforcement of law and legitimacy of the electoral process proved sufficient to answering questions such as: How can the performance of the Electoral Management Body to organize elections be categorized? Does the general electoral process respect



and abide the laws set to run it? Are the standards established by the electoral law to ensure the integrity of the vote count met?

These were the basic guidelines established to settle on whether the electoral dimension can be considered as an indicator of democracy in Belize. In other words, this work looks to demonstrate that the elections in Belize are improving in efficiency and transparency, opening the way for citizen involvement, trustworthy journalism, political party evolution and transition of power in parliament.

The objectives of the investigation work, having done research at the General Archives of Belize mainly and several other databases were firstly, to describe the general election course of action in Belize as an independent State. This work also, looks to present an analysis on the quality of democracy in Belize; present other democratic indicators in parliamentary elections, without going into depth on their definition; identify the legal provisions guaranteeing the transparency of the EMB and; determine the performance of the electoral body to organize elections.

## Chapter 1. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BELIZE

For a long time, States, nations and nation-States have had a clear idea of their area of comfort and influence territorially speaking, drawing and imagining boundaries and borders to delimit their safety zone. From this discussion surges the conceptualization of frontier, in order to maintain strange and foreign forces from invading. Analytically speaking, the frontier becomes versatile territorial space taking into consideration the geographic, economic, political and cultural aspects.

This conceptualization turns important when speaking of the continental Caribbean region, especially the coast of Quintana Roo and Belize. The democratic reality in the small country of Belize is a contradictory mix of inexperience, lack of information, of interest, from the society standpoint, and a political vigor, this from the political parties platform, which does not seem to convince the majority. This can be understood if we take into consideration the fact that this country has been an independent State since 1981; a very short amount of time considering that the colonial era in the continental Americas was been vanquished approximately 200 years ago. This, of course, shows how inexperienced, democratically speaking, this Caribbean island trapped in the mainland, really is.

## Early exploration and settlement of the Bay of Honduras

The political history of Belize, considering the arrival and Spanish settlement process in the region, as the starting point, dates back to the first half of the sixteenth century. Pedro Bracamontes and Gabriela Solis (2006) wrote about the shipwreck of Gonzalo Guerrero and the rest of his crew in the northern coast of Quintana Roo, near Cabo Catoche.<sup>1</sup>

To amplify this train of thought, let's consider that Belize was occupied by the Spanish and British in the seventeenth century but the problems between both Crowns date back to 1497<sup>2</sup>, when the Catholic Head of state made repartition between the Spanish and Portuguese, leaving the British empty handed. Nevertheless, there were several

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1 This is a marquee moment in regional history because it was the first encounter between the European explorers and the Mayan tribes and non-nomadic groups that had settled all over the coast of present-day Quintana Roo. Gonzalo Guerrero crash landed near Cabo Catoche, and after being held captive by the locals, he managed to escape and went southward where he ran into the kingdom of Chactemal and the emperor Nachankan. After living there and be wedding the daughter of the ruler (this was documented as the first interracial marriage in America), he adopted the Mayan culture and fought alongside them until his death.

2 This repartition of the "New World" between Spain and Portugal found a firm and instant blockade of rejection by the French, English and Dutch. In 1497 J. Cabot made a journey to the northern part of the continent. On the other hand, Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1975), Francis I, king of France expressed his discontent saying "The sun rises for me as it does for everyone else. I would like to see in Adam's Will the clause which excludes me from a part of the world."

encounters previous to the territorial battle. Paz Salinas [1979: 20] writes that the English occupation of Jamaica in 1655 and their establishment in territories belonging to Spain,

*Sólo puede explicarse en relación a la acumulación del capital en Inglaterra y a la expansión comercial de la misma en el transcurso del siglo XVII...(y) Fue el capital comercial el que generó las formaciones sociales constituidas en las colonias del Nuevo Mundo, provocando de ese modo una intensa acumulación de capital en los países metropolitanos.*

The Spaniards showed very little interest in the area. Nigel Bolland explains how,

*In the early 1530s Davila, lieutenant of Francisco de Montejo was sent to establish Chetumal, ...the capital of the Mayan province which stretched southward from the eastern shore of lake Bakhahal (now Bacalar) to New River Lagoon, and possibly to the Belize River [BOLLAND; 2004: 18].*

After this first approach by the Spanish to settle Chetumal or Chactemal, unsuccessfully, Davila journeyed south in search of food. In 1618, Fray Bartolomé de Fuensalida and Father Delgado encountered Mayan resistance on their trek through Belize. There were several attempts by the Spanish to settle and reclaim the Belizean territory from the

British under the argument that they were invading Spanish land. Nevertheless, the Spanish never settled in Belize. Chamberlain (1948) writes that a group of Franciscans and Dominicans made it to the village of Bacalar and Chactemal, facing plenty of difficulties, but were unable to advance southward due to the lack of funds.

On the contrary, the British began settling along the Belize River in 1640 with Captain Wallace or Willis at the front of the expedition.

*Whatever the details, which will probably remain doubtful because of the paucity of early records, the purpose of the British settlement was to export logwood... By the middle of the seventeenth century, British buccaneers, who had previously plundered Spanish logwood ships, were engaged in cutting the tree themselves in various parts of the Yucatan Peninsula...*

[BOLLAND; 2004: 19].

The commercial expansion of the British Empire into the Caribbean played a major role in the rise of contraband commerce, establishing the island as a base of operations from where the commercial transactions with the Spanish colonies, especially with the Caribbean islands and a couple key points established along the bay of Campeche and the coast of Yucatan. Once the king of England, Charles II, had solidified several strategic points in the hemisphere, and because the piracy problem had raised certain pressure in all of Europe, he began inking the Treaty of Madrid in 1667. Trying to

salvage the relations between Spain and Great Britain, in 1670, known as the Treaty of Madrid or the Godolphin Treaty, these nations signed a treaty outlawing piracy. This treaty was very significant in other aspects as well, mainly because Spain openly acknowledged the English ownership of several islands in the Caribbean<sup>3</sup> [PAZ; 1979: 21].

The signature of this agreement between Spain and Great Britain gave the latter the opportunity to explore inland making their way to the Caribbean coast as well as into the Gulf of Mexico. During this period of conquest, the Spanish were looking to expand their domain, granted by the Catholic Church, in the search for natural resources and wealth. The British pirates turned baymen had a similar goal. They were looking for lumber to exploit and export back to Europe. Considering their knowledge of the Caribbean Sea, and Yucatan as well, the British explorers, how they were now considered by her Majesty, found a vast ground which they could exploit. This became a strategic point for the British government because of the great distance that existed between the New Spain political center and the most southern point of the Yucatan Peninsula [BOLLAND; 2004: 18-20]. This settlement went on to become one of the first of its kind for the British in the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Bahamas and Jamaica are the most important, but the deal also included several of the Lesser Antilles, such as Barbados, Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, St. Lucia and the Virgin Islands.

During the late seventeenth hundreds and early nineteenth century, the British pirates turned settlers, also known as *baymen*, began extracting long wood from the southern region of the Yucatan peninsula, the bay of Honduras, considering that this resource was multi-productive; it produced a sap used in Europe to make dye. Also, it was a very sturdy lumber, good for building ships, and this made the exportation of precious timber became a very productive economic activity.

It was until 1763 that the British were authorized to cut and extract logwood and mahogany. With this decision came the need of laborers. As a result, the British began importing slaves to work in the lumber industry. The necessity of manpower came from the realization that the Mayans would not settle to the working conditions implanted by the woodcutters in addition to the shortage of workers available in the area<sup>4</sup>. Two years later, in an attempt to have a grasp in the Belizean colony, the king of England sent William Burnaby, the commandant appointed in Jamaica, with the objective of inspecting the territory as well as systemizing the laws in the area. The Burnaby Code was born and in his return to Jamaica the commandant was named the entity's superintendent. This first governing body was the Public Meeting, a legislative body begun by settlers

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4 A History of Belize; Benque Viejo del Carmen: Cubola, Productions. ; Chapter 3 ([www.belizenet.com/history/chap3.html](http://www.belizenet.com/history/chap3.html)).

establishing themselves in order to elect magistrates and exercise judicial as well as administrative enterprises.

The British looked to have major control over the colonists, and in 1786, the arrival of the new superintendent, Marcus Despard, executed a series of changes in the woodcutting administrative system limiting the pioneers' point of action and securing the colony under the British domain.

### **British Honduras**

In the commencement of the nineteenth century, the population of British Honduras reached a total of about thirty-five hundred inhabitants and until then, the only form of local government was unlinked from the crown. Every year, the settlers chose a total of seven magistrates, whom were in charge of the political and economic decision making. In 1808, afro-descendants were given the right to vote for magistrates for the first time in the short lived history of Belize<sup>5</sup>. This was an important step toward the emancipation of slavery given the fact that the slave community was recognized as equal to European settlers [GILMOUR; 1981: 23]. The British looked to have a major control over the

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<sup>5</sup> The only requirement was a residence of one year and owning 100 sterling pounds.



territory by threatening to suspend several rights such as the public meeting. As an extra note, slavery was finally abolished in 1838, but this did little to change the economic structure of the country since the former slaves continued performed the same labors only that they did it now as free men. A year later, the Executive Council was created with eight members and in 1840 the English Legislation was implanted. Three years later, the magistrate election was suppressed and they were now handpicked by the superintendent.

In 1850, the power struggle between the superintendent and the landowners, they demanded to be recognized fully as a British colony. Looking to forging diplomatic relations with the young nations of the western hemisphere, the British executed the signature of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, in 1850, with the United States agreeing to propel the construction of a canal that crossed Central America joining the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It also forced the US to maintain its expansive urges from entering the region of Mesoamerica.

The situation with Mexico and Guatemala was very similar to the posture adopted by the British with the US. Any issues dealing with British Honduras was to be negotiated with the Mexican and Guatemalan governments. The British established an agreement with the Mexican government which guaranteed that the British colonizers would not be

bothered or threatened in any way. With the Guatemalans, the English signed a limits and boundaries treaty in 1859 [PAZ; 1979: 38].

The economic situation in the second half of the 1800s was held together by threads and needles as a result of the costly military expeditions against the Mayans and the administration expenses grew. In 1853, the Public Meeting was abolished and the first formal modern constitution of British Honduras was enacted. This group of colonial leaders was made up of 21 persons; three were nominated and 18 were elected. In order to be elected, the candidate had to be a British subject of at least 21 years of age and have a net worth of £400. On the other hand, the voter had to be loyal to the British Crown, older than 21 years of age and had to enjoy a real property value of £7 or an annual salary of £100 [PALACIOS; 1993: 1].

Also, the landowners and merchants dominated the Legislative Assembly. In 1871, the council renounced to their political privileges and demanded the protection of the British Crown as well as the enactment of a new Constitution which gave the British Honduras colony a real and legitimate government [PAZ; 1979: 39]. This new Magna Carta did not dissolve the Executive and Legislative Council, now the members were chosen by the governor in the Legislative Council which meant the beginning of the Crown Colony system. Through this new document, the Legislative and Executive power was exercised directly by Britain government through its representative the Governor

General who presided over the meetings and had original and sting vote. The Legislative Assembly was now made up of nine members, of which five were official employees of the Crown and four were elected.

Ten years later the Belizean people asked the Crown to reestablish the self-governing state, which was met with a harsh negation.

This shift in the power structure, from the oligarchic stature to the colonial state, completed a move in the form of government and administration that had gone through an evolutionary process that for almost one hundred years. This alteration took the power away from the hands of a privileged few and gave it to the administrative councils of the English enterprises in the territory and to the Colonial Office in London. This concentration and centralization of power marked the disappearance of the colonial elite. By 1890, the majority of all commerce held in the British Honduras was in the hands of a small chamber of recently arrived Scottish and German merchants.

The *alcalde* system, which was emulated from the Spanish in order to control the Mayan communities, was applied in several villages, through electoral processes, looking to bring under control the rebel Mayans as well as the colony [BOLLAND; 2004: 149].

Bolland states that,

*At the end of the nineteenth century some disputes surfaced concerning the colony's boundaries and the jurisdictions over alcaldes of the more remote Maya villages.*

The colony of British Honduras was faced with the challenge of incorporating the Maya and afro-descendent community into the colonial society. The policies devised were applicable in certain contexts but not in others, depending on the colonial administration at the moment; the *alcalde* system, which was a system of confinement but finding this arrangement unmanageable, the coordination shifted to a policy of indirect ruling, through the elected *alcaldes*, opposed to the previously appointed ones. This organizational structure lasted for the last part of the 1800s and first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During this time, there was a growing demand of mahogany and logwood from the United States. There was also an importation of new machinery which pushed the economic growth of the Belizean lumber industry mainly due to the growing interest in timbers worldwide. Also the political ties between Creole and American merchants gave brought a new twist to the way business and politics were handled.

*La burguesía metropolitana y la burguesía local lograron mantener el equilibrio basado fundamentalmente en la extracción de maderas y por*

*parte de las compañías, y en el negocio de importación y exportación a través de la burguesía local. [PAZ; 1979: 40]*

Growing tensions were brewing in British Honduras at the turn of the century. In 1919, a race riot sparked off by disbanded soldiers subjected to racist treatment when they formed part of the British West India Regiment that fought along the British in the First World War. Also, the Great Depression sent a harsh blow towards the fragile national economy. Most of the population was tied to the exports sector and the sudden fall of prices worldwide placed the colony in an awkward and uncomfortable position. Disturbances occurred periodically by the unemployed population who demanded the Crown take action. Another blow to the Belizeans in the 1930s was the entrance of a devastating hurricane damaging even more the economic structure as well as the deteriorated living conditions.

Looking to avoid the worsening of the labor crisis as a consequence of the chaotic situation of the country, the authorities had to negotiate certain concessions with the local bourgeoisie, of political character, looking to counteract on the reserved rights the governor had and that favored the metropolitan interests. This meant that the Legislative Council was reformed and would be integrated by twelve members, five official and seven non-official, of which two would be appointed by the governor and the remaining five would be elected through suffrage [PAZ; 1979: 41].

In February of 1934, as a mode of protest for the economic conditions, an unemployed brigade marched in the capital, protesting the condition of the working class countrywide. These socio-economic conflicts with the oligarchy that absorbed British Honduras, pushed the creation of the Labour and Unemployed Association (LUA) headed by Antonio Soberanis and Gabriel Adderley. In 1936, new modifications to the constitution were made in order to increase the number of non-official members in the Legislation.<sup>6</sup> The changes were adopted in 1938 as the Legislative Council size was modified to 12 members, of whom five were official, two were nominated and five more were elected.

The new Executive Council would be made up of three *ex-officio* members, four collocated by the governor and ten would be elected through general elections. The syndicate activity was legalized in 1941 and two years later, the Employers and Employee Act that revoked the repressive mechanisms that went back over a century; a move that gave impetus to the birth of the General Workers Union (GWU), whose influence extended throughout the country.

The national sentiment towards the government was that of rejection and when *on December 31, 1949 the Governor imposed the devaluation of the Belizean dollar over*

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6 [Countrystudies.us/belize/79.htm](http://Countrystudies.us/belize/79.htm)

*the objections of the Legislative Council, unmasking the total power of the Colonial Government. That very night, George Price and others formed the People's Committee...The People's Committee faced repression from the Colonial regime, including the declaration of a state of emergency that lasted 137 days, but popular support flourished and on September 29, 1950 the People's United Party was formed, dedicated to national unity and independence.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Electoral Processes pre-independence**

Elections in modern British Honduras have a history that dates back less than to the 1950s. In January 12, 1952, The Daily Clarion gave news of a policy looking to establish the National Party<sup>8</sup> with the objective of ultimately attaining full self-government as a unit of the British Commonwealth. With the establishment of a National Party, also came the statutes for internal party competition. Therefore the formulation of the parties also meant that party conventions came into action in order to select leaders who were capable of running this government which the National Party was looking to accomplish

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pup.org.bz/index.php/the-party/history-of-party/item/196-a-visual-history-of-the-pup>

<sup>8</sup> The Daily Clarion. *Policy of Nacional Party* Announced; 56<sup>th</sup> Year; Saturday, January 12, 1952 (article available at the George Price Centre Archives in the city of Belmopan).

but also served as a buffer looking to take attention and supporters from the Party George Price and company had built.

The first national election process in which the National Party (NP) and the People's United Party (PUP) would face off was held in 1954 with the later resulting victorious.

**Table 3. Political history notes 1765 – 1954**

Year	Governing Body	Function	Eligibility
1765	Public Meeting (legislative body begun by settlers)	- To elect magistrates - To exercise judicial & administrative duties	(member) Property, income, color
1853	Public Meeting abolished  First formal modern constitution	- Number of members – 21 (3 nominated, 18 elected)	(member) British subjects, +21 years, worth £400  (voter) British subjects, +21 years, Real property value £7, o salary of £100 per year
1871	Legislative Council established (beginning of Crown Colony system)	- Legislative and executive power exercised directly by Britain gov't through its representative the Governor General presided over the meetings, had original and sting vote - Number of members – 9 (5 official [employees of the Crown], 4 unofficial)	



<b>1919</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (July) Race riot in Belize City</li> <li>- Sparked off by disbanded soldiers from Belize who were subjected to racist treatment when they were a part of the British West India Regiment that supported the British in WW1</li> </ul>
<b>1934</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (February) Unemployed Brigade marched to through the Belize Town</li> <li>- (March) Labour and Unemployment Association formed by Antonio Soberanis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Protested the condition of the working class countrywide</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>1938</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legislative Council size changed to 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o 5 official</li> <li>o 2 nominated</li> <li>o 5 elected</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>1943</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Labor laws changed and General Workers Union was registered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Function: Espoused the working man's cause militantly</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>1945</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legislative Council size changed composition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o 3 official</li> <li>o 4 nominated</li> <li>o 6 elected</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>1947</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beginning of political activity nationally</li> <li>- Municipal elections in Belize Town won by Native First Independent Group (4/7 seats): G. Price, J. Smith, H. Fuller and Karl Wade</li> </ul>
<b>1948</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beginning of Open Forum with participants: Philp Goldson – The Billboard</li> <li>- I.D. Kemp – UNIA activist</li> <li>- Antonio Soberanis – Labour Union</li> <li>- John Smith and Herbert Fuller elected to Legislative Council</li> </ul>
<b>1949</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (December 31) Open Forum held protest meeting against devaluation</li> <li>- Dollar devalued</li> <li>- People's Committee formed: Chair, John Smith; Secretary, George Price; Member, Clifford Betson</li> </ul>

<b>1950</b>	- (April 29) PC dissolved and PUP formed - Leader, John Smith; Chair, Leigh Richardson; Secretary, George Price; Member, Clifford Betson
<b>1951</b>	- Philip Goldson and Leigh Richardson sent to prison for one year for a charge of sedition against a Billboard article which was said to incite violent revolution
<b>1952</b>	- National Party formed supported by colonial government
<b>1954</b>	- Universal adult suffrage - First national elections under the two party system

Source: PALACIO, Myrtle. *Selecting Our Leaders: Past and Present. How the Election Process Developed.* EBC; Belize. 2002.

Soon after, the first joins the Honduran Independence Party (HIP) to consolidate the National Independence Party (NIP) in 1957 and compete once more against the PUP in elections the following year. For the 1961 elections, the contention became more interesting with the inclusion of new political parties. In this electoral process three political institutions faced each other; the PUP, NIP and the Christian Democratic Party formed by Nicholas Pollard and other PUP dissidents unhappy with the control George Price had over the party, among other reasons. The PUP obtained the majority of votes once again tallying 63.4 percent of the votes, while the NIP mustered 23.2 and Pollard's CDP gained 11.4 of all votes. The opposition managed to take almost 7,621 of the

22,032 votes that were registered in that period, but what they did not accomplish was taking power from the PUP's hands.

The inclusion of new and independent political parties is always a sign of a democratic nation and system but it can become an unnecessary commodity when elections are under way. That is, whenever a third party obtains popularity among the voters, it is result of a bad administration and a weak opposition. Unfortunately when this is the case, the three parties will be looking for the same aim. The negative effect of a tripartite Westminster system is that while one of the sides takes the lead, the other two will now compete directly head to head looking to get as many seats as possible in House of Representatives. The result of the 1961 elections proved that institutionally speaking Belize was not ready for a three way competition given that the final result awarded all 18 seats of Congress to the PUP [CUNIN & HOFFMAN; 2009: 58].

The year 1973 becomes a significant year given that it is until then that the British government and the international community acknowledges the baptism of Belize and no longer refers to the territory as British Honduras. It was also in that year that the United Democratic Party (UDP), consisting of the NIP, the People's Development Movement (PDM) and the Liberal Party, joined in alliance to compete against the PUP, whom they were able to hold at 70.6 percent of the vote in the elections of 1974 [CUNIN, HOFFMAN; 2009: 40].

In 1978, through constitutional reforms, Belizean democracy is strengthened with the creation of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC)<sup>9</sup>, the public institution responsible for administering and of the personnel employed for the elections the following year.

The 1984 Elections and Boundaries Commission's Annual Report states that,

*In 1978, the voting franchise was extended when the age required to register as an elector was lowered from 21 years of age, to 18 years. This further accommodated more Belizeans to be able to vote for their leaders in government. Independence of 1981 gave control to Belizeans and political leaders to fully manage the affairs of the country. Since then, five peaceful, free and fair elections have been held.*

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<sup>9</sup> In "A Framework for Voter Education" [PALACIO; 2004], Myrtle Palacio expresses that: The role of the Elections and Boundaries Commission is (1) *responsible for the direction and supervision of the registration of voters and the conduct of elections, referenda and all matters connected therewith;* and (2) *...in the exercise of its functions, the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority and shall, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, act in accordance with the Representation of the People Act or any other law, rule or regulation relating to elections.* Also Section 90 empowers the Commission to make proposals to the National Assembly regarding boundary redistricting. There is a Chairman and four Members. The Chairman and two members are appointed by the Governor General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The other two members are appointed by the Governor General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition [2004: 6]. We shall see more of the Election Management Body in Chapter 3.

On January 31, 1981, after facing a territorial dispute with Guatemala over not reaching an agreement on the border limits, which is still in controversy today, the Belizean government proposed the terms for the independence of Belize, which was approved at the Constitutional Conference of Belize in the Marlborough House in London<sup>10</sup>. Resulting from this convention was installing a new Constitution that established a constitutional monarchy as the political system, assigned the title of sovereign to the British monarch who is represented in Belize by the Governor General.<sup>11</sup>

However, the real political power lies in the elected representatives of the National Assembly and in the cabinet headed by Majority Leader in the House, which at that time was occupied by George Price, president of the PUP.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1. Elections and Results from 1954 to 1979**

YEAR	VOTERS	% PARTICIPATION	WINNER	PRIME MINISTER
1954	20801	70	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1957	22058	52.6	PUP	GEORGE PRICE

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<sup>10</sup> This discussion was held between April 6 and April 14

<sup>11</sup> This was one of several moves that would motivate the approval of independence by the British and Belizeans alike.

<sup>12</sup> The majority party leader also is given the title of Prime Minister.

1961	27714	80.3	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1965	37860	69.8	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1969	29823	75.3	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1974	33737	70.6	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1979	50091	89.9	PUP	GEORGE PRICE

Source: AFRODESC. Working Paper No. 5: p. 41.

### Independence and Political Transition<sup>13</sup>

The political situation prior to 1981 was experimental given the sudden changes that the Belizean Parliament faced from time to time. Until before their independence process,

*The bicameral Parliament of Belize, the National Assembly, consisted of a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Senate {had} 9 members, all appointed by the Governor-General. The House of Representatives comprises 28 elected members. All parliamentarians have a maximum term of office of 5 years...All Belizean citizens who...attained the age of 18 years {were} entitled to vote. Qualified electors who {had} resided in the*

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<sup>13</sup> This will be a quick look of what the electoral history prior to 1981.

*country for a minimum of one year immediately prior to their nomination for election may be candidates for the House of Representatives or the Senate...The parliamentary mandate {was} incompatible with election connected offices, membership of the armed or police forces and being party to a government contract. For election purposes, Belize {was} divided into 28 electoral divisions; each of them returned one House member by simple majority vote. Vacancies which arose in the House of Representatives between general elections were filled through by-elections, whereas Senate vacancies were filled by appointment.<sup>14</sup>*

The reality pertaining to the representative machinery has remained unchanged. The addition of electoral districts has modified the panorama since the 1980s resulting from the influx of foreign population as well as the uncontrolled growth of the towns and cities.

The political situation in the country of Belize, recapitulating the most significant events that made Belize a democratic nation with a positive level of governance required to ensure the implementation of clean elections every five years is a relatively unexplored subject in recent years [CUNIN and HOFFMAN, 2009: 43]. This year is a very noteworthy achievement for the small nation because it also conducted a series of

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<sup>14</sup> The extract comes from the Elections and Boundaries Commission 1984 Annual Report. It is a simple two page document that describes the electoral context between 1979 and 1984.

electoral reforms that changed the way they would hold voting processes at national and district levels.<sup>15</sup>

*The election was called on 21 November 1984 in accordance with a transitional provision of the Constitution. A total of 61 candidates were in contention. On polling day, the ruling People's United Party (PUP), led by Prime Minister George Price (who was running for his seventh consecutive term), suffered an unexpectedly large defeat to the conservative United Democratic Party (UDP), headed by Mr. Manuel Esquivel; the latter captured 21 of the 28 House seats. Observers attributed the centre-left PUP's setback in part to the electorate's wish for a change as well as to Belize's economic difficulties, caused especially by a fall in the world price of sugar, the country's main export product. In the campaign, the UDP had advocated the need for more foreign investment in Belize and less government control of the economy. The PUP was reportedly also damaged by internal dissension. On 17 December, Mr. Esquivel was sworn in as Prime Minister. The following day, he announced the membership of his Cabinet [EBC; 1984: 2].*

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<sup>15</sup> These electoral reforms will be handled in another chapter.



The first post-independence election cycle took place in 1984, where the Democratic Union Party (UDP) and United People (PUP) competed for the Legislation majority [BOLLAND, 2004: 213]. In this contest, the UDP won 53 percent of the total vote, which guaranteed the highest number of seats, plus the post of Prime Minister for its leader, Manuel Esquivel. It was a sign of respect towards the electoral institution, being an electoral process which gave for the first time the legislature the opposition party, the fact that the PUP having been in power for over thirty years in a row, led by the president and founder of the party George Price, accepted the results and turned over the Prime Ministry as well as the leading post of the Legislation.<sup>16</sup>

In 1993, Price moved the electoral process ahead of time, anticipating victory and five more years in office. The conflict with Guatemala again took fire, causing a rapprochement between the parties; it also caused internal clashes within the UDP, concluding in a partisan divide and the creation of the National Alliance for Belizean Rights (NABR) [GOMEZ CARRILLO; 2008, 218].

As tensions escalated with Guatemala, those between the UDP and NABR lessened leading to the union of the Democratic Union, under the premises of security, the withdrawal of British troops and the growing PUP relations with Guatemala. As a

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<sup>16</sup> For the 1989 elections, Price returned to power.

consequence, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the PUP won a lead of 1700 votes over the UDP, of the 70,000 in dispute, but the second took 16 of the 29 legislative spots available for that year.

The PUP swept the general elections on August 27, 1998, seizing 26 of the assembly sites, leaving the UDP with only three seats. On that occasion, there was a voter turnout of 94,173, 60 percent emitting their suffrage for the PUP and UDP 39% for [CUNIN and HOFFMAN, 2009: 43]. This victory reflected the electorate's disapproval with the Democratic Union's government.<sup>17</sup>

The PUP was seeking a second consecutive term after posting a remarkable economic growth between 1998 and 2003 [KEN; 2008: 14]. The opposition sought to replace them in office amid allegations of corruption and embezzlement of public funds.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the PUP won 22 seats in the assembly, earning 53.2 percent of the total voting, leaving seven positions, and 45.6 percent of the vote to the UDP. Although the advantage of the PUP in this process was not as one-sided as it had been in previous electoral

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17 This newfound hope revived in favor of the new faces representing the PUP, besides giving him the post of Prime Minister Said Musa.

18 Prior to this election, the parties had alternated in power since independence.

processes, the act was historic given the fact that for the first time in the post-independence era that a political party came out victorious at a national gala.

Myrtle Palacios describes the situation:

*After nearly 200 years of British rule, September 21, 1981 heralded the independence of Belize. There was a new Constitution in the horizon, a Belize Constitution. Belize attained independence under the leadership of Premier, Hon. George Cadle Price, who became Belize's first Prime Minister. A Belizean Government was now responsible for both the internal and external affairs of the country. In the system of government full independence also meant that a Governor General represents the Queen of England as Head of State in Belize.*

*The Belize Constitution, which was passed on September 20, 1981, is the supreme law of Belize. It calls for a National Assembly consisting of the House of Representative and the Senate. Members of the House of Representative are all elected.*

*The number of the members increased to 28 in 1984 by Act No. 16 and later to 29 in 1993. The Prime Minister chairs the Cabinet. The first election after independence was held on December 14, 1984. Some*

*64,441 electors were registered and 49,311 electors representing 74.9% of total electors went to the polls. The United Democratic Party won the first election after independence, and formed the government under Prime Minister Hon. Manuel Esquivel. Four other general elections have been conducted since then, the last being March 5, 2003. The victorious party was the People's United Party, who have won three out of the five elections in post-independent Belize [2003; 22].*

The legislative elections of February 7, 2008 differed from previous ones in that from this race. Belizeans elected 31 members instead of 29 for the House of Representatives. An important fact is the elevated voter turnout that every process has registered up to the 2008 elections (See table 2).

**Table 2. Elections and Results from 1984 to 2008**

YEAR	VOTERS	% PARTICIPATION	WINNER	PRIME MINISTER
1984	64439	74.9	UDP	MANUEL ESQUIVEL
1989	80544	72.6	PUP	GEORGE PRICE
1993	98371	71.6	UDP	MANUEL ESQUIVEL
1998	94173	90.34	PUP	SAID MUSA

2003	126202	79.48	PUP	SAID MUSA
2008	156993	76.63	UDP	DEAN BARROW

Source: AFRODESC. Working Paper No. 5: p. 41.

Also, tensions within the PUP allowed gave the opposition leverage to strategize their next move towards the 2008 elections utilizing the hostilities and general disconcert. In other words as expressed by Ms. Palacio,

*...the most challenging being the period December 2007 to February 7, 2008 leading up to Belize's Parliamentary Election. The tensions of 2005 and then again in early 2007, escalated with precise subtlety. Public Officers with responsibility to coordinate and manage the 2008 Election were intimidated through character assassinations by political operatives and on the daily Talk Shows of one Media house in particular [2010: 11].*

Moreover, the opposition, the UDP won the election by obtaining 25 of the 31 available spots. A national referendum also had been called to determine the views of the Belize

Senate in an election.<sup>19</sup> The referendum question was: "Should the Senate of Belize be elected?" [HOFFMAN, 2009: 36].

The plebiscite was conducted with the same procedures as the general election, taking into consideration all registered voters, places and other aspects of procedure for conducting the referendum. The vote of the consultation showed 62 percent in favor, 37 against and one percent of the votes were annulled.

Hence we can see that the post-independence elections of '84 to 2008, shows that Belizeans are committed to democratic processes ordained working within a party system based on the Westminster model. Although the PUP dominated politics until the early '70s, it was partly because the opposition was virtually non-existent and poorly organized. When the UDP, its structure, was under the command of Manuel Esquivel, it accumulated strength and was able to seriously contend against the PUP's George Price, showing a degree of reliability and efficiency that the alternation of power has been a catalyst for partisan domestic growth, thus enhancing democracy and governance nationwide.

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19 Contrary to the House of Representatives elections, all twelve of the Senate members were appointed by the governor general until 2008.

## Chapter 2. A THEORETICAL APPROACH OF DEMOCRACY

### Introduction

Before initiating this analysis, it is precise to set some warnings. First of all, some of the categories here established over an abstract base that do not sustain an empirical reference; nevertheless, indicating an acceptable way towards democratization allows us to broaden the conception of what is empirically possible or turns our attention to hidden obstacles that otherwise would not would notice. A second warning is that any empirical case o democratization may contain certain features of more than one category, which is the case most of the time. Last, I will only examine those which appear to be the most important paths basing my thesis on logic and history to build my case on democracy and its components. The term of democracy, for the purpose of this paper, is not considered as a synonym of elections. Rather, it must be considered as having greater rank than that of the selective process of officials and administrators. It must not be limited to a playing field of power struggle, nor can it exclude the institution of a political system, respect of civil liberties and human rights or decision making processes; it cannot leave out the cooperative aspect but rather include these elements as indicators of democracy among others. The election process must be considered as an indicator of democracy in any country, in this case Belize.

The studies of democracy, political systems and political representation have acquired extra attention in the past thirty years due to the political push throughout the globe with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, as well as the liberation of former colonies that now were en route to the institution self-government and an independent constitution. An example of this is the amount of countries that consider themselves democratic. Even more relevant is the amount of countries that have become independent, as shown by Leonardo Morlino, since the 1980s. Until then, the count of independent nations summed up only 171; 34 in Europe, 51 in Africa, 40 in Asia, 35 in the Americas and 11 in Oceania [MORLINO; 1996: 79]. Belize was one of those of recent independence, although the democratic participation and activity dates back to the 50s. Therefore, the democratic processes, and moreover, the political processes have been an important ingredient of the independent struggle, just as it occurred with several other Latin American nations, an ideology imported from Europe.

His perspective of democracy is not linked to any ideological current for it is a product of the development of the occidental civilization. Morlino goes on to recognize the category as,

*...a political regime that nominates a <<necessary correspondence between the acts of the government and the needs of those affected by them>>, or in a different description, a political regime characterized by the*



*<<continuous capacity of response (responsiveness) of the government towards the preferences of its citizens, considered politically equal [1996: 80].*

There is no power struggle in democracy, says Morlino, given that the government is chosen based on a majority/minority model. In other words, the majority selects a minority in order to make decisions that will contribute to the common interest. Once in office, the elected few have to take into consideration not only the majority of the voters but also those who elected someone else but lost the contest. This miniscule bunch must receive the same rights and liberties as the rest.

The idea of selecting official representatives to handle and make decisions that would benefit society as a whole was a practice that, at least in the Americas, began in territories with British settlements, along the Atlantic coast. The idea of electing leaders of opinion and professionals who would convey the collective worries to the playing board and who would work in order to ascertain a fair and just political and electoral system would guarantee the functionality of a reputable government. Therefore, in every democratic electoral system, the object of the voting system is its functions: to legitimize, expressed through the election process; to represent, with the institutionalization of constitutional organs of representation; recruiter of the political elites; producer of political direction, where the electors also configure the executive powers and; political

socialization, with a symbolic political dimension that maintains a determined political society united under democratic principles and values.

Considering the above features, it can be stated that the most common democratic political system in Latin America is the presidential regime such as in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia and Brazil; countries where the power is divided into three branches of government, the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches. These political regimes are distinguished by their direct electoral rounds where the citizenry choose the head of state and autonomous powers of the executive director that is independent of parliament [MAINWARING & SOBERG, 2006: 22-23].

The political system of Belize, on the other hand, prevails in that its political apparatus, parliamentarian democratic system, is ran by the head of state is essentially a representative figure and the executive depends on the confidence of the parliament [COXALL & ROBINS, 1992: 210-212].

What characterizes the democratic parliaments are its permanent nature, the internal pluralism and the organic binding representation process [COTTA, 1996: 266]. The first concerns the non-hierarchical collegiate basis, comprising a greater number of members to a committee or other body corporate. The second feature focuses on the freedom of decision-making, capable of causing a continuous flow of decision. It also refers to a principle of plurality that is expressed, through a complex regulatory set of rules that

allows the development of the opposition in the political game, which leads to the third particularity and pluralism. The fourth dimension is based on an organic link with the public but has a discriminatory power [COTTA, 1996: 266] because it is the highest level of representation in the electoral system.

These are features that are present in the Westminster parliamentary model, according to Jose Antonio Olmeda (2000). The Westminster system is a political system with a high degree of centralization of the majority bloc. The House of Commons embodies the expression of universal suffrage through which the representatives of this elected body can hold their post, while the House of Lords is of limited suffrage, or restricted voting.

The Westminster political system, according to Olmeda, is characterized by:

1. Bipartisan hegemony that keeps any other party on the shore;
2. Parliamentary control by the executive branch that allows the government to enforce its decrees without opposition jeopardized approval;
3. Centralization of the system leading to the virtual control of relationships with administrative agencies and local councils, and
4. The government enjoys considerable independence from interference of the judiciary.

## Establishing the Democratization Foundations

The Belizean system meets all these characteristics as it is the People's United Party and the United Democratic Party who have alternated in power since the 80's<sup>20</sup>, having independent candidates who have obtained a miniscule number of seats, but insignificant compared to the big two. Since obtaining their independence from Great Britain, the posts of parliamentary leaders and prime ministers have been occupied by George Price (PUP), Manuel Esquivel (UDP), Said Musa (UDP) and Dean Barrow (UDP). Belizean parliament, as is the case with British legislation, delegate on any issue it deems necessary without having to deal with the constraints faced by systems of checks and balances as is the case in the United States. The British Monarchy fulfills

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<sup>20</sup> PUP and UDP are the two partisan pillars in present Belizean politics but this does not eliminate the existence of third parties. PUP is identified by the color blue. It is the first national party that spawned from the labor movements in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Of the two, it is more concerned with joining the regional integration system of Central America and the Caribbean. The UDP, *reds*, was born in the 1970s as a constraint looking to block the continuous one party domination of the PUP. The red party identifies itself with the Caribbean community than the Central American bloc but in recent years, both have been pushing towards the integration of the area given the number of immigrants and refugees that have made Belize their permanent settlement.

Along with these two, in the last electoral process, two new parties emerged, Vision Inspired by the People and the People's National Party. The first runs under a progressive political slogan criticizing the UDP and PUP's transition of power without giving any results and withholding the interests of the elite over those of the people. VIP is Belmopan based party that has a similar goal as the PNP but until the moment have not succeeded in obtaining any real political strength to battle with the two big parties.

functions that go beyond the representation of a ceremonial nature and inclusive. Nevertheless the term democracy seems to always stir up controversy and split opinions given its nature, development and historical application since becoming independent in 1981.

When speaking of what is democracy and what it means to be democratic, sends us on trip across time looking at what it has been understood and accepted as democracy in the last couple hundred of years. Other questions that come to mind are “what’s so great about democracy and being democratic?”, “where do stand on democracy?” and “what should every country be doing to promote democracy?”

The UNDP’s 2002 Report on Human Development states that democracy must not be only considered as a value but more like necessary mean towards development,

*...For the UNDP, democratic governability is a central element of human development, because it is through politics, and not just the economy, that it is possible to generate equal conditions and raise the options of the people... it is in this sense that, democracy is the proper frame to open spaces for political and social participation [UNDP; 2002: 25].*

Samuel Huntington [1994; p.12] identifies three waves of democratization that has its beginnings in 1828 and extends until the early 1920 with a reversal that initiates with the

market crash and extends itself until the end of the Second World War. The next wave of democracy was instituted alongside the founding of the modern day United Nations and stood strong until mid 1960s when the Cold War began to expand beyond the hot zone it had established in the eastern board of Asia, spreading from the Soviet Union all the way to the Middle East. Its reversal period is opened with the US entrance in Vietnam up to 1973, which took a different route with the strengthening of the US as the occidental superpower and beginning of the soviet collapse in 1974 and this third wave ended in 1995.

Huntington presents three types of democracy: as a source of government authority; as the purpose served by government and; as the procedures for constituting government. This brings raises a problems of ambiguity when democracy is defined as the authority source or as the purpose of government, so a procedural definition is used in this study. In other words, the “how?” of democracy is more important than the “why?” or “to what end?”

According to Huntington, this view of democracy should center on observable, objective, explanative, bureaucratic or official and procedural definitions as opposed to idealistic definitions. Having that said, a present-day political system denominated as democratic

*...to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates*

*freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.* [HUNTINGTON;1994: 7].

This definition also implicates that all citizens should not be denied or prohibited from any civil liberty (free speech, right to assembly, etc.) needed to facilitate any electoral process. Also, this definition provides benchmarks by which we can better measure the development of a democracy against other democracies or itself over time, for example how many people vote, how many parties share power, is any group systematically excluded from power. Regimes considered non-democratic have a restricted or non-existent electoral competition and widespread voting.

There is a certain motivation for non-democratic countries to reform in order to be considered a democratic State. Legitimacy of a political regime tends to look to set democracy as a norm. This is in part because successful democratic transitions of other countries in the same region tend to send a strong pro-democracy message suggesting that a greater number of democratic States also signifies a larger number of potential sources of assistance for new democracies. Looking at this from another standpoint, the faster democracy spreads across a region, higher will be their possibilities to arrange assistance agreements and treaties which can be directed to developing and/or strengthening a specific sector of the economy. The fact of the matter is that, democratic countries tend to stretch out a helping hand to other democratic countries.

Immanuel Kant in *Perpetual Peace* [1795], takes a look at the expansion of the republican regimes that were emerging in the second half of the 1700s which were characterized for having a constitution based under the principles of liberty, acquiescence to a common legislation and equality for all members of society. To Kant, a republican government was one in which the executive power was separated from the legislative representation of the citizenry. Nowadays, the majority of the countries identified as democratic comply with the requisites first established by Kant's republican conceptualization.

Kant's text<sup>21</sup> was written in 1795 when the jacobins and moderates were in conflict in France. Until then, there were only three nations that could be considered republican, France, Switzerland and the United States of America.<sup>22</sup> Aside from this note, the Prussian thinker made a bold statement in assuring that these republican regimes would not commence war amongst themselves, which can be empirically backed throughout the various global conflicts that have spawned in the last two centuries.

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<sup>21</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. 1795. Posted in <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> France would soon after lose its category as republican with the French Revolution.



Although Kant showed some skepticism towards the republican system imposition, arguing on one side the impossible task it would mean, he did believe, that a federation of republican States was the only way to achieve perpetual peace [Kant; 1795: 96]. This did not include however the obtainment or establishment of a republican government through imposition or invasion of another territory. The only scenario in which he saw it okay for a country to enter another is if the latter asked for the intromission in order of establishing a republican regime [Kant; 1795: 97]. Nevertheless, the democratic establishment was never put into question by the philosopher.

Juan Bosch makes a similar critique to the contemporary understanding of Latin American democracy by stating the Dominican Republics' case in *Capitalismo, democracia y liberación nacional*, suggesting that the

*Dominican pre-capitalism, like all the countries of Latin America, was due not to the existence of a mode of production previous to the capitalist but to the fact that the national society was established by the Spanish in its image when Spain did not have a capitalist development or even have the means necessary to reproduce itself in our land, in a detailed manner as it*

*was there in the European peninsula from which the discoverers and conquerors had embarked. [BOSCH; 1987: 9]<sup>23</sup>*

Bosch questions the Spanish inquisition of the Americas highlighting the lack of democratic values and the imposition of the monarchical system. He posts the notion that if the Spanish would have boosted the economic growth of the American colonies, as well as its own, similar to the British model, history would have been written differently. According to this thesis, the poor decision made by the Spanish, if Spain had taken advantage of the technological advances that aided the British in their industrialization effort, pushing towards political reforms resulting from the lack of civil liberties, the Spanish conquest could have seen a shift in the administration of the colonies that did not result in the independence cycle in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but instead could have pushed towards a metamorphosis of the political systems towards the establishment of a republican State.

Furthermore, Bosch states the functionality of democratic representation but it is only viable in capitalist States where the economic development has been emphasized in the political aspect of its commercial and financial relations. Only through this road can the bureaucratic paradigm be time-honored into a governing institution that shapes the

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<sup>23</sup> Translated directly from the original text in Spanish.

direction of the State. Having said this, Bosch manages to link the *Huntingtonesque* democratic waves with the financial waves of the international economy.<sup>24</sup>

*The so-called representative democracy only works fully in the countries where the capitalist system has advanced to a point of relative development. No nation has ever achieved representative democracy in its territory or before capitalism was established or before it was developed to produce a ruling class.*<sup>25</sup> [BOSCH; 1987: 17]

Schumpeter, in an excerpt taken from *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1976) gives his interpretation of the beginnings of this new found 18th century democratic wave in which he explains that,

*The 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of democracy may be couched in the following definition: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making*

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<sup>24</sup> The number of authors who chose to write about this topic is endless but this work in particular, the writings of J. A. Alonso, Raul Prebisch and Jorge Witker best describe the economic turmoil that surfaced in Latin America as a result of the power struggle in the twentieth century.

<sup>25</sup> Translated directly from the original text in Spanish.

*the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will.. [SCHUMPETER; 1976: 250]*

Democracy, as seen by Schumpeter, is the agreement drawn up by the people through a representative body which has the common good as the top priority. Any person who cannot see this common interest, he says, must have a veil of ignorance that makes them blind to what society considers the common good and this implies definite answers to all questions so that every social fact and every measure taken or to be taken can unequivocally be classed as right or wrong. The main idea is that through an elected body, democracy is reached in the compliance to secure the well being of a given group within a marked territory under the rule of a constituted law.

On the historical aspect, democracy may be seen, in an approving sense as a power struggle that has its foundations in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Power struggles such as the English Civil War, the Plymouth settlement and the constitution of Rhode Island (1641) are examples of the changes political metamorphosis that was occurring but the most significant of all is the French Revolution. The newfound republicanism established a critique of the old system of politics, the monarchy, given that this tradition had often emphasized the importance of the aristocratic dominance and leadership in a State. To look at this from a different point of view, the quest for a different form of government signaled the British constitutional monarchy, with an elected parliament as the ideal

republic model of government. This idea sprouted in the 1800s and united with the demand to extend the franchise, lead to the establishment of what came generally to be called 'democracy'.

Robert Dahl presents democracy as the selection of the governors through popular decision in an open, competitive and periodic contest between a plurality of candidates [DAHL; 1971: 29]. He explains modern democracy through the use of the term Polyarchy, understood as

*...a political regime that is distinguishable, in general terms, for having these two broad characteristics: citizenship extended to a comparatively high proportion of adults, and within the civil rights he includes that of opposition to the high government official and making them leave their posts through the right of suffrage<sup>26</sup> [DAHL; 1993: 266].*

These two features are realized with the presence of the seven key institutions essential to democracy<sup>27</sup>; thus, these institutions are necessary in order to establish a democratic regime.

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<sup>26</sup> Translated from Dahl's *La democracia y sus críticos*, Barcelona, Paídos; 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Dahl's seven institutions necessary to establish a democratic regime: elected officials, free elections, universal suffrage, right to vote and to be voted, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the press.

Sartori [1992, 2004] has based his analysis of the electoral system; his posture implies that a political reform as an institutional engineering task to allow the government to serve its purpose, while citizens broaden the base of social consensus on many decisions. Przeworski has also expressed that

*...The connection between democracy and representation is based in that governments are representative because they are elected: if elections are freely contested, if participation is limited, and if citizens enjoy political freedom, then governments will act in the best interest of the people [1998: 9].*

Taking these premises of the institution of representation, it is useful to ask what is the role of political institutions of the regime and what warranties do they offer to demonstrate their trustworthiness to make use of their power in order to achieve the common good. Duverger, could be considered a pioneer in attempting to describe this concept to argue that it gives citizens a greater margin of freedom. He states that a set of political institutions in a given country and time, constitute a political regime and that in a certain way they are like constellations whose stars constitute the political institutions

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They are necessary to meet the following criteria: equal vote, effective participation, enlightened understanding, control and inclusion agenda.

[1996: 65]. In framing the political institution of the regime, Duverger requires three key institutions: the people's representatives and the election, the judicial review of the rulers and the separation of government and parliament.

Kenneth Minogue<sup>28</sup> summarizes the ideas of Shumpeter, Sartori, Morlino and Dahl stating that,

*Democracy is possible only when a population can recognize both sectional and public interests, and organize itself for political action. Hence no state is seriously democratic unless an opposition is permitted to criticize governments, organize support, and contest elections. But in many countries, such oppositions are likely to be based upon tribes, nations or regions, which do not recognize a common or universal good in the state. Where political parties are of this kind, democratic institutions generate quarrels rather than law and order. In these circumstances, democracy is impossible, and the outcome has been the emergence of some other unifying principle: sometimes an army claiming to stand above 'politics', and sometimes an ideological party in which a doctrine supplies a simulacrum of the missing universal element. One-party states often lay*

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<sup>28</sup> "Democracy" in *Political Science and Theory* edited by KRUPER, Jessica; Routledge; 1987: 50-51.

*claim to some eccentric (and superior) kind of democracy—basic, popular, guided and so on. In fact, the very name 'party' requires pluralism. Hence, in one-party states, the party is a different kind of political entity altogether, and the claim to democracy is merely window-dressing. This does not necessarily mean, however, that such governments are entirely without virtue. It would be foolish to think that one manner of government suited all peoples [1987: 51].*

In order to understand democracy as a contractual policy, it must be seen as an objective concept that serves as a methodological fundament for the study of present-day political science. Therefore, a method of analysis proposed for the study of democracy must have a conceptualization of democracy that pretends to be valid in meaning and in applicability to actual political phenomenon.

The study of Belizean electoral processes surges as one seems to fit the mold planted above. But in order to understand what we are trying to explain in Belize, its political structure, a distinction of what we see in the remaining American continent is needed. We must acknowledge as well as distinguish the existing presidential regimes present in countries such as the United States of America and similar before exploring and explaining what the parliamentary system adopted in Belize.



## The Anatomy of an Electoral System

In every political system considered democratic, the object of the electoral system are the legitimizing, representative, political elites recruiting and political socialization functions, fundamental to the electoral functions. The genuine electoral systems are democratic. This is because the main principle of every democratic society is that the legitimizing road of political power is the same as every electoral process. The legitimizing policy, electoral in origin puts the majority's will over the rest of the citizens. For this reason, it is said that the main objective of an electoral arrangement, even over representation, is legitimizing the political power of the *auctoritas* in order for them to exercise their *potestas*.<sup>29</sup>

The representative function of the electoral systems is consequent of the impossibility of a direct democracy. It configures a delegation of expression or a representative's mandate of the elected. Said in other words, the chosen officials represent the people and not just a district, circumscription or section of the population. As for the recruiting function, the electoral process renovates and selects the political elite that is professionalized and specialized on the matter, looking to create political leaderships.

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<sup>29</sup> Juan Hernandez Bravo believes that the selection of representatives implicates more than just the depiction of diplomacy for it also alludes to the idea of providing proper professionalization of the elected officials [DEL AGUILA; 2003: 354].

The influence of electoral systems in the political life is evident. To appreciate its full significance it is enough to see how the structure of the States was transformed through the adoption of universal suffrage and direct election mechanisms. In other words, through mediation of the political parties, the electoral systems can exercise essential influence over the political life of a nation. We can see the difference of a direct influence, in which the electoral system gives impetus to the organization of the parties, and an indirect influence, in which the organization of the parties engendered particularly by the system, comes united with a determined form of political life.

The Electoral Knowledge Network describe the choice of an electoral system as,

*One of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy, yet rarely is an electoral system consciously and deliberately selected. Often the choice is accidental, the result of an unusual combination of circumstances, of a passing trend, or of a quirk of history. The impact of colonialism and the effects of influential neighbours are often persuasive in choice of electoral systems. Yet in almost all cases the choice of a particular electoral system has a profound effect on the future political life of the country concerned. In most cases, electoral systems, once chosen,*

*remain fairly constant as political interests congeal around and respond to the incentives presented by them.*<sup>30</sup>

With this political system, between the electoral tendencies and the constant facts found in all political organisms, we find the governors and the governed. The first, always smaller in number, handles all the political functions, monopolize the power and enjoys the advantages that come with it. The second, larger in populace, is directed and regulated by the first in a legal manner and from it receives the material means of sustenance as well as the indispensable ones vital for the political organism. The specialized website goes on to state that,

*...Any new democracy must choose an electoral system to elect its parliament, but such decisions are often affected by one of the two following circumstances:*

- *Either political actors lack basic knowledge and information so that the choices and consequences of different electoral systems are not fully recognized or;*

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<sup>30</sup> <http://aceproject.org/main/english/es/onePage>

- *Political actors use their knowledge of electoral systems to promote designs which they think will work to their own partisan advantage.*

*In either scenario, the choices that are made may not be the best ones for the long-term political health of the country concerned, and at times they can have disastrous consequences for a country's democratic prospects.<sup>31</sup>*

The nature of a modern State is that of representation; every political system, democratic or not have tended to present themselves as representative. Therefore in order to understand the political context of Belize, we must first differentiate the two main political systems of representation that are present in Latin America and the Caribbean; parliamentarianism and presidentialism.

### **The Functional Distribution of Power in Parliament**

The Parliament, which can be known as Congress, Courts, Chambers or Deity depending on the political tradition of each country, is a collegiate organism, depending on the liberal-democratic system, designated and selected by popular vote. This elective characteristic is justified by the representative status held by its components; that is, the

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<sup>31</sup> <http://aceproject.org/main/english/es/onePage>

elected are agents or representatives of their fellow citizens who express their demands and negotiate on their behalf. One of the most controversial political matters is the selection of an electoral system, which is required to convert the policy preferences of the citizenry in the election of representatives. The reason for this controversial character is that an electoral system is not technically a neutral mechanism and in fact may favor certain groups or candidates when competing in the election.

The composition of Parliament is renewed regularly and periodically. The period, between two and six years, according to the system, for which its members are elected constitutes a legislature. Nevertheless, in some cases and according to the constitutional laws, a parliament can be dissolved by the Executive before a legislature comes to an end, if elections to renew are simultaneously scheduled.

Depending on the constitutional provisions of each country, parliaments may be composed of one or two chambers. However, the systems with a greater liberal-democratic tradition have preferred to divide the congress in two.

There are two main reasons in doing so; conservative reluctance to popular suffrage and territorial distribution of power. In the first case, the existence of a second chamber was designed as a brake on the radicalism excess of the House. Sharing some responsibilities with the latter, the second chamber exerted a moderate influence on decisions of the first. With this objective, members of second chambers are often

referred to under more selective procedures; by indirect suffrage among older candidates, by appointment from the head of State, including by inheritance. In the second case, the reason for the existence of an upper house or senate is the federal or decentralized structure of the state. To ensure a level playing field for certain entities, states or communities that comprise establishing a second chamber in which each of the territories will have equal representation without taking into consideration its population, its extent or other characteristics. Thus, the most powerful states or communities, in terms of demographics or economic, will not be able so easily imposed on the entire federation and must agree with minor communities.

### **The Democratic Parliamentarianism**

The origin of the parliamentary system is British. Its emergence comes from small bourgeoisie's necessity for representation in the government. It is Oliver Cromwell's legacy, whom the British history obscures, but his work expresses the Englishmen's greatest pride. According to Sartori<sup>32</sup>,

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<sup>32</sup> Sartori Giovanni. *Ingeniería constitucional comparada. Una investigación de estructuras, incentivos y resultados*; México; FCE; 1996.

*The parliamentary systems do not allow a separation of power between the government and Parliament: its primordial characteristic is that the Executive-Legislative branches share power. This amounts to saying that all the systems that we denominate as "parliamentary" require that the governments be designated, supported and, depending on the case, removed, depending on the Parliament vote [SARTORI; 1996: 116].*

The parliamentary system is a political system determined by the formal institutions of power, in which there exists a structural dogma or confusion of power. In other words, the head of the executive function of government has a relative dependency of the legislative organs.

Its principles or dogmatic institutions are as follows:

- The government –call it an executive function– forms part of the Parliament in a political and judicial manner.
- The Executive holds the obligation of resigning in case of a vote of mistrust (or no confidence) from the Parliament.
- The executive organ has the restricted faculty, but applicable, of dissolving Parliament.

- The Head of Government has the precise control over the majority party in Parliament; in other words, the Prime Minister belongs necessarily to the political party that obtains the higher number of seats in Parliament.
- As a general rule, the executive function is bi-personal; there is a Chief of State who handles diplomatic and representative tasks, and, also, a Head of Government.
- The legislative organ is able to designate the members of the Prime Minister's cabinet [OLMEDA; 2000: 758-763].

Carpizo quotes Hans Kelsen in saying that parliamentarianism is “the only possible form of democracy” [1996: 330]. In the bicameral systems, the attributions of each chamber are established by the constitution. If the chambers dispose of the same attributions, it is known as a symmetrical system. If one of the two halls is more influential or has added attributes in respect to the other, we are looking at an asymmetrical system in which the opinion of one, generally the lower chamber, prevails over the higher. In this case, what the less influential chamber can do is introduce modifications to a Bill adopted by the other chamber or, in its case, delay its entry into force. The lower house is the one with more political weight. It is a collegial body composed of a relatively large number of members that in liberal-democratic systems do not usually exceed seven hundred nor be less than a hundred. The size of the institution must be balanced between a



sufficiently representative, given that it will not be achieved with a very low number of members, and reasonable efficiency in their work, which would be spoiled if the number of members grew excessively.

In any case, the broad composition forces the National Assembly to organize so that their work is as agile as possible. It is given a president, is organized into Parliamentary Groups, distributes tasks between committees and the plenary, and is provided with support services. The Parliament's president is responsible for organizing the national parliamentary debates as well as for the institution's administration. The president and other components of the table are elected among its members by the House itself. Although it has the approval of the parliamentary majority, the president must defend the rights of all members and adopt a neutral position during the discussions. However, during the voting sessions, the maximum House member follows tradition and votes within its own group.

Members of the House are grouped according to their political affinities, usually according to the party under whose protection or training they have gone to the election. Thus, each group is identified with ease; the conservative group, the Socialist group, the liberal group, etc. Each group selects a leader or spokesperson that runs the party's parliamentary tactics, establishing the positions to be adopted, determining which

members of the group will represent it in the various committees and noting who shall intervene on their behalf.

Miquel Caminal suggests that,

*In the current parliamentary systems, the representative has lost its independence. It is subject to agreements of the parliamentary group or party to which it belongs. Its connection to the political career emphasizes this dependence of these structures strongly hierarchical and charismatic leadership that subject are political parties [2005: 417].*

He goes on to include that the,

*Voting discipline ensures the stability and permanence of the majority in government, so that non-compliance can lead to weakening of government or even its fall [2005: 417].*

The Parliament's function also looks to legitimize political decisions by converting them into legal texts. When parliament passes a law, it is giving legal form to a set of agreements that seek to resolve differences between the social positions. Among the major parliamentary competencies, control of executive action is one of the most significant. The Constitution outlines the basic rules that in principle have to be respected both by Parliament and the Executive in their mutual relations. But the effect

of these rules may vary according to the influence exercised by each. Therefore, Parliament plays a legislative control role rather than a legislative function in the liberal sense. In a higher or lower level, there has always been a close link between government and parliament in the realization of the legislative function. Although the Parliament cannot compete with the government, according to Nohlen, it can exercise a controlling function.<sup>33</sup>

### **Westminster System**

The Westminster system originated in the United Kingdom and is used in all the countries of the Commonwealth of Nations. The country is divided into a number of districts defined by the electoral law. Each one of these districts has approximately the same number of voters.

Each political party may nominate a candidate for each district; there is also the possibility that independent candidates sign up to be considered in the ballots. In the elections, voters choose only one of the candidates running in their district. The

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<sup>33</sup> NOHLEN, Dieter. "Sistemas de partidos" en Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (IIDH)/ Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Electoral (CAPEL) (Comp.): Diccionario Electoral, San José de Costa Rica 1989b, 631 – 635.

candidate with the most votes will be the Common of the House of Commons to represent his district. In the event that a Common resigns or dies, the deputy leader will convene immediately a new election in the district. There is no endowment process as in other parliamentary democracies. The queen called to form a government party leader with the most seats in the House of Commons after the election [OLMEDA; 2000: 725-728].

The advantages of this system are that it is representative and easier to contend for election. Anyone who meets the requirements to be eligible, the only requisite needed is to obtain the most votes in a district in order to access a House seat. Representation is ensured since the Commons exclusively represents the electorate in his district, having at all times liberty to ignore the will of the party the Common represents. In the extreme case that a Common is expelled from his party, the representative will not lose his seat and is free to run in the next election for his district as an independent candidate, precluding the possibility of reelection.

The Westminster system has its disadvantages. Most notable is the lack of proportionality. Many of the representatives are elected by a handful of votes behind the second place, so a lot of votes are not represented, and small differences in total votes can mean huge differences in seats in the chamber.

In the analysis of this topic, we can begin by stating that in region, considering the Caribbean States and Belize as equals and members of the British Commonwealth, among other things, the Westminster System is established in micro States under similar regimes with a prolonged British influence, a long decolonization process that slowly erected independent democratic systems. These countries then began their gradual democratization through the institution of electoral rights and laws, autonomous administrative structures and most important the passage of political control to the local elites.

Also, the structural principal of the Westminster system is, as Dieter Nohlen<sup>34</sup> says, the majority rule whose application takes several forms within that model. Lijphart [1984: 5] enumerates nine elements interrelated that are constitutive of the Westminster democracy:

*(1) The Executive power concentrates in a Cabinet composed by members of the majority party in Parliament; the coalition governments constitute the exception.*

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<sup>34</sup> NOHLEN, Dieter. Presidencialismo vs. parlamentarismo en América Latina, en Boletín Electoral Latinoamericano. IIDH San José Costa Rica 1991.

The two major parties are so strong that each of them can, at least potentially, win the elections. When within the electoral results there is a slight margin, the effects of the electoral system, which favor the majority, represent a clear majority of Seats in favor of the triumphant party in the parliamentary elections; almost all of the political power is concentrated in the hands of the parliament's majority in disadvantage of the opposition.

*(2) The division of powers between the legislative and executive favors the Cabinet in power under the direction of the Prime Minister.*

The Cabinet cannot prescind of a majority in Parliament, due to the fact that a government can be forced to resign by majority vote. Nevertheless, keeping in mind that the Prime Minister is also the leader of the party and that the Cabinet is composed by representatives of the party with majority. In other words, it signifies an intra-party consensus which manages to obtain the support of its second row parliamentarians also called back-benchers who are members of the fraction that is not invested in gubernatorial post.

*(3) Between the First and Second Parliament Chambers exists a strong asymmetrical relation that, in practice, translates into a unicameral de facto.*

While the members of the First Chamber are elected directly by the people, the members in the House of Lords are political personalities hand chosen by the Prime Minister. The Second Chamber enjoys certain prerogatives to retard a legislative process. However, a limited number of Cabinet members may be recruited without needing to obtain a parliamentary mandate.

*(4) In spite of the existence of smaller that manage to get a small percentage of mandates, in Parliament and in the political scenario the two main parties predominate.*

Within the frame of this bipartisan system there exists the possibility of transition of power.

*(5) Due to a wide social homogeneity, the party system is structured above else unidimensionally, predominating several political orientations in the socio-economic level that can be classified within a leftist-rightist scheme.*

The party preferences of the most important social stratus at the political-electoral level coincide with this structure. The working class tends to support the labor party, placed at the centre-left of the party spectrum, while the middle class chooses the conservatives that are situated farther to the right of the same. Other characteristics of

the social differentiation, such as religion, ethnic or regional identification are also of importance. On the other hand, in comparison to the socio-economic issues, these differences do not have a decisive influence over the party system.

*(6) The parliament representatives are elected by relative majority in uninominal circumscriptions.*

The first past the post tactic decides a candidates' fate in the electoral contention. The first to receive the highest amount from a determined number of voters approved through the voter registration log in a political division.

*(7) The government system has a centralist and unitarian structure.*

The administrative and political authorities, communal or regional, may have important functions within the political system, but their competencies are not guaranteed in a Constitution; they depend exclusively of policy that government is driving at a given moment on a national level. The local administration does not have an autonomous sovereignty from the national government nor is it independent from the parliamentary majority.

*(8) The constitution is not a unique text, clearly codified, and is qualified as "non-written".*



The parliamentary majority is the sovereign authority that makes front to all constitutional principles, norms and agreements, whose constitutional level is recognized by a de facto convention. However, this non-written constitution does not have any legal protection.

*(9) In the strict sense of a representative democracy the chosen*

*Parliament acts as the body that represents the people.<sup>35</sup>*

Because of the parliamentary sovereignty, there cannot be proper elements of a direct democracy, like a referendum for example. These nine structural elements of the Westminster model are applicable to the Belizean political system in the same order in which they were presented.<sup>36</sup>

Based on the above, it can be determine that the main features of a democratic parliament must be: representative, namely, socially and politically representative of the diversity of the population, and guaranteeing equal opportunities and protection for all its

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<sup>35</sup> LIJPHART, Arend. *Democracies. Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in 21 Countries*; New Haven/London. 1984.

<sup>36</sup> There are four types of elections in Belize: General Election: every five years to elect leaders and members of the National Assembly. Thirty one representatives are elected. Municipal elections: every three years to leaders at the municipal level. Election of City Council or Common Council: Election of Council for each community every three years with its own president and six members. The fourth sort is the Referendum which may be called at any time to approve specific issues of national importance approved by the National Assembly.

members; transparent and open to the nation through various means, and in its operation; accessible in parliamentary proceedings involves citizens, including associations and civil society movements; accountable to the electorate about performance of its functions and the integrity of his conduct and; effective, otherwise seen as a good organization in accordance with democratic values and the performance of their legislative functions in a manner that meets the needs of the people.

One feature that affects the political representativity of a parliament is the proper functioning of the electoral system in the social and political context of a country, and equity of treatment to different political parties, whose degree of electoral support from the public is the best indicator of public opinion. These political institutions must pass through numerous types of filters in order to stay afloat.

## **Presidential**

The presidential system can be defined from several view points according to the methodological proposal. That is, it is a system determined by the formal institutions of power, where the dogmatic principle of the separation or balance of power reigns. In other words, the head of the Executive power is independent, in a relative manner, from the Legislative and Judicial powers. The origin of the presidential system can be set

without the point of discussion as being the United States. It emerged with the finality of having an elected Executive, independent from the other powers or functions of the government.

This results interesting to mention given the fact that the United States' presidential system came to be thanks to a scarce representative system composed of only seven out of the thirteen, one per colony, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of may, 1787 in the Philadelphia Continental Congress<sup>37</sup>. Marie-France Toinet says that, one of the most original creations to come out of the Constitution of 1787 was the reference of an elected Executive because there was no of such precedent in record [TOINET; 1991: 125].

Toinet also mentions that attendants of the Philadelphia Congress faced a double problem in creating a political system with an elected Executive. That is, the amplexness of the presidential powers and the dependence of the people. She expresses that James Hamilton, one of the founding fathers, had the idea that the strength of the Executive is an essential condition for the existence of a good government [Idem]. Toinet exemplifies the excesses of the presidential faculties in the United States, from

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<sup>37</sup> TOINET, Marie-France. *The Political System of the United States*, p. 125.

Jefferson, Lincoln and Wilson, and extending to Nixon and Reagan, concluding that the presidential domination is an acquired fact [TOINET; 1991: 127].

Jorge Carpizo analyzes the Mexican case saying that,

*In Mexico, without a doubt, the President is the key piece of the political system and has predominance over other political elements that configure the system.*

*...In my criteria, the causes for the Mexican presidential predominance are:*

- *He is the head of the major political party, which is integrated by the greater labor, agricultural and professional unions.*
  
- *The weakening of the Legislative power given that the majority of the legislators belong to the dominant party and they know that, if they oppose the President, the possibilities of success are practically annulled and that, they are surely frustrating their political career.<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>38</sup> Keep in mind that Carpizo's work is from the 90s and this was the reality under the PRI's 70+ reign of Mexico.

- *The highlighted influence in the economy through the mechanisms of the Central Bank, the decentralized organisms and the state-participation businesses, as well as the abundant faculties that it holds in economic matters.*
- *The institutionalization of the military, whose bosses depend of the president.*
- *The strong influence over the public opinion through the controls and the faculties it holds over the mass media.*
- *The plentiful constitutional and extra-constitutional faculties.*
- *The determination of all international political in which the country is involved [CARPIZO; 1996: 2509].<sup>39</sup>*

Since its independence, Mexico has been governed by an endless series of "strong men" or "*caudillos*", who have occupied the presidency of the Republic. Undoubtedly, the Executive has been, and continues to be the main piece of the political system. The country opted for an exacerbated presidential system rather than choosing a presidential system de jure or de facto. This distinction is crucial, since from it you can

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<sup>39</sup> Carpizo, Jorge, *El presidencialismo mexicano*, 13a. ed., México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1996.

come to understand how the Executive branch is used and what role the president's power plays.

Maurice Duverger defined this phenomenon stating that,

*The presidentialism is a distorted application of the classical presidential regime, by weakening the powers of parliament and hypertrophies the president's powers: hence the name. It operates primarily in Latin American countries that have transported the constitutional institutions of the United States to a different society [DUVRGER; 1992: 152].*

From this definition, it becomes clear that the presidentialism has virtually nothing to do with a presidential system. Lorenzo Meyer, following Duverger's own definition, analyze the presidential and states that<sup>40</sup>:

*It is precisely this form of government where the division of powers under the Constitution is left on paper and is not practiced, since the Legislature and Judiciary are subordinated to the Executive, and where the same applies to the powers of the states and municipalities. The presidentialist*

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<sup>40</sup> Duverger, Maurice, *Instituciones políticas y derecho constitucional*, 2a. reimp., México, Editorial Ariel, 1992, p.152.

*term also implies a weak civil society and, therefore, incapable of producing social actors with enough strength to act with relative independence of the presidential power in significant policy issues, such as: real political parties, business organizations, middle class, workers and peasants, media, academia, and so on [MEYER; 1996: 19-20]<sup>41</sup>.*

This was undoubtedly the role played by the president. Presidentialism has a central spot within the political system, axis around which the whole apparatus of power revolves regardless of the formal network; on it rotates a complex web of relations and political commitments. Thus, in turn occupying of the presidency has become an absolute ruler. As the maximum authority, within the dynamics of the regime, the president cannot be wrong and has no accounts to render to the other powers, the nation or anyone. The most prominent institutional feature of Mexican politics has been the centrality of the presidency and the enormous concentration of power in the chief executive. In fact, the concept of presidentialism in Mexico refers not only to the institutional arrangement and governance framework enshrined in the Constitution but, more importantly, to the concentration of political power and the assumption of responsibility by the executive of the economic and political development of the nation.

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<sup>41</sup> Meyer, Lorenzo, "La crisis del presidencialismo mexicano. Recuperación espectacular y recaída estructural, 1982-1996" , *Foro Internacional*, México, núms. 143 y 144, enero-junio de 1996, pp. 19 y 20.

## Principles of the Presidential system

John Carey and Matthew Soberg do a dichotomy of the definition used to refer to presidentialism in which they note that the main principal of the presidential system is the division of powers, from which several others derive<sup>42</sup>:

- Uniqueness of the power; Executive.
- The president of the republic is simultaneously the Chief of State and Prime Minister.
- The president is elected by the people.
- The president appoints and removes the secretaries of the State.
  - o The president and the cabinet do not have to answer to Congress.
  - o Neither the president nor the cabinet can form part of Congress.
- The president can belong to a different political party than the House majority.
- The president cannot dissolve Congress.

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<sup>42</sup> SOBERG, Matthew and CAREY, John. *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*; Cambridge University Press; United Kingdom; 1992: 19-27.



The truth is that in practice the president could do it all, from giving land to farmers in need, create major industrial complexes, giving concessions to loyal groups and related characters, as well as deciding a labor dispute. The Chief Executive was omnipotent and all-embracing, he was in everything and everything was owed to him. The psychological or subjective element played a primordial role which caused the President not be questioned or criticized it, and he enjoyed unlimited legitimacy; not to mention that everything in the country begun and ended at the hands of the president.

### **Analyzing and Contrasting the Presidential and Parliamentarian Systems**

To Linz<sup>43</sup>, a parliamentary system is more efficient because it allows flexible responses to a changing situation. These flexible responses are perceived as a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister in the event of an inefficient policy direction of his government, without creating political chaos or the dissolution of parliament in case there is a lack of cooperation or positive response from the Lower Chamber. Such was the case in Germany, following the dissolution of parliament in September 2005 requested by

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<sup>43</sup> Juan J. Linz, "The perils of Presidentialism," in *Parliamentary vs. Presidential Government*, ed. Arend Lijphart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 120.

Chancellor Schroeder because of a social problem caused by the increase in unemployment rates thus calling new elections.

Linz notes that presidentialism is a zero-sum system because a president can occupy the post even after receiving less than 50% of the vote [LINZ; 1992: 40]. It is a system where the winner takes all. In the parliamentary system, in order to obtain the charge of prime minister, it must be won by a relative majority. If a single party is able to secure the majority of votes, it has opportunity to form a minority government or to share power with another party [LINZ; 1992: 124]. Thus, representation is given to a number of parties which means that the prime minister will have to be attentive to the needs of different groups in order to keep their support. That a system is considered zero sum model also implies that winners and losers are well defined by a full presidential term. The losers have to wait until a full term concludes without any access to Executive power, and perhaps without any public office.

In the case of parliamentarianism, the losing party candidate regularly becomes the leader of the opposition party, therefore, has a place in the political process [LINZ; 1992: 66]. The voter knows that those who will form the government belong to the party and in most cases are well known leaders with experience in politics. Often, the presidential candidate does not have a strong political history or a strong tune with a game, so you can be elected by other factors such as market occupying, charisma or persuasiveness.

In this system, according to Linz, candidates for prime minister have a long history because they have been part of the Parliament where decisions are made collectively allowing them to have some experience to govern.

## Chapter 3

### **Development of the Electoral Process in Belize (1984-2012)<sup>44</sup>**

The electoral contention in Belize is a process that consists of several months' work. The first step is taken by the Prime Minister by announcing the end of his term and dismemberment of Congress. Then the political parties begin the race by selecting the best suited and most capable candidates to run for Congress in each of the 31 districts that compose the country. The EBC takes part as well with the registration of the voters and the construction of the elections. The local media inform the public of the happenings and actions that are significant of the parties, the candidates and other important players in the political arena. Finally, the voters and interested public begin their participation by getting involved by choosing sides and cooperating in the campaigns and staying informed by the information transmitted through radio and television and in the last couple of years, the media also includes the use of internet as a communication platform.

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<sup>44</sup> The main purpose of this chapter will be to explain the development of the general elections in Belize specifically speaking of the two last processes held in August 2008 and March 2012. This effort does not subtract any importance from the rest of the general elections post-independence.

As we can see the process can be managed according to the electoral indicators that can be accounted for before, during and after the election proposed by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino<sup>45</sup> and adopted by the Network for Quality of Democracy in Mexico. The applicability of the following in the Belizean study is the objective of this chapter in general, that is after having explored the historical context and theoretical approach postulated in the previous chapters. Morlino and the Network consider eight dimensions to determine the democratic rating of a State: Rule of Law<sup>46</sup>; Electoral Accountability<sup>47</sup>; Agency Accountability<sup>48</sup>; Political participation<sup>49</sup>; Political Competition<sup>50</sup>; Governance and Responsiveness<sup>51</sup>; Freedom<sup>52</sup> and; Solidarity and Equality<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> DIAMOND, Larry and MORLINO, Leonardo. *The Quality of Democracy* (Working Paper); CDDRL; USA; 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Individual security and civil order; justice system; institutional capacity of public administration; corruption and anti-corruption policies and; public safety and human rights.

<sup>47</sup> Elections; plural and independent information; parties and party system; parties and citizens representation and; competition and alternation within parties.

<sup>48</sup> Relations between the legislative and executive branches; relations between the judiciary and executive; Ombudsman's Office and; state and municipality organization.

<sup>49</sup> Citizen participation in politics; elections and other forms of conventional participation; participation in political parties and civil associations and; unconventional and contentious participation.

<sup>50</sup> Competition between political and social actors; competition within parties and social organizations and; forms of competition and political change.

<sup>51</sup> Citizen perception of the legitimacy of institutions and; objective and subjective constraints on governance and responsiveness.

<sup>52</sup> Personal dignity and; civil and political rights.

## **Election Indicators of Democracy<sup>54</sup>**

For the purpose of this exercise, only the election indicators shall be considered.<sup>55</sup> They do not offer a simplified system of qualification of the Belizean government but rather try to illuminate the stage in which the elected officials and other politicians act and interact. For that reason the indicators must not be interpreted as a grading or rating system for the elected authorities. Also, this is not an attempt to compare one electoral process

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<sup>53</sup> Location and distribution of economic and social resources; discrimination; economic and social rights; assessment of public policies in education, health and poverty.

<sup>54</sup> For the purpose of this study, I shall focus on the second set of indicators proposed by the Network Quality of Democracy in Mexico: eight dimensions considered: 1. Rule of Law: 1.1. Individual security and civil order; 1.2. Justice system; 1.3. Institutional capacity of public administration; 1.4. Corruption and anti-corruption policies; 1.5. Public safety and human rights 2. Electoral Accountability: 2.1 Elections 2.2 Information plural and independent, 2.3 Parties and party system, parties and citizens Representation 2.4, 2.5 Competition and alternation within parties 3. Agency Accountability: 3.1 Relations between the legislative and executive branches, 3.2 Relations between the judiciary and executive, 3.3 Ombudsman's Office, 3.4 List state and municipality, 4. Political participation: 4.1. Citizen participation in politics 4.2. Elections and other forms of conventional participation, 4.3. Participation in political parties and associations, 4.4. Participation unconventional and contentious 5. Political Competition: 5.1. Competition between political and social actors, 5.2. Competition within parties and social organizations, 5.3. Forms of competition and political change 6. Governance and Responsiveness: 6.1 Citizen perception of the legitimacy of institutions, 6.2 objective and subjective constraints on governance and responsiveness 7. Freedom 7.1. Personal dignity, 7.2. Civil, 7.3. Political rights 8. Solidarity and Equality: 8.1. Location and distribution of economic and social resources, 8.2. Discrimination, 8.3. Economic and social rights, 8.4 Assessment of public policies in education, health and poverty.

<sup>55</sup> The task of analyzing each of the dimensions demands a greater level of analysis, not to mention that it would make this work a multi volume text, which is why I will consider it for a future project or at least hope it impulses the reader to further research on the subject.

with another. The theoretical approach tries to demonstrate that the political regime rests within the democratic corporation of Belize.

Leonardo Morlino suggests that in order to

*...[A]nalyze the quality of democracy, and to seek a “good” democracy, we must first know what democracy is. At a minimum, democracy requires: 1) universal, adult suffrage; 2) recurring, free, competitive and fair elections; 3) more than one serious political party; and 4) alternative sources of information [MORLINO; 2007: 2].*

These measurements present partial results of a complex reality. In order to grasp that complexity, various indicators were gathered, some focused on the process, others on the politics and results. Although they can give a panoramic spectrum, they offer a partial vision and do not explore nor do they exploit the measured concepts to their totality. Also, there are certain aspects that capture the singularity of an electoral process which sets it apart from all the others observed in other States. They are extremely difficult to incorporate through the quantitative dimensions and are best understood from a qualitative point of view.

The democratic index presented in this work is only a first glance, qualitative-quantitative of the social and political phenomena. The data collected and presented, that compose the democratic evaluation respond to the amplification of the indicators in Belize.

The issues of entry barriers to the electoral process and internal democracy are complex, which is why before offering a comprehensive evaluation, it is necessary to obtain more information than is currently available for independent candidates, party formation, the procedures followed by them to choose their candidates, the conditions under which competing candidates within parties and control forms of internal elections.

An important issue that affects electoral competition is the lack of open political room for women by reserving places quotas on party lists for Parliament. In the last decade, many countries in the region have adopted such legislation. Rohini Pande and Deanna Ford in a report published by the World Bank mention that,

*More than half of the countries in the world have implemented some type of political quota, mostly in the last twenty years. They have led to a dramatic increase in female leaders across the globe. The 1995 UN Beijing Conference on Women went a step further, by providing an impetus for quota policies by calling for governments to “ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions.” ...Given this global environment, political quotas*



*began to emerge as a viable and popular policy option in countries across the world.* [PANDE & FORD; 2011: 8]

Between 1991 and 2003, eleven of eighteen Latin American countries have introduced quota laws that usually require between 20 and 40 percent of places in the parliamentary party lists are assigned to women.<sup>56</sup> This mechanism is a significant improvement since it expresses a formal recognition of the need to create greater opportunities for the inclusion of women. It is, however, just an initial step in the treatment of barriers that still prohibit women compete on a leveled playing field.

It is important to observe the characteristics of the people and the parties that win the elections and as consequence, obtain official public posts. Pertaining to the role of women in power, the present amount has increased when compared with the previous processes. According to the WIProject in Belize, the number of women that have risen to power has been rather limited. In other words, since 1984 until 2008, there have only been five female ministers.

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<sup>56</sup> In Latin America, quota schemes have been on the rise since the early 1990s, and have mainly taken the form of legislated candidate quotas. First adopted by Argentina in 1991, this type of quota has since been implemented in ten other Latin American countries. The quota adoption process was facilitated by the consolidation of democracy in the 1980s, which fostered the emergence of women's associations and other civil rights groups. [Ballington, J., Ed. *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; 2003]

The number grew drastically in the 2012 administration if compared with the previous periods. There was one female Representative of the PUP, Dolores Balderamos from the Belize Rural South Division, and two Ministers appointed by the Prime Minister, Senator Joy Grant, appointed Minister of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities and Senator Liselle Allamilla was sworn in as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development.

**Table 4. Women in Power**

<b>Female Ministers in Belize 1984-2008</b>	
1984 – 1989	No woman minister
1989 – 1993	No woman minister
1993 – 1998	Hon. Faith Babb (Minister of State)
1998 – 2003	Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia (Minister)
2000 – 2003	Hon. Ana Patty Arceo (Minister of State)
2003 – 2008	Hon. Sylvia Flores (Minister)
2007 – 2008	Sen. The Hon. Lisa Shoman (Minister)
2008	(No woman minister)
2012	Hon. Dolores Balderamos (PUP Representative); Hon. Senator Joy Grant (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology and Public Utilities); Hon. Senator Liselle Allamilla (Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development)

Source: WIPProject; <http://www.nationalwomenscommission.org/WIPProject.htm>. 2008; <http://www.belize.gov.bz/ct.asp?xItem=684&ctNode=570&mp=27>.

Another important issue that affects electoral competition in Belize is the rules for political funding. This theme has a growing impact on the nature of electoral competition because it has strong influence on whether elections are free and fair, giving everyone an equal opportunity to compete. To ensure that the money does not become a factor that distorts the electoral process, some countries rely on public financing of the election campaign, paying for votes cast or facilitating access to the media, television substantially. Most countries use a mixed system of funding, but the trend is toward greater control, while still difficult implementation. Clyde Wilcox, a professor from Georgetown University explains how,

*In the U.S. today, there are wide-ranging and often angry debates about almost every issue of campaign finance regulation. Some call for stricter limits on contributions and for bans on some kinds of large contributions to parties, while others would eliminate all limits on contributions... Some advocate public subsidies for candidates – free or cheap media, or a direct public grant – while others favor abandoning the current limited system of public funding of presidential elections. Some would ban certain types of advertising made before elections, others argue that no spending can be limited because it is free speech [WILCOX; 2001: 1].*

This is also a worry that haunts Belizean electoral policy and the Representation of the People Act. Party sympathizers from both sides argue that since the regulation of campaign financing is still a dream, both sides of the spectrum will continue to seek out capital within and outside of the Belizean territory.

A key issue with the lack of control on campaign funding is the control of corruption within the process. The limited information available makes it difficult to know how much capital is entering the parties, but provides some evidence on the severity of the problem. A report delivered by the OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy in collaboration with International IDEA and SPEAR says that

*While political parties in Belize are internally well organized there are no external or legal regulations... [That require them] to be registered entities or to adhere to any regulations. The area of campaign financing is seriously underdeveloped... [And a] financing legislation simply does not exist, even though partisan politics and political campaigns are becoming increasingly expensive [WESTERMAN; 2004:2].*

Over the course of the last couple of years, the people of Belize have come to recognize that their elected officials received funding from the private sector and international investors through media exposure in the form of papers, radio, talk shows and the internet. The unofficial disclosure of the funding received by the parties can be attributed

to the fact that, as the OAS-IDEA-SPEAR report mentions, Belize *is such a small, close society* which makes it difficult to keep that information in secrecy.

*Unregulated campaign contributions enable donors to buy favors and influence. The utilization of the patron-client relationship by political parties is one way political parties appease the general electorate. Large contributors tend to contribute only to the two major political parties* [WESTERMAN; 2004:2].

The type of funding or donations the parties obtain from the public and private sectors can vary from cash donations to logistical support. In 2008, Zenaida Moya, UDP candidate for the municipal elections recognized that the people were showing their approval of her candidacy by offering money donations as well as banners, vehicles and similar funding<sup>57</sup>. The OAS-IDEA-SPEAR report also highlights the fact that, the high costs of campaigning and the inability to access low cost or no cost media, mainly television and newspapers, the two main parties seek financing inside and out of Belize emphasizing, the financial dominance of the two major parties and the virtual lack of funds for third parties and independent candidates who find it impossible to mount credible campaigns, much less win an election or even a single seat.

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<sup>57</sup> Channel 7. *Zenaida Moya Powered by People or Cash?* posted on October 7, 2008. <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=12341&frmsrch=1>.

Also, the choice of candidates has been a selective process that sends the dominating parties into a spiral in which possible aspirants must invest their time and money in showing that they have the guns needed to beat the *other* party. This has not always been the case; Myrtle Palacio writes that,

*Belize's political culture started with its first settlers, the Buccaneers, around the middle of the 17th century...Belize was therefore governed first by the Settlers who owned the land, then the Colonial Office through the Superintendent, and later the Governor... [Those] Leaders who formed the Legislative Bodies called, Meetings, Assemblies, and Councils were primarily nominated, selected, or even handpicked. Later on when the citizens were allowed to vote, only a few persons responded. The majority could not vote, could not run for office, primarily due to the stringent eligibility requirements for voting [PALACIO; 2004: 10].*

The political stage in British Honduras of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries gave the settlers the freedom to take control with the idea of controlling the land and keeping the Spanish out of the territory, but with the turn of the XX century, the economic situation and labor problems incited the locals to look for self-government instead of having foreigners come from the nearby Caribbean islands and taking over the coveted power positions.

With the election of Legislators, came the caucuses and national party conventions that permitted the party sympathizers to hand pick the best suited to run for office. That is, the party leaders were being chosen to take political control of their organizations and the country's economic, political and administrative affairs as well.

### **Accountability of the Parliamentary Electoral Processes in Belize**

The general elections are under the supervision of the Election Management Body composed by the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Elections and Boundaries Department, and other international surveillance agencies; the Organization of American States, CARICOM, and the Commonwealth Secretariat Expert Team, among others also take part in the observational happenings during Election Day. Their work is to secure the grounds to make sure that the procedure is conducted without any wrongdoings or events that might be interpreted as such before during and after the electoral rounds have passed.

*The two Election Management Bodies in Belize, which are entrusted with the responsibility to carry out vital functions as it relates to elections and are empowered by law to execute them to ensure free and fair elections, are the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) and the Elections*

*and Boundaries Department. The Department is responsible for the day to day electoral management on behalf of the EBC... These bodies are established and should operate in a manner that ensures the independent and impartial administration of elections. The EBD and the EBC must therefore be impartial and independent of government or other influences. This is a critical area, as the election administration machinery makes and implements important decisions that can influence the outcome of the elections...The Elections and Boundaries Department (EBD)... It operates within the realms of the Public Service and is thus guided by its rules, regulations policies and procedures. Additionally, the Department operates, by law, according to Legislations contained in the Substantive Laws of Belize, specifically the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) [MEIGHAN; 2003: 2].*

Taking the previous in consideration, in the 2003 process, several mistakes were observed by the EMB, mainly with the preparation given to the personnel in charge of the elections. The EBC pronounced that these procedural errors are caused due to the lack of knowledge of the Representation of the People Act (ROPA), the Belizean elections' playbook. The *STATUS OF THE EBC DATABASE SYSTEM TO DECEMBER 2003* presented by the Elections and Boundaries Department (2004) also points out



that, human error such as placing electors in the wrong polling areas, and poor filing strategies in the manual system. In the case of the filing strategies, the practice was that each District Office maintained its own method of filing. When information was changed, as in a modifying names or addresses, this often went unreported to the Records Section of the Central Office and vice versa. Also the informal organization allowed for entry of names into the electronic system via telephone from District Offices to the Data Entry Unit without providing proof.

Also new to the political scenario in Belize was the introduction of election observation and scrutinizing. Myrtle Palacio articulates how between 2003 and 2008, call-in talk shows with open content and topics were abundant permitting the major contenders to initiate a pre-electoral quarrel in open air waves flooded by calls in support of one side or the other thanks to the supply of prepaid phone cards provided by the parties to the sympathizers [PALACIO; 2012: 21].

During this time of political turmoil, the UDP based their campaign under the accusations of corruption, land distribution and a general need for change of the government structure and leadership. Mismanagement of the Ministry of Finance by Ralph Fonseca and the lack of action from the Prime Minister Said Musa sent the wrong message to the Belizean people, especially after facing several crises throughout his

Prime Ministerial term<sup>58</sup>. The opposition, with Dean Barrow at the helm, were targeting Ralph Fonseca, Mark Espat and Cordel Hyde as the Ministers responsible for the economic crisis that Belize was facing between 2003 and 2008.

During this electoral process, the EBC had to engage two events, the general elections and the referendum seeking the opinion on whether the Senate should be elected as well, not to mention that Ruth Meighan was appointed Chief Elections Officer on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007. This appointment meant that the EBC would have to start planning the upcoming elections on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 and at the same time, get the newly appointed staff familiarized with the procedures. In the General Elections and Referendum Report, Meighan explains how, the CEO's priorities were to prepare a

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<sup>58</sup> There were at times several threats from within from Cabinet members looking to resign if something was not done to give solution to the Ministry of Finance's ordeals ("7 Cabinet Ministers Threaten to Resign" posted on August 12, 2004 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=6765&frmsrch=1>; "Musa on Pending Sale of Intelco to Prosser" posted on August 3, 2004 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=1128&frmsrch=1>; Barrow expects big crowd at protest posted on August 27, 2004 in <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/12898>; House Debates \$136 million Bond posted on February 21, 2005 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=2002>; "5 Million n Debt Relief from U.K." posted on August 19, 2005 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=3512>; "PUP looks for bounce from a rousing convention" posted on February 21, 2005 in <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/11987>. These are just a few articles in which the media displays the distrust the people of Belize had on Said Musa's administration.

budget for the 08 elections and employing temporary staff and additional support for the Central and regional Offices.

*Additionally the decision was made by the Director, Office of Governance to have other support staff from the Office of Governance. These officers were posted in early January of 2008 and included – (2) Senior Officers, (1) Secretary I and (1) Second Class Clerk [MEIGHAN; 2008: 3].*

Given that the Commission was ill prepared to handle the task, the Department was given receiving orders straight from the Office of Governance,

*On the whole aspect of electoral management leading up to the Election Day [MEIGHAN; 2008: 3].*

The report presented by Meighan mentions that the Commission had their first meeting, with the aim of exposing the Election Plan which included a tentative list of Returning Officers and Election Clerks on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The meeting also looked to give the Commissioners the list of Nomination Stations and a Breakdown of Polling Stations. Two more meetings were later held in which the Department Staff was keeping the Commission updated on the preparations leading up to the February 7<sup>th</sup> General Elections.

Prior to the elections, the EBC faced several challenges. First was the extra ballots printed which were not handed over to Ms. Meighan by Print Belize Ltd [MEIGHAN; 2008: 6]. The ballots were later destroyed under the supervision of EBC staff member Josephine Tamai. Another issue the Election Management Body had to face was the lack of funds and proper planning before the elections looking to secure impartiality, efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism.

Due to the lack of time between the assignment of CEO and Election Day and short experience in budget planning and preparation, a budget had to be prepared and submitted for approval by the Ministry of Finance having as a result receiving a lesser budget than the one submitted. Voter registration and voter lists gave way to suspicions of illicit and extemporal electoral registration. Jules Vasquez of *Channel 7*<sup>59</sup> estimated that on January 10<sup>th</sup>, there were approximately three thousand new Belizeans that would be sworn in before the month ended and of which two thousand first time voters were waiting to be registered looking to express their suffrage right in the 2008 elections. This action in terms of work overwhelmed the EMB.

On the same topic, Myrtle Palacio states that the recruitment process and training program elaborated to prepare the new Election Workers was conducted under

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<sup>59</sup> *The Crush to Beat 7 pm Voter Registration Deadline*, posted on January 10, 2008 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=10065&frmsrch=1>.

*tremendous hardships* [PALACIO; 2010: 12]. In an interview offered to Cannel 7 News<sup>60</sup>, Ms. Meighan said that the EBC,

*"...are very much prepared in terms of the general elections. [The] major concern is to make sure that we have an accurate and credible voter's list...and so now we are going through the final phase of the January registration and that should be ready by the end of January... We are actually very much prepared as far as prepared for that election."*

According to the 2008 EBC Report, on Election Day, the EMB had to manage the reception of information and statistics on the amount of voters that submitted their ballots on an hourly basis. The Body also had to provide administrative support to election workers and general public. Ruth Meighan also expresses certain concern in her report about possible wrong-doings and non-consequential behavior by some of the politicians and voters at the Polling Stations.

*However the Returning Officers and their workers were professional in performing their duties and at the close of the polls, there were no reports*

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<sup>60</sup> "Elections & Boundaries Dept. Prepared for Feb. 7th Election" posted on January 19, 2008 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=9871&frmsrch=1>.

*of violence... There were reports of an elector voting in the name of another* [MEIGHAN; 2008: 8].

The entire process was haunted by simple mistakes that demonstrated the lack of preparedness by the Elections Officers such as the fact that,

*There were reports that individuals from the United States Embassy were posing as Observers and because of lack of proper training and preparation these people were allowed to enter into some of the Polling Stations* [MEIGHAN; 2008: 9].

After the Polling Stations closed, the UDP won 25 of the 31 seats in contest. The results were inaccurate at times because the personnel at Netkom Solutions in charge of posting them live-time were pulled off the job early the following morning. In the end, the EBC had to do several fixtures to the final count with the help of Netkom.

The Commonwealth Expert Team invited by the government of Belize to observe the process found no problems with the 2008 elections and declared a credible process, including that, *up to the time of writing this report we have heard no complaint that the conduct of the election affected the results* [KNIGHT, ESHUN-BAIDEN, KNIGHT, ESHUN-BAIDEN, PATTERSON; 2008: 16]. However the Expert Team did make several recommendations in which the following excel:

- *To work towards a single independent election management body which reports directly to Parliament and is autonomous from any government department.*
- *It is recommended that enabling mechanisms should be used to overcome the barriers to women's participation, change perceptions and increase women's participation as candidates. A number of models to achieve this can be found in Commonwealth countries.*
- *It is recommended that for transparency of the electoral process, disclosure of funding and expenditure on campaigns should be filed with the relevant Election Management Body and made publicly available.*

These recommendations grasp the problematic that democracy faces. Having a Commission and a Department complicates and at times interferes in the electoral process since according to Section 88 of the Constitution of Belize the Department is in charge of the administrative labor and voter education while the Commission is in charge of the direction and supervision of the registration of voters and of conducting the elections at any level. These two bodies overlap their own work as seen in the dilemma caused previous to the 2008 elections. The Election Management Body should not be a two headed monster, with each wanting to go in separate directions, but rather should work organically and systematically to strengthen the activity of the institution as an

independent and sovereign body to whom the CEO and the rest of the Department and Commission staff should report.

The role of women needs to become a major point of negotiation for the female leaders in Belize. This is not just a delicate subject pertaining to women's rights; it has to be seen as a declaration of human rights in which the aim should be to include all Belizeans into the game of power. Groups such as the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR) and Women's Issues Network (WIN-Belize) promote the voter education and research to promote the empowerment of women in Belize.

Since the subject of campaign financing has been analyzed above, this paragraph shall be brief. The exchange of political favors for funds to inject into the campaign of any aspiring candidate makes it simple for not only national businessmen to get involved but it also attracts the attention of internationals. Having total freedom, due to the lack of regulation to insure as much capital as possible into a campaign, candidates will travel abroad in search of private funding. In 1979, a group of UDP sympathizers organized a tour across the US looking for support in the form of dollars under the argument that the PUP was establishing close relations with communist States. This type of propaganda is



not banned but it is not prohibited by the ROPA and Section 88 of the Belizean Constitution.<sup>61</sup>

The media's role turned out to be crucial during the elections. The Commonwealth's Report states that the campaign stage, especially in the end, was healthy and there was a very visible freedom of speech *as the parties fearlessly put forward their campaign platforms* [KNIGHT, ESHUN-BAIDEN, PATTERSON; 2008: 12].

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<sup>61</sup> The SPEAR Report on Campaign Financing in Belize of 2004, explains in a detailed manner that, "A public or joint campaign financing system does not exist in Belize. Campaign financing in Belize is a private undertaking of political parties and as such is unregulated territory. Therefore, there are no binding requirements for distribution of resources, or prohibitions and limits on financing. Ostensibly, political parties that are able to amass a significant campaign war chest have a major advantage. The direct consequence of this arrangement is that third parties and independent candidates are not able to compete fairly and equitably in the electoral process. This further entrenches the two major political parties, and effectively limits the viable choices open to voters. Lack of funding to sustain a campaign, especially in a general election, is one reason independent and third party candidates have been consistently unsuccessful at the polls. A system of public financing or joint campaign there in Belize. Campaign financing in Belize is a private company of political parties and, as such, is an unregulated territory. Therefore, there is no mandatory requirement for the distribution of resources, or the prohibitions and limits on funding. Apparently, the political parties are able to accumulate a substantial campaign war chest has a great advantage. The direct consequence of this arrangement is that the third party and independent candidates can not compete on a fair and equitable electoral process. This further strengthens the two major political parties, and effectively limits the viable options open to voters. Lack of funds to support a campaign, especially in a general election, is one of the independent candidates and third reasons were always unsuccessful at the polls."

The main newspapers had full coverage of the daily political events leading to the elections and although they are privately owned, the party favoritism was clear.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Channel 7, Channel 5, CTV3 and Wave TV are the main broadcasters available that offer serious programming that critiques and scrutinizes the political scenario and its relevant players. As for radio coverage, Belize has several small radio stations that have limited radius coverage but there are also radio stations such as Stereo Amor, Love FM, Wave Radio, KREM, People's Radio, Positive Vibes, Fiesta FM, among others that have national coverage.<sup>63</sup>

The journals covered with due freedom of speech issues such as the Universal debt payment<sup>64</sup>, Superbond, Social Security, Finances and public safety, but also informed about other matters like the problems within the PUP Cabinet, the ill made decisions by Ministers and including concerns pertaining to the Prime Minister. The problem the media in Belize faces is the lack of investigation and follow-through in the news. The

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<sup>62</sup> PUP and UDP have their own media duopoly. The first have The Belize Times while the UDP has its loyal support from The Guardian.

<sup>63</sup> In 1989, there was only one radio station, Radio Belize. The following year, KREM Radio was born in Belize City. KREM Radio was Amandala's voice which gave a voice to the people of the city. In 1993, Love FM joined the airwaves in the northern part of Belize. Radio Belize closed in 1998 which is also when the same year that Congress amended the Broadcasting and Television Act allowing the political parties private permits to start their own radio stations. This was a significant move mainly because it facilitated the parties hiring air space and special programming to impulse the candidates' image.

<sup>64</sup> *Musa's Executive Obfuscations Date Back to September 07* posted on March 13, 2008 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=10712&frmsrch=1>.

news broadcasts from the papers and television follow certain leads that are important but fail to investigate the matter on a profound level. The transparency issue is not a concern since the national archives are open for anyone to visit and scrutinize any material available but there just is not a need from the media to continue on the offensive as soon as another event overlaps the last.

The importance of the media in the 2008 elections was their job in voter education. The fourth power acquired a significant role in inciting people to go out and vote. Newspapers, radio stations and television broadcasters from Wave Radio, The Guardian, The Belize Times, Vibes Radio and TV were airing shows dedicated to the electoral process and the candidates' daily activity. The excess of exposure and incessant time the parties were acquiring also gave way for personal attacks on both sides mainly criticizing the personal lives of candidates instead of the campaign, or lack of, their objectives of professional career.<sup>65</sup> This dirty war was directed mainly at government officials such as the Prime Minister Said Musa being incarcerated and John Briceño's association with drugs.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Morning news host and reporter for Love FM and Stereo Amor, Arthur Cantu granted an interview in March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in which he kindly explained the media's role in the 2008 election process.

<sup>66</sup> Extracted from Arthur Cantu's interview; also see *Blast from the past! When Briceño was a drug dealer* posted on 02 June 2011 in

Along with the television, radio and newspaper exposure the parties gave to their candidates, the application of propagandistic music was applied by both the PUP and UDP in order to attract and keep their nominees in the mind of the voters. Regional musical groups such as Super G, were hired by the PUP to fix their known *punta* songs in order to include a pro People's United Party message.

The EMB should be setting limits and regulating the amount of air time the political parties should be capable of acquiring but because this action is not contemplated within the Belizean Constitution or in the Representation of the People Act, the political organizations are able to purchase as much time as desired during election period. The Broadcasting and Television Act – Chapter 227, Section 5<sup>67</sup> Radio and Television Licenses is composed in an ambiguous manner which allows the parties interested in obtaining a permit. Section 10 mentions the offenses a person or persons face if they

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[http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3282:blast-from-the-past-when-briceno-was-a-drug-dealer&catid=53:headlines](http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3282:blast-from-the-past-when-briceno-was-a-drug-dealer&catid=53:headlines).

<sup>67</sup> The section 5.-(1), related to the granting of licenses only stipulates the following: *No person shall establish or operate any radio or television station or use any apparatus or installation for the purposes of broadcasting except under and in accordance with a licence issued to him by the Minister and upon payment of such fee as the Minister prescribes.* Section 9.-(1)(g)(h) regulates the *allocation of time by licensees to the broadcasting and televising of matters of religious, political or industrial controversy and the ensuring of the preservation of due impartiality in programmes relating to such matters; [and] the allocation of time by licensees to the broadcasting and televising of matters of an educational, cultural, sporting or scientific nature.*

run an unlicensed station and it does not state any matter beyond those pertaining to the running of a broadcast signal whether it be radio or television.

The EBC should regulate both quantity and quality of the content expressed on the daily papers as well as in the airwaves. The material that is aired and printed should be monitored and approved by the Commission and for those who do not comply, a penalty should be applicable. It is for this and many other reasons that the Commission needs to establish a rule book in which all specifications pertaining to political parties and electoral procedures. Mexico's Federal Institute of Elections operates under the Código Federal de Instituciones y Procesos Electorales (COFIPE)<sup>68</sup>. The purpose of the COFIPE is to ensure a clean, transparent and fair electoral process to which all parties and candidates must abide by. A similar regulator in Belize could be a stepping stone to an autonomous Election Management Body.<sup>69</sup>

## **Party Participation and Citizenry**

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<sup>68</sup> This is the bible for holding elections and conducting electoral processes at any level in Mexico. The advantage of this codebook is that it is based on a system of sticks and carrots which allows it to be the judge and jury of electoral penalizations.

<sup>69</sup> I will not go into depth on this matter given that this subject leads into another territory for which time is needed in order to give it its deserved attention.

Although abstentionism is not a regional problem, some countries in Latin America, taking the Mexican example as the main example for instance, tend to show the disapproval of the contenders by simply not showing up to exercise their suffrage on election day. In fact, this past election, 37 percent of Mexicans eligible to vote decided to ignore that right.<sup>70</sup>

The Belizean case is an example of citizen participation having voter participation surpassing the 70 percent margin (see table). The first election after independence was held on December 14, 1984. A total of 64,441 electors were registered and 49,311 electors representing 74.9% of total electors went to the polls. The voters gave the majority vote to the UDP and 21 House seats out of the 28 in contest. In 1989, the totality of voters registered was of 80,544 with a turnout of 58,475; 98,371 registered in 1993 and 70,434 voted that year. The amount of voters grew for the 1998 process to a total of 94,173 and 85,076 voted, making it the highest voter participation in Belizean history. The 2003 election saw a decrease in voter turnout in proportion but in real numbers saw an increase of 32,029 new entries in the voter registration log, which showed an increase of 34 percent but only 79.48 percent of the capable did.

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<sup>70</sup> *Siete datos que hicieron históricas estas elecciones* posted July 5th, 2012 in <http://m.cnnmexico.com/nacional/2012/07/05/participacion-electoral&next=1>.

The Commonwealth Expert Team in their report to the Secretary General wrote that during the PUP government of 2003-2008,

*Has been plagued by accusations of corruption and fiscal mismanagement and came under increasing pressure in the face of large budget deficits, and a dramatically increasing national debt...Civil unrest broke out in the capital city of Belmopan during mid-January 2005 and continued sporadically for several months. The initial unrest was provoked by the release of a national budget with significant tax increases.*

*At the municipal Election held in March 2006, the PUP lost heavily winning only three of the available 67 seats. The UDP won the remaining 64 despite two other parties and four independent candidates having contested [KNIGHT, ESHUN-BAIDEN, PATTERSON; 2008: 7].*

By 2008, after having seen how the PUP was incongruent in their policy practice and application, the EBC posted a total of 156,993 voters of which 76.63 voted. Of that 76.63 percent of people that did vote, 56.73 percent did it support of the UDP, ending with the PUP's ten year run in power.

**Table 5. Election Results from 1984-2012**

Year	Total of	% of growth	Voter	Winning	Prime Minister
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	<b>electorate</b>	<b>since last process</b>	<b>turnout</b>	<b>party</b>	
<b>1984</b>	64,439	28.6	74.9	UDP	Manuel Esquivel
<b>1989</b>	80,544	25.0	72.6	PUP	George Price
<b>1993</b>	98,371	22.1	71.6	UDP	Manuel Esquivel
<b>1998</b>	94,173	-4.3	90.34	PUP	Said Musa
<b>2003</b>	126,202	34.0	79.48	PUP	Said Musa
<b>2008</b>	156,993	24.4	76.63	UDP	Dean Barrow
<b>2012</b>	178,054	11.8	73.18	UDP	Dean Barrow

Source. Elisabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffman. AFRODESC- Working Paper No. 5. 2009; Elections and Boundaries Commission, 2012.

Hence, from 1984 to 2003, none of the parties had been able to ensure back to back victories at the voting polls. It was not until March 2003 that for the first time since becoming an independent country that one of the major parties achieved to secure a second consecutive term when they took 22 seats to the UDP's seven with 53% of the vote.

Shortly before the 2008 Election the Government announced that, in addition to the General Election ballot, Belizeans would be given the opportunity to vote in a referendum on whether the Senate should become an elected body. The introduction of the referendum was opposed by the UDP who were vocal in urging their supporters to ignore the referendum ballot entirely on polling day. The addition of the referendum also



added a new dimension to previously well-established and understood voting procedures which many felt would be problematic. For example, the UDP, while having called for an elected Senate, felt that the proposal needed further discussion as to the form and content.

### **The other citizens and their participation**

The topic of inclusion of all Belizean citizens is a sensitive subject due to the fact that while attempting to attract a higher number of voters, both parties have attempted to attract the migrant vote. Given the geographical fact that Belize is a nation surrounded by countries that went a period of internal conflict, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala for instance, there was an influx of people throughout the late 1980s and 1990s primarily looking for refuge<sup>71</sup>. Over the years, thousands of Central Americans as well as Asian nationals have made Belize their home. Some seek shelter from war, others, more recently, look to improve their income and economic situation but what the

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<sup>71</sup> For more information on Central American mobilization to Belize, see ROBINSON, St. John. *Peopling Belize. Chapters in migration*. Belize City: National Institute of Culture and History, Institute of Social and Cultural Research; 2006. SEITZ, Karl S. *Migration, demographic change, and the enigma of identity in Belize*. M.A.: Arizona State University; 2005.

reason, these naturalized Belizeans have become an important ingredient in Belizean politics.

In 1993, a group of Central American refugees were given the Belizean citizenship and registered to vote through an amnesty sponsored by the PUP government going against the Constitution and Electoral law<sup>72</sup>. The objective was to acquire a significant number of voters, almost 500 new voters pulling towards the opposition at that time. The result was the return of the People's United Party to power.<sup>73</sup>

On Election Day 2012, the migrant community turned up to vote in a steady wave of support towards both parties. According to the Representation of the People Act, Part II, Article 5,

*Every person who on the date of his application to be registered-*

*a. is 18 years of age or over; and*

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<sup>72</sup> *The Truth - about the nationalization process* posted on January 19, 2012 in [http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4278:the-truth-about-the-nationalization-process&catid=54:highlight](http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4278:the-truth-about-the-nationalization-process&catid=54:highlight)

<sup>73</sup> The Central American community in Belize is spread throughout the country but tend to have higher numbers in the Corozal and Orange Districts in the north and Cayo District in the West. They have a strong base formed in the capital and in Belize City as well.

*b. is a British subject who has ordinarily resided in Belize for a period of not less than twelve months immediately preceding that date; or who is domiciled in Belize and is ordinarily resident therein on that date; and*

*c. is resident for a period of not less than two months immediately preceding that date in the electoral division in which he seeks registration, shall, unless otherwise disqualified, have the right to vote at an election of a divisional representative for that electoral division...*

The law is very clear on who is eligible to vote. The person registered must be an adult with a Belizean address, and residing in the country for at least 60 days prior to the registration period. The newly registered Belizeans, of Central American and Asian descent, had to prove being in Belize at least two months after naturalization in order to be eligible voters. Looking to pull support towards the UDP side, in January 2012, there were 8,000 new registered voters [Interview with M. Palacio, April, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012].<sup>74</sup>

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74 Consider also that in 1993 there was an investigation on how nationality was being granted under the PUP. The report was done by the Consortium of Non-Governmental Organizations on the granting of Belizean nationality and was submitted to the citizens of Belize on the 6th of October 1993. On page 12 under the heading: Ministerial Intervention the report states that, "the review of 83 applications specifically selected from the 1992 to 1993 period demonstrated that the files were generally incomplete. Medical and

## Competency and Alternation within the Parties

Despite the *unsportsmanlike* usage of the media, party machinery and electorate, the political system in Belize has experienced periods of metamorphosis within the parties allowing them to experience transitional rejuvenations. In order to keep the parties up-to-date, their leaders must renew their policies, political postures and philosophy according to the context of the country. Supporting party pronouncements that become obsolete is a dangerous practice given that the party's well being depends on what the public opinion is like. Therefore, incorporating new faces, savvy leaders with a different perspective, that does not invalidate the previous, allows the public in general to form an opinion on

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security checks, Solicitor General vetting and Oaths of Allegiance were frequently omitted. This can be attributed in large part to a significant increase in political intervention. In the nationality granting process, frequent memoranda from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs directed the Department of Immigration to waive requirements to accommodate a larger number of applicants within shorter time periods as the 1993 elections came closer...The Report continues: "*Political intervention directly from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first instance and later on from his Permanent Secretary and other officers resulted in the improper documentation of nationality files. Political interference became so institutionalized that the Minister no longer sent personal messages 'in confidence' to the Department of Immigration but the Ministry staff began sending directives, which applied to large number of applicants.*" In the end a total of 2,177 persons were nationalized and of those only 953 registered to vote. So the question needs to be asked, are the people being served by the UDP going to register to vote? There is no better teacher than history. [http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=4278:the-truth-about-the-nationalization-process&catid=54:highlight] [1,098 Got Citizenship in January posted in January 20, 2012 in http://amandala.com.bz/news/1098-got-citizenship-in-january/]

whether this fresh batch of PUP and UDP supporters will in fact be able to negotiate not only with each other but also have enough preparation to face the international spectators and participants pertaining to Belizean issues.

### **2012 Electoral Process**

This year elections were held more than a year earlier than the law demands, but it is the Prime Minister who decides when dissolution of Congress is needed and therefore sought out to hold them on March 7, 2012. Unpopular and weak opposition united with leadership problems were key factors toward the summons made by the Prime Minister, Dean Barrow, of the elections.

The PUP was going through an internal restructuring process in which the new party leaders were looking for a fresh start separating themselves from past leaders with a present negative image. In 2009, John Briceno surged as the leader of the rejuvenated PUP and then again in October 2011 saw a shift in the top post of the party with Francis Fonseca and he helm.<sup>75</sup> With the new institutional administration came the challenge of unity and fixing the party's financial problems. The main objective was taking as many

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<sup>75</sup> *Francis Fonseca endorsed as P.U.P. leader* posted on Oct 31, 2011 in <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/62634>

seats as possible from the UDP but in order to do so, familiar faces such as Said Musa and Mark Espat had to step aside given that they decreased the party's popularity and credibility. Briceno and Fonseca saw the month of October 2011 as the perfect moment to unite the party and begin their climb back to the electoral establishing a frontal campaign against the Government of Belize and specifically against the Prime Minister, Dean Barrow, and his party.

On the other side, social problems such as crime, social security and lack of job opportunities and fair wages were the outcries of the Belizean people<sup>76</sup>. Channel 7 made a scrutinizing analysis of what affected Belize in 2011 and would also become lighter fluid that would push the nation towards a shift in power;

*...2011 has been a very active year for the news - probably the most active since the turbulent 2005. Just looking at the broad outline - it was the year that saw Government take over BEL, and then lose BTL just a few days later, only to take it back just hours later...It was also the year that saw the uproar over the ninth amendment... That one is done and now the battle is about UNIBAM and Belize's buggery laws... [A]t the state and judicial level: in May and June there were the fiery bus protests and the*

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<sup>76</sup> *Unpopular UDP* posted on March 16, 2012 in <http://www.belize-times.bz/2012/03/16/unpopular-udp/>

*Chetumal Street South Squatters. And who could forget the butane issue, or the fake land documents issue, those mystery PUP millionaires, and a new leader of the opposition.*<sup>77</sup>

Other issues that turned political were the

Meanwhile, *The Guardian*, UDP promoter, printed a similar note, *Year in Review 2011*, in which it highlights the Prime Minister's achievements. The sugar cane industry rescue, a tax break on fuels, collaboration with the Guatemalan government to upgrade the road from Big Falls Village in the Toledo district to the Belize/Guatemala Border at Jalacte, nationalization of Belize Electrical Limited (BEL) and of BTL, the 9<sup>th</sup> Amendment, along with loans to save the Sugar Industry and pay off the Universal debt from the Bank of Belize and other international sources<sup>78</sup>.

Nevertheless the Honorable Prime Minister Dean Barrow looked to take advantage of the batch of new Belizeans who had been sworn in the last couple of years and as most

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<sup>77</sup> *The Images of 2011* posted on December 30, 2011 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=21408&frmsrch=1>.

<sup>78</sup> *Year in Review* posted on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in [http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4248:year-in-review-2011&catid=40:politics&Itemid=90](http://www.guardian.bz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4248:year-in-review-2011&catid=40:politics&Itemid=90).

recently in January of 2012<sup>79</sup> combined with the internal PUP problems. As a counter attack against the registration and approval of new voters, representatives from the Vision Inspires by the People and People's National Party demanded that the new Belizeans be denied the right to vote shielding their demand behind the Statutory Instrument 11 of 1997 which stipulates that the voters' list be cleansed and the re-registration of the electorate.<sup>80</sup> Their demands were not met and so they would push to pressure the international organisms in charge of monitoring the elections.

During the electoral process of March 7th, 2012, the public of Belize were ready for the long day that awaited them.

A day before the elections were held, Frank Almaguer, Head of OAS Observer Team to Belize, had a team of 22 people ready to cover the process an all 31 districts. He had positive feedback on the preparation by the EBC which he described as follows;

*All of the information, in terms of the mechanics, are all in place, or are getting in place. We know that the voting places are ready to be opened tomorrow morning, as we understand it. ...In the course of the day, we'll*

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<sup>79</sup> *GOB's mass citizenship, rapid registration under fire!* posted in January 20, 2012 on <http://www.belize-times.bz/2012/01/20/gob%E2%80%99s-mass-citizenship-rapid-registration-under-fire/>.

<sup>80</sup> *VIP AND PNP: Remove Naturalized Belizeans off Voters' List* posted on January 24, 2012 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=21581&frmsrch=1>.



*have a pretty good understanding of the process as it is taking place, and of course, we will remain in the various communities until the last vote is counted... There are always issues that come up as one begins to understand the process.*<sup>81</sup>

This was the first electoral round that the OAS observes in Belize and therefore the experience was new-fangled. The team had to get acquainted with the political system, the EMB, the procedure and voter turnout. As a member of the OAS, Belize is a State committed to uphold democratic principles in which clean and fair elections are basic. Furthermore Almaguer included that,

*Elections are a vital part of that process, and we expect - we assume - that elections are competitive - that is that they are 2 or more candidates - that they are open - that is that all the voters can vote - that they are fair - that it's an opportunity to votes to be counted objectively, and in end, for the process to lead to the formation of a government elected by the citizens.*

On Election Day, 73 per cent of the Belizeans registered to vote, 130,303 of 178,054, turned up to the voting stations in the 31 districts of Belize which meant a full renewal of

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<sup>81</sup> *OAS Observer Team Ready To Go* posted on March 6, 2012 in <http://www.7newsbelize.com/printstory.php?func=print&nid=21934>.

Parliament. There were a total of 76 candidates, 73 men and three women, competing for the 31 available seats. Several constituencies showed had independent and local third parties competing with the UDP and PUP. Most of these contests involving three of four candidates were the electoral divisions in Belize City rural area; Rural South had four representative aspirants, while Belize Rural North and Rural Central presented three each. Cayo North, Belmopan and Corozal South West and Bay also had three candidacies per division along with Lake Independence [EBD; 2008]. The non PUP or UDP candidates represented the Belize Unity Alliance which was a merger of Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) and the People’s National Party (PNP).

**Table 6. Number of Seats in House of Representatives per party 1984 - 2012**

Year	Number of seats	PUP seats	PUP votes	UDP seats	UDP votes
1984	28	7	43.4	21	53.4
1989	28	15	50	13	48.2
1993	29	13	51.2	16	48.7
1998	29	27	58.82	2	39.63
2003	29	22	52.77	7	45.24
2008	31	6	41.17	25	56.73
2012	31	14	47.54	17	50.37

Source. Elisabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffman. AFRODESC- Working Paper No. 5. 2009; Elections and Boundaries Department, 2012.

After the polls closed, the votes were counted and the UDP was able to retain 17 of the 31 parliament spots up fro grabs leaving the PUP 14 places. This new selection of representatives meant that the UDP lost eight seats in Parliament in comparison to the 25 won on 2008.

## CONCLUSIONS

Democracy as a method, periodic elections and the renovation of the political conduction just as the votes determine so, produces by its own means, properties or defects of ingovernability that keep mounting up with the course of time. Or democracy is the cause of this phenomenon, and has no cure or remedies to heal it.

In order to help the healing process, there are several points that need to be considered. First, governability is a problem faced by every political regime in every nation; Belize is not the exception. It has faced a series of socio-economic events that make difficult to govern. The economic crises, the slow economy, serious internal problems with the sugar, telecommunications and financial sectors and the social unrest have turned Belize into a boiling pot that is ready to explode at any moment. The actual government under the Honorable Dean Barrow has to face the growing debt, the incapability to create new job sources, the growing crime rate, among other problems. Counting with the support of the majority is not a guarantee that this administration will prevail, but rather should look to establish public pacts with the opposition looking fortify their credibility and secure the support of the entire House of Representatives.

Also, the country needs to establish strong autonomous institutions that although depend on public funding, do not need to answer to the Prime Minister and thus, the directors or heads are not fearful of losing their job for any reason not related to their

efficiency. The best example of an institute that needs that sovereignty is the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Because it is dependent of the General Direction of government, it is perceived as subjected to the Prime Minister and the party in power. Another need of the EBC is the installment of a code that delineates how the elections are to be held and respected, and how the political parties and partisans must behave, not just during the election period but also outside of the political race.

Second, public opinion of the actual administration is conflicted. This is not new given that the people assigned to run the government have struggled to cause a change in every term. The first Prime Minister of independent Belize, George Price, enjoyed a strong approval in the public eye which gave the idea that only he could get the job done. By the next elections, and given the poor economic situation which the country faced, proved that there was no such thing as an untouchable leader. Manuel Esquivel, leader of the UDP took over with no change in the public opinion front. He struggled to present any positive change in the economy and instead had to deal with an oil crisis and another with the prices of sugar, a main commodity of Belize. This resulted enough to have the press and the public in contempt.

For the following administration, the situation did not improve. There were internal conflicts within the PUP over land issues with Price back atop. Afraid of losing total control of the Assembly as well as of the party, united with the public conception of

incapability to govern, George Price decided to dissolve Congress and summon elections only four years after regaining power. The *blues* were weakened by the internal collapse and therefore looked to reassemble the PUP's structure starting with the heads. Manuel Esquivel managed to muster enough support from the public considering the PUP problems and won the '93 elections. Under his hand, the economic situation flourished thanks to the socio-economic decisions he and his team executed. Unfortunately it was not enough because he failed to maintain those changes because he failed to secure international funds and loans to Belize going forward. He was forced to cut jobs and by December 1997, there were 800 less public servants on his team.

By 1998, the PUP won 23 seats of 29 and Said Musa took over as president of the party and Prime Minister of Belize. With a renewed PUP, persons with a college preparation, Mike, Jorge and Mark Espat, Cordell Hyde, John Briceno for instance, who helped restart the tourism sector, obtained with loans that gave a push to the economy and as Arthur Cantun said, "take Belize to the world". There was also an encounter with the Central American States looking to improve the relations especially with Guatemala as well as with the Caribbean. All of these improvements, kept the PUP in good grace of the public opinion and for the first time in independent Belize a Prime Minister was reelected. However shady financial movements involving the sell and buyback of BTL, acquisition of the Port of Belize and the mismanagement of monies donated by

Venezuela and the government of Hong Kong drove to internal problems once more in the PUP. This chain of events withdrew the public's support and in 2008, Dean Barrow took control of the government, seat which he successfully managed to keep in the 2012 elections. The public opinion on political matters sought to push Barrow and his people out of office in the final chapter of elections, due to bad financial decisions which have taken the country further into debt.

From this summarized history lesson on Belizean public opinion and its impact of transition of power, we can see that the power game is controlled by two parties, leaving the thirds, Vision Inspired by the People and the People's National Party, in the shadows. This is a result of the vote by tradition scheme that takes over on Election Day in Belize<sup>82</sup>. When asked why they took the liberty to cast their vote, the majority of the voters responded that they were voting for one or the other party, because it is their right. When trying to obtain more information on the matter, many just answered that there were many reasons but failed to go into detail on the matter. There were few outstanding cases that seemed to be well informed on specific issues but always took a side either with the PUP or UDP. One account managed to expose several of the

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<sup>82</sup> The interviews were held on the District of Orange Walk and Belize City. The interviewed were people chosen at random as they walked out of the voting centers and their names are left unmentioned as to not violate their rights.

troubles that were haunting the present government, the sell of BTL, financial problems of the sugar industry, among other concerns, but because of the tradition of voting blocs stood by defending the party in power.

The media plays a strong part in the development of the political game in Belize. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about a communications revolution that allowed the emergence of newspapers, radio and television stations, and most recently the paid television programming and the world wide web which permits anyone with a decent internet connection, although somewhat expensive, to extract the most important news from their locality or national and therefore, form an opinion of the situation of the political scenario. The surge of these telecommunications options was used to by the parties looking to advance on the polls. The internet allowed the people to be up-to-date on the actions and events the parties were holding. The parties on the other hand looked to undermine one another with yellow press where discrediting the competition was a mean of tilting the scale either towards the reds or the blues.

The newspapers, television, radio and internet were priced possessions during the election month and to that, another tool can be considered as a telecommunications good. Cellular phones played an important role in the campaigning game. Text messaging and phone calls were made looking to ample the public opinion of candidates for Congress. This practice was strategic in the main cities. The internet



social networks also played an important part in spreading the parties' propaganda. In short, the media will continue to slowly develop a stronger voice in forming a public opinion but it is also important to acknowledge that these need to be regulated as well by a code of conduct pertaining to the electoral field.

The importance of the formation, evolution and revolution of the political parties signifies the evolution of the electoral democratic system set up in Belize. Whenever a political institution has to reassemble their main players, it has to be done with the goal of strengthening their position, looking to establish a new path and therefore, a new party manifesto is sent out into the world. Both PUP and UDP have a yearly manifesto published; unfortunately they set out to change the entire country with excessive objectives. In the 2012 manifesto, the UDP vows to give the country a 360° shift in every field, from the financial sector, to the health, oil and national welfare.<sup>83</sup> The PUP<sup>84</sup> looks concrete the oil drilling referendum as one of the main objectives but also plan to set a fixed election date every four years.

The Belizean model is characterized by its permanency, internal pluralism and organically binding representation course of action. The plurality principle expressed through a complex regulatory set of rules allows a

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<sup>83</sup> Full version of the UDP Manifesto can be found at <http://udp.org.bz/UDPManifesto2012/manifesto.html>.

<sup>84</sup> A copy of the PUP's National Manifesto can be found at <http://www.pup.org.bz/national-manifesto/>.

healthy development of opposition in the form of a second and third parties involved in the political game. Belizean model of the Westminster system, with a high degree of centralization of power embodies the expression of universal voting.

The Belizean Parliament has total control over the Executive branch which means that the government can enforce its decrees without the jeopardized approval of the opposition. This can turn dangerous when the opposition obtains close to fifty percent of the seats in Parliament as has happened in the 2012 process.

The municipal elections were a different story. The UDP won 44 city councils seats leaving the PUP with 23 representatives. This may seem like a crushing victory for the UDP but when seen how many councils are of majority red, the almost doubled number is reduced to a 6 city councils under UDP and 3 went to the PUP. The UDP won in Belize City, San Pedro Town, Benque Viejo del Carmen Town, Belmopan, Corozal and San Igancio & Santa Elena Town, while the PUP took the city councils of Punta Gorda, Dangriga and Orange Walk. This information turns important towards the evolution of the democratic building process in Belize given the fact that the present government under Dean Barrow holds an absolute

control of the system, leading to a virtual control of relations with the local or municipal administrations and local councils.

All in all, in both cases, general and municipal elections, there were enough provisions set by the EMB to guarantee an efficient election run. There are still some bugs that need to be cleared in a more specific electoral law but the standards established can be qualified as proficient and sufficient. The elections in Belize are improving in efficiency and transparency, opening the way for citizen involvement, trustworthy journalism, political party evolution and transition of power in parliament. The best proof is the involvement of the citizenry in political activity in the formation of civil societies and associations. Also, the media's involvement in the political arena is evolving towards a more in depth investigation communication source. There are up and coming reporters and news casters that are not afraid to challenge the government and its course of action. On the hand, there is a clear renewing of the major institutions that look to keep up with the changing international practices of democracy.

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## Interviews

- Interview with Arthur Cantun, March 7<sup>th</sup>, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012
- Interview with Gaspar Vega, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012
- Interview with M. Palacio, April, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012
- Interview with Marcel Cardona, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012