

DEMOCRACIES FOR SALE?: A Case for BELIZE

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Political parties are necessary organizations to source leaders for the ballot paper. That is the case in Belize since the first election after adult suffrage on April 28, 1954. Two or more political parties over these past six decades of politicking have vied to represent electors, and have been elected to govern this country. However, to date, there are no laws to govern political parties that are tasked with such important pursuits as leadership of governance in a country of people. Political parties are not perceived as NGOs or businesses or partnerships, but they exist.

Election financing to maintain a political party between elections, to contest elections and successfully bring a political party into power has become extremely exorbitant. But the price tag cannot be limited to just the election campaign season, but must also include administration cost for three to five years between each election call. These expenses include party conventions, staffing and transportation. There is also the continuous cost of the customary patron/client system that political parties operate; such as funerals, weddings, medical, etc. However, a political party cannot finance itself through membership subscriptions, so where does the financing come from?

At a conference I attended in 2013 in Barbados financed by the Organization of American States (OAS), it was identified that due to the high financial "need" that political parties in the English speaking Caribbean countries had become dependent on donations from large moneyed groups both local and international. Some of these donors have turned out to be swindlers, modern day carpet baggers, criminals, and even foreign governments. These invariably influence democracies and public policy, violate legislation, and at times made leaders richer in a short period of time.

As a result, some Caribbean countries on winning elections have become indebted to questionable groups and criminals due to their political parties' dependency on funding. At that time (2013), OAS offered a model legislation for participants to share. It is not a one size fits all, it is a basis for countries to adopt, make changes and use as their own. Participants at this conference were officials of political parties from thirteen English speaking Caribbean countries.

To date, Belize has no legislation to govern political parties and no legislation on political party financing which includes campaign financing. Whereforth Belize?!

Electoral Politics

the naked truth

BELIZE

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Ballot Box

