

Guyana

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Guyana gained its independence in 1966. From this year until 1991 this country is coded as an autocratic regime, but Geddes (2003) does not provide regime type coding because it's too small. Using Polity IV as a guide, starting in 1992, Guyana is coded as a presidential democracy. Our coding as a democracy contrasts with Cheibub et al. (2010) who do not consider Guyana a democracy in any year (Stepan & Skach 1994; Busky 2000). Through its independent history, the country has had two major political parties: People's National Congress (PNC) and People's Progressive Party (PPP).

After the independence, the PNC leader Linden Burnham assumed the position of prime minister until his death in 1985. Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, served as a member of the People's National Conference, Reform branch (PNC-R) with a coalition government that included the United Force (UF) until 1969. PNC-R formed a coalition government with UF when it won a second largest seats next to the ruling PPP in the election in October 1946. The PNC-R, which won 40 percent of the vote and twenty-two seats, and the UF, which won 11 percent of the vote and seven seats, formed a coalition to defeat the PPP, which won 46 percent of the vote and twenty-four seats. Since then, UF was in coalition until 1969. With the elections in 1969 a leadership changes, but no minor SOLS change, when the secondary party (UF) was dropped. Burnham continued to serve as prime minister until 1979.

Burnham ruled the country in an autocratic fashion, held fraudulent elections, suppressed civil and human rights, and possibly had opponents assassinated (U.S. Department of State 2011). As mentioned above, Guyana is considered an autocracy under Burnham. Specifically, we code the country's sub-regime type for the period of Burnham as a single-party/personalist hybrid regime. To do this, we use Geddes (2003) definitions of different type of single-party and personalist regimes to come to a coding decision.

Guyana under Burnham, fits the single-party classification for three reasons. First, according Geddes (2003, 72), single-party regime is defined as "those in which the party had some influence over policy and controlled most access to political power and government jobs." Reflecting a country's ethnic cleavage created under the British colonial rules between urbanized African-Guyanese and rural East Indian-Guyanese, Guyana was characterized as a competition between two major political parties: PNC and the PPP. The African backed the PNC led by Linden Burnham, while the communist-led East Indians supported the PPP of Cheddi Jagan, who later became president in 1992. In sum, political parties played an important role. Indeed, although the PNC dominated the National Assembly, 14 out of 53 seats were awarded to the PPP in 1974 (Hope 1985, 57). In addition, since 1970, the PNC increased commitment to socialism by declaring a "cooperative republic." Reflecting this policy, Guyana started to nationalize major companies operating in the country, which included nationalizing two foreign-owned companies. By the late 1970s, the government controlled over 80 percent of the economy (US Library of Congress 1992). This nationalization indicates the PNC's influence over domestic policies, which is one of the main characteristics of a single-party regime.

Second, in deciding whether a regime led by the single leader of a single party should be classified as personalist or single-party regime, Geddes (2003) gives more weight to the party than the leader, “if the party existed prior to the leader’s accession to power.” As to this point, the PNC was created by Burnham in 1957 which is before his accession to power. As a primarily urban-based party, the PNC represented the African racial bloc, or about one-third of the population, including most of the nation’s intellectuals.

Third, Geddes (2003) gives more weight on the party, “if the successor to the first leader already held a high position in the party and was not a relative or a member of the same tribe or clan as the leader.” After his death, Burnham was replaced by new PNC leader Hugh Hoyte. He was a one of the five Vice Presidents at that time. He was not a relative of Burnham.

However, Guyana under Burnham also is characterized by aspects of a personalist regime, which leads us to code the country under this leader as a mixed single-party-personalist regime. First, Burnham was an only leader for about twenty years. After the independence, Burnham assumed the position of President until his death in 1985. This suggests that there were few “inter-party” conflicts.

This consolidation of power to Burnham was institutionally guaranteed. The 1980 Constitution created an executive President who is the chief of the executive authority in the country and who is expected to act in accordance with his own judgment, except in situations where his is required to take advice or recommendations from special bodies. According to (Jeffrey and Baber 1986, 64) “the leader is the one officer who is constitutionally impossible to remove.” In addition, although the only way to obstacle leader’s unlimited constitutional authority was a rule that required his judgments to be subjected to the revision by the General Secretary, this rule had no meaningful power since the leader appointed the General Secretary. Therefore, we can conclude that if the leader was unwilling to relinquish power, it would be impossible to remove it; thereby, the party policies could not go against the leader’s wishes. This suggests that political power was consolidated to Burnham. In other word, it is highly likely that the politburo was a rubber stamp for the leader, which characterized a personalist regime.

Second, it is difficult to tell whether the country’s socialist policy stemmed from Burnham’s wishes or the PNC’s wishes. At the time when the PNC was created, the PNC advocated a policy of moderate socialism, anticommunism, and hospitality to private investment. However, as we described above, the PNC changed its ideology to the left, culminating 19740’s “Declaration of Cooperative Republic.” Considering this point, we are not sure how much the PNC had a political influence as a party, or how much the PNC could function without Burnham.

Third, the PNC was created before the Burnham’s accession to power. But, the PNC was created by Burnham. Initially the PNC and the PPP was a same party. But, since the PPP strengthen its communist ideology, Burnham left from the PPP and created the PNC.

Following Burnham's death in 1985, Hugh Hoyte acceded to the presidency and was formally elected in the December 1985 national elections. We code a minor SOLS change because Hoyte was beholden to the PNC like Burnham, but he was not a personalist leader. Hoyte had been one of five vice presidents under Burnham and had been responsible for economic matters. It seems like the party picked him as a successor, because his expertise was valuable in the times of economic troubles Guyana was in. Unlike Burnham, Hoyte was not a charismatic leader. His political power was limited since he was relatively young and the seniority which existed under Burnham was maintained. Especially, First Vice President and Prime Minister Hamilton Green and Deputy Leader Ptolomy Ried kept their power in the PNC.

Hoyte ruled for eight years, gradually moving Guyana to democracy. As a result, Guyana held its first free and fair election in 1992. A member of the opposition party, Cheddi Jagan, the founder of the PPP-C, became president. This constitutes a SOLS change. Hoyte took steps to stem the economic decline, including strengthening financial controls over the parastatal corporations and supporting the private sector. In August 1987, at a PNC Congress, Hoyte announced that the PNC rejected orthodox communism and the one-party state (U.S. Department of State 2011).

Hoyte stayed in the position until 1992, when a free and fair election put Cheddi Jagan in power, signifying a SOLS change as he was from the People Progressive Party, Civic branch (PPP-C). Since 1992, the PPP-C has dominated the presidency of Guyana. There have been four PPP presidents between 1992 and 2008, but neither of these changes is a SOLS change.

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