

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Guyana

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>15</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	6	6	0	Democ:	6	6	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:		15		Tentative:		No		
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Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	GUY	CCODE	110	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	5	2	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	5 October 1992		Begin Date	6 October 1992																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1980																								
Executive(s)	President Bharrat Jagdeo (PPP/C); elected by majority party in the National Assembly; first assumed office in 1999 following resignation of President Jagan; reelected by Assembly 19 March 2001; most recently reelected 28 August 2006																								
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (65 seats; 53 members proportional elections, remaining 12 members delegated by local government councils; most recent elections, 28 August 2006) People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C): 36 People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R): 22 Other parties: 7 Delegated members: 12																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court of Judicature																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Under the terms of the 1980 constitution, the president is the nominee of the party with the largest number of votes in the legislative elections. During the first 32 years of independence Guyana was ruled in a largely autocratic manner by the Peoples' National Congress (PNC). Consisting primarily of Afro-Guyanese, the PNC closely regulated the executive recruitment process. The first free elections in Guyana were held in 1992 and the PNC lost to the predominately Indo-Guyanese People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the PPP

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leader Cheddi Jagan was named president (he died in office in March 1997). In December 1997 elections, the now named People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) again polled the majority of legislative seats and Janet Jagan, Cheddi Jagan's widow, was named president. Although the opposition PNC alleged that the December 1997 elections were rigged, international observers declared them to be "free and fair." While the elections were free from violence, the months immediately following the voting were filled with street protests and sporadic political violence.

Bharrat Jagdeo assumed the presidency in 1999 following the resignation of Janet Jagan. The ruling PPP/C was returned to power in March 2001 elections when it secured 52 percent of the popular vote, compared to 42 percent for the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R). However, the results were disputed and there were violent clashes in the capital between rival groups of supporters. The PNC/R refused to concede defeat and appealed to the High Court to prevent the inauguration of President-elect Bharrat Jagdeo. However, the election was judged to have been basically fair, despite administrative and procedural inadequacies, by international observers. It was announced on 21 March 2001 that former US President Jimmy Carter had brokered an agreement between the two parties which committed the two parties to a program of constitutional and electoral reform. However, the PNC/R boycotted legislative proceedings for 14 months between March 2002 and May 2003.

Bharrat Jagdeo won a second five year term with her victory in the August 2006 presidential poll, gaining more than 54% of the vote. Her party, the PPP/C, also increased its majority hold on the legislature by picking up an additional 2 seats. Unlike the 1997 and 2001 election cycles, there was no political violence associated with the voting process in 2006.

Executive Constraints: Substantial Limitations (5)

While Guyana is a democratic polity, nevertheless, it continues to function under a constitution written during a period of authoritarian rule. The 1980 constitution grants strong powers to the president. These powers include the authority to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and vice president, to dissolve the legislature, and to veto all legislative bills. Despite the difficulties associated with altering the constitution, some effort has been made in recent years to examine the possibility of reforming the constitution to limit executive autonomy. Reforming the constitution requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament, a number that can only be achieved by cooperation between the ruling and opposition parties. The judicial branch has significant powers and does provide a check on executive actions. In January 2001 the court had ruled that the 1997 elections were "null and void" due to irregularities in voter registration procedures; this ruling had limited effect as it came just prior to the holding of new elections in March 2001.

Political Participation: Factional Competition (7)

Race and class have had a profound influence on Guyanese politics since independence in 1966. However, in recent years racial politics, pitting the majority Indo-Guyanese against the minority Afro-Guyanese, has replaced the class-based politics of the early independence years as the core factional division within this country. Both the People's Progressive Party and the People's National Congress Party are socialist in orientation. Guyana, however, is a plural society in the sense that the two dominant ethnic groups retain distinct political identities and often interact with each other in a violent manner. The Afro-Guyanese, originally brought to Guyana by the Dutch to work on the sugar plantations, constitute roughly one-third of the population while the descendants of the indentured East Indian agricultural workers now constitute a little over one-half of the total population. According to the Indo-Guyanese community, the Afro-Guyanese-dominated PNC, which controlled the political institutions of Guyana from independence until the early 1990s, established a historical legacy of racial discrimination in Guyana. However, many Afro-Guyanese now believe that they suffer discrimination at the hands of the Indo-Guyanese-dominated PPP government (in power since 1992). While widespread ethnic violence has not occurred in Guyana in over 30 years, nevertheless, voting continues to fall along ethnic lines, the two dominant parties use ethnic-based rhetoric to fuel racial tensions, and each group seeks to use their control of state institutions to advantage their respective ethnic constituencies. The potential for ethnic instability in this country can be seen most recently in the aftermath of the 1997 elections. Claiming the PPP won through fraud, the PNC mobilized its supporters into street protests as its members in parliament staged a seven-month boycott of the National Assembly.