



SURINAME

Capital	Paramaribo, 5°50'N 55°10'W
Official languages	Dutch
Recognised regional languages	Sranan Tongo, Hindi, English, Sarnami, Javanese, Indonesian, Bhojpuri, Hakka, Cantonese, Saramaccan, Paramaccan, Ndyuka, Kwinti, Matawai, Cariban, Arawakan Kalina
Government	Constitutional democracy
- President	Ronald Venetiaan
Independence	November 25, 1975
- from The Netherlands	
Political Parties (election results 2005)	
New Front for Democracy and Development (Nieuwe Front voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling): Coalition of National Party of Suriname (Nationale Partij Suriname) / Progressive Reform Party (Vooruitstrevende Hervormingspartij) / Pertjajah Luhur/ Surinamese Labour Party (Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid) 23	
National Democratic Party (Nationale Democratische Partij) 15	
People's Alliance for Progress (Volksalliantie Voor Vooruitgang): Democratic National Platform 2000 (Democratisch Nationaal Platform 2000) / Basic Party for Renewal and Democracy (Basispartij voor Vernieuwing en Democratie) / Party for National Unity and Solidarity (Kerukanan Tulodo Pranatan Ingit) 5	
A-Com: General Liberation and Development Party (Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelingspartij)/Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek)/Seeka Seeka 5	
A1: Democratic Alternative '91 (Democratisch Alternatief '91)/ Democrats of the 21st Century (Democraten van de 21ste Eeuw)/ Political Wing of the fal (Politieke Vleugel van de fal)/Meeting Point 2000 (Trefpunt 2000) 3	
Total: 158	

State of Democracy Suriname

Suriname's political system has not changed much since independence. The political parties have an ethnic support base, thus reflecting ethnic divisions within society. Yet in Suriname different ethnic groups coexist peacefully.

The weakness of the political system rests with the lack of change in political leadership. The elites of the 1970s are in fact still in power. There is no generational renewal, which raises concerns about the system's sustainability.

Political Parties

Political parties in Suriname are organized around the leader of the party. The members of the party have not much say. This has to do with Suriname's weakly developed democratic culture. Most parties tend to focus on specific issues and have an ethnic bias, instead of a general programme that attracts a broader electorate. Virtually all parties lack basic institutional and financial capacities.

Elections 2010

General elections are scheduled to take place in May 2010. The political system requires that parties form coalitions to enhance their chances of governing. Pre-election alliances are thus formed.

It is expected that in the upcoming elections three alliances will compete. The first is the one that currently rules, the New Front, consisting of the NPS, VHP, PL, SPA, and DA-91, and without the parties of the inland, a small coalition headed by Ronny Brunswijk. The Middle Block consists of three parties, UPS, New Suriname, and PSV. The third coalition is the Mega Block (NDP/DNP2000, KTPI, PALU) which, according to polls, has the largest chance to win the elections. This alliance is led by former President Desi Bouterse, who is currently being tried for his alleged involvement in the December murders of 1982.

Strengthening the role of civil society

Civil society organizations are not very strong in Suriname. They do not have the capacity to monitor or put pressure on the government. Political society is thus not being held accountable by civil society or pushed to articulate the needs of citizens.

NIMD Suriname Programme

In Suriname NIMD supports interparty dialogue, provides civic education on democracy and technical assistance to lawmakers, and facilitates a training programme on party development in which representatives of 21 political parties are participating.

Democracy Unit

NIMD's programme partner is the Democracy Unit, a multidisciplinary working group of the Anton de Kom University Suriname. In August 2007 the Democracy Unit's multiparty sounding board was installed. This board consists of 9 representatives of different political parties. They discuss the content and strategy of the programme.

Interparty Dialogue

There is a commitment of the political parties represented in the sounding board to develop a shared national agenda. Since 2007, when a political reference group was set up, the political parties participate in a structural dialogue, even in periods when such a dialogue is not possible in the Assembly. In this way, the Democracy Unit offers the political parties an impartial space to interact with each other and to have discussions about the issues related to the improvement of democracy.

Public Financing

The issue of public financing of political parties has been addressed by the Democracy Unit. In 2007 the political parties requested a study on the subject, which was conducted in 2008. A separate study on civic awareness in relation to the financing of political parties was also initiated. The results of both studies were discussed and resulted in a draft bill, which will be proposed to Parliament in 2010.

Training the Trainers

As the political parties are weakly institutionalized, the Democracy Unit offers training programs for party cadres. Participants are trained in such a way that they can pass on their knowledge to others within their respective party. Journalists and teachers are also welcome to participate in the training. The training program was initiated in 2009 and subsequently evaluated for further professionalization in the years to come. The intention is that through such trainings a younger generation of politicians and party cadres will develop.

Civic Education

Civic education is necessary to have an active civil society, which can hold political society accountable for their actions. In 2009, the Democracy Unit introduced a yearly Democracy Month in cooperation with the University of Suriname, the UNDP, the Institute of Social and Scientific Research (IMWO), the Projekta foundation, and representatives of the private sector. This annual event celebrates democracy with a series of activities focused on civic education and interactions between politicians, civil society and the population at large. The activities included a weekly television show and six radio broadcasts on democracy (during which questions could be put forward to politicians), student debates, and publications on democracy in different newspapers.



In order to strengthen a new younger generation of politicians, discussions between political youth representatives from Suriname and The Netherlands were facilitated. In an exchange in 2009, they discussed the future relation between the two countries during a special edition of the youth television programme *Gran Krutu*. The conclusions of the debate were presented to party leaders from Suriname and the Netherlands. NIMD will continue to facilitate the strengthening of political youth representatives in Suriname. In February 2010, an election debate will be organized between political youth and official party.

Stakeholders

1. Programme partner
Democracy Unit

2. National partners
Anton de Kom University of Suriname – Political Parties – Institute of Social and Scientific Research (INWO) – Projekta Foundation

3. International partners
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Organization of American States (OAS)