

2015 Elections in Suriname: a historical power shift

Jack Menke¹

ABSTRACT

The 2015 elections in Suriname marked a significant change since the first general and free elections in 1949. The electoral results indicate a shift in both the electoral and political power that went at the cost of the traditional mono-ethnic parties. Suriname held nine elections from 1949 - 1977 and seven elections in the post military period (1987-2010). In the post military period the Front, a coalition of mainly traditional mono-ethnic political parties, won four of the seven elections. However, this could not prevent that their political power base as well as their electoral share eroded. The main argument in this article is that initially ethnic party affiliation resulted in electoral hegemony of the traditional mono-ethnic parties. This hegemony ended in 2015 when the National Democratic Party (NDP), led by the former leader of the military regime (1980-1987), won 26 of the 51 parliamentary seats. In addition to the role of the changed demographic structure, the defeat of the mono-ethnic parties is explained by the strong emphasis on ethnicity and juridical-political issues after the military regime (1980-1987) while neglecting the socio-economic living conditions.

Keywords: Election. Suriname. Ethnic Parties.

RESUMO

No Suriname, as eleições de 2015 marcaram uma mudança significativa desde as primeiras eleições gerais e livres de 1949. Os resultados eleitorais indicaram uma mudança tanto no poder eleitoral quanto no político, que se deu à custa dos partidos monoétnicos tradicionais. O Suriname realizou nove eleições entre 1949 e 1977 e sete eleições no período pós-militar (1987-2010). No período pós-militar, a Frente, uma coalizão de partidos políticos tradicionais, principalmente monoétnicos, ganhou quatro das sete eleições. No entanto, isso não pode evitar que a sua base de poder político, bem como a sua quota eleitoral desintegrassem. O principal argumento neste artigo é que, inicialmente, o partido da afiliação étnica teve a hegemonia eleitoral dos partidos monoétnicos tradicionais. Essa hegemonia terminou em 2015, quando o Partido Nacional Democrático (NDP), liderado pelo ex-líder do regime militar (1980-1987), ganhou 26 dos 51 assentos parlamentares. Além da função da estrutura demográfica alterada, a derrota dos partidos monoétnicos é explicada pela forte ênfase na etnia e nas questões jurídico-políticas após o regime militar (1980-1987), uma vez negligenciadas pelas condições de vida socioeconômicas.

Palavras-chave: Eleição. Suriname. Partidos Étnicos.

1 Introduction

From 1949 to 2015 Suriname held sixteen parliamentary elections under general suffrage. The

mono- ethnic political parties that were founded in the 1940s dominated politics until 1991. Altogether

¹Full Professor of Social Sciences; Institute of Graduate Studies and Research (IGSR), Anton de Kom University of Suriname. Ph.D University of Amsterdam | menkejack@yahoo.com

they achieved an electoral support of over 50% in the 1949-1991 period. At the end of the military period (1980-1987) the three major mono-ethnic parties² (VHP, NPS, and KTPI) united in the Front coalition. This political combination won the elections in 1987 and 1991 with 89% and 54% of the votes cast. In the subsequent elections the electoral support of these parties eroded and remained below the 50%. The 2015 elections marked an electoral transition: the National Democratic Party (NDP) led by the former leader of the military regime (1980-1987) won the majority of the parliamentary seats. The purpose of this article is to analyze and explain the electoral instability and the electoral transition of the political evolution in Suriname in historical context. First, an overview is given of the economic, demographic & socio-cultural context. Then, the electoral and political systems are described followed by addressing the sources of political power prior to the military regime (1980-1987). After, an analysis of the evolution of electoral results since 1949 the political power shift in the 2015 elections is explained. Finally, the conclusions and future political perspectives are addressed.

2 Demographic, economic and cultural context

Suriname became politically independent in 1975. It is both part

of the South American continent and the Caribbean region. With a land area of 163.820 square kilometers and a population of 534,189 (2012) the country is comparable with the Brazilian border state Amapá that covers 142.829 km² and a population of 669.526 inhabitants (IBGE, 2011). Suriname is subdivided into the coastal lowlands, the savanna and the highlands in the south with its tropical rain forest. The majority of the population lives in the capital city of Paramaribo and the semi-urban district Wanica (Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2013). The Sipaliwini district, located in the interior, occupies 80 percent of the land area with a population density of only 0.2 inhabitants per square kilometer.

When the first political parties emerged in the 1940s, the bauxite production - controlled by two foreign multinationals - was the pillar of the economy. In the 1980s, the mineral economy became more diversified with crude oil and gold production. The small open mineral-based economy Suriname went through several adjustment shocks in the 1980s and 1990s. This was due to external and internal developments: the decline of bauxite mining and processing; the suspension of Dutch development aid in the 1980s; and the implementation of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s (Menke, 1998). After a volatile growth from 1980-1999, the economy had a continuous positive growth

²Historically many political parties in Suriname have been affiliated with one ethnic group. This means that ethnicity has been playing a major role in politics. However, in the last twenty-five years some parties have been evolving towards multiethnic organizations (Sedney, 1997).

from 2000-2015, mainly due to the favorable world market prices of crude oil and gold. Various sources report a high economic inequality but also inequalities in basic sectors like health, education and housing, and across regions (Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2013; Neri; Menke, 2001).

With approximately 20 ethno-linguistic groups and various tribal peoples, Suriname is culturally one of the most diverse societies of South-America (Menke et al., 2013). The largest groups are of East Indian, Creole descent, Maroon and Javanese.³ There is also a large group of mixed origin and smaller groups such as the Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese and Whites. Since the 1980s, there is a large influx of Brazilians, Chinese and recently of Surinamese people from Holland. The diversity of Suriname becomes more complex if we consider the religious landscape. People of the three major world religions contribute with substantive percentages to the religious diversity: Christian (49%), Hindu (23%) and Islam (16%). Furthermore there are various tribal, Afro-American/native religions (winti) and other religions such as Javanism. This is a quite different from the overall picture in the Americas and the Caribbean: Americas Barometer (2012) registered only 2.2% Non-Christian Eastern Religions, against a vast majority of 85% Christians, 9.8% with no religion and 1.5%

agnostics/atheists (Menke et al., 2013). Like the ethnic and tribal groups, the principal religious groups of Christian, Hindu and Islam are all minorities.

3 Politics in the pre-independence period

The multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Surinamese society influenced the political system and the political parties that emerged after the Second World War. The first mono-ethnic political parties (VHP, KTPI, NPS) were founded in the 1940s and dominated politics from 1949-1980. Nation-wide their electoral support in this period reached between 60% and 90% of the votes cast (Menke, 2000).

The traditional mono-ethnic parties - NPS (Creole-based), VHP (East Indian-based) and KTPI (Javanese-based) - represented the interests of their ethnic and/or religious rank and file. In the 1940s, the colonial elite occupied the highest positions in the social structure, the government, the parliament and the army. The colonial middle class consisted mainly of mulattoes who occupied the higher and middle ranks and professions. The lower social strata comprised peasants and wage laborers in agriculture, mainly have the East Indian and Javanese ethnicity. Wage laborers in the balata, mining and the urban manufacturing sectors were predominantly Creole people.⁴

³East Indians are descendants of immigrants from India; while Maroons are descendants from escaped slaves and Javanese are descendants of immigrants from Indonesia.

⁴In the colonial and postcolonial, Surinamese society definitions of ethnic categories were frequently changed. After the Second World War the censuses of 1964 and 1971 broadened the concept of Creole by adding the Mixed group and Blacks in urban and rural areas. However, the 2012 census narrowed this definition by defining the mixed as a separate group.

The introduction of general suffrage in 1948 was initially opposed by the mulatto middle class that feared increasing competition of East Indian people for employment in the public sector. The electoral system, designed by the representatives of the mulattoes was meant to consolidate their class position. This contributed at the first elections of 1949 to the victory of the political party (NPS) that in that period was dominated by mulattoes.

In Suriname, a political tradition of consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1977) evolved that dominated politics in various periods. This is a multi-party system based on the cooperation between elites of the major ethnic groups and their respective political parties - East Indians (VHP), Javanese (KTPI) and Creoles/ blacks (NPS) - via an informal brokerage system. The state in addition of being an instrument to execute political power also became a source for (ethnic and political groups) to acquire power and social mobility. Consequently, the 'ethnic state' emerged with a distribution of resources within the state sector along ethnic lines, including ministers and the appointment of rank and file as civil servants. The distribution of resources was also reflected in the allocation of development aid in distinct economic sectors: Creole people occupied strategic positions in parastatals and the public sector, while East Indians dominated development resources for the agricultural sector.

After the 1958, elections state power came under control of a coalition the NPS (Creole-based), VHP (East Indian-based) and KTPI (Javanese-based). In the political history of Suriname the 1958-1969 period is referred to as the *Verbroederingspolitiek*, a tradition of coalition government the Surinamese version of consociational democracy. In Suriname, this was based on the cooperation between elites of the major ethnic and or religious groups and their political parties that represented East Indians (VHP), Javanese (KTPI) and Creoles (NPS).

3.1 From a Creole to an East Indian dominated state

The NPS, which was being dominated by dark-skinned Creoles since 1958, was the leading party in the coalitions until 1969. The successive governments pursued the "Industrialization by invitation" development strategy that included large foreign capital investments in the bauxite mining and - processing during the 1950s and 1960s. This strategy did not yield the expected long-term economic growth. Even the largest and most promising initiative, the Brokopondo hydroelectricity project, did not make a significant contribution. The multiplier effect generated by this project included a growth of the real per capita income of 13% annually that lasted very short from 1965-1967. However, the economic growth turned negative in the next two years (1968-1969). Other negative effects such as increased unemployment, labor strikes and emigration became apparent.

The VHP-PNP coalition (1969-1973) was the first East Indian dominated government since the general elections in 1949. This change in the execution of state power is reflected in the equal number of East Indian

and Creole ministers in the 1969-1973 period (Table 1). This differs from the period of consociational democracy (1958-1967), when the distribution of ministers was in favor of the Creole.

Table 1 – Minister by ethnicity in 24 governments 1949-2015

Ethnicity	Período																Total	
	1949-58		1958-69		1969-73		1973-80		1980-88		1988-90		1991-2001		2010-2015		49-2015	
	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%
Creole & Mixed	46	92	30	81	6	43	23	79	68	72	6	33	33	49	18	50	230	66
East Indian	4	8	6	16	6	43	2	7	20	21	7	39	19	28	4	11	68	20
Javanese	0		1	3	1	7	4	14	5	5	3	17	10	15	6	17	30	9
Maroon											1	6			7	19	8	2
Indigenous															1	3	1	0
Other	0		0		1	7	0	0	2	2	1	6	6	9		0	10	3
Total	50	100	37	100	14	100	29	100	95	100	18	100	67	101	36	100	346	100

Source: : 2000b. <<http://www.starnieuws.com/index.php/welcome/index/nieuwsitem/30688>>. <[http://www.nickerie.net/News2010/2010-09-22 De nieuwe ministerraad](http://www.nickerie.net/News2010/2010-09-22%20De%20nieuwe%20ministerraad)>.

The equal number of Creole and East Indian ministers in the 1969-1973 period reflects a significant change compared to the 1958-1969 period. The evolution and differentiation of the middle classes coincided more or less with ethnic divisions. This can be explained historically and economically, but is also related to the emergence of the "Ethnic State" during decolonization, characterized by the division of ministries along ethnic lines. Illustrative is the Ministry of Agriculture, where from 1958 to 1973 all the ministers were of East Indian descendant. This also illustrates the role of the state as an important source for creating classes by patronage and providing resources (e.g. jobs, land and scholarships) to members of the own political party and eth-

nic group. This was not restricted to East Indian dominated ministries, but had become custom at most of the ministries governed by ministers of other ethnicities.

The VHP-PNP government (1969-1973) introduced the Joint Venture strategy that gave an economically active role to the state. This form of state interventionism is reflected in the strong emphasis to establish parastatals and public enterprises, in particular in agriculture and forestry. The "Joint Venture strategy" included the participation in enterprises by both foreign capital and the Surinamese state, with the latter participating with at least 51% of the shares (Menke 1991). The poor results of this strategy - measured by capita economic growth, income distribution and employment - gave

rise to class conflicts in particular between civil servants and the state. The conflicts had a strong ethnic element and expressed a protest of Creole against the alleged political domination of East Indians. The deteriorated socioeconomic situation was an important push factor in the large emigration wave to Holland.

The political response to the increased social and ethnic tensions in the early 1970s was the mobilization of in a broad oppositional combination (NPK) - led by exponents of the Creole who linked with the largest Javanese party (KTPI) and a nationalist party (PNR). This combination won the 1973 elections and became advocate of the political independence that was achieved in 1975. They remained in power until 1980, when the military seized state power by a coup.

4 State and political independence 1975-1980

The political independence of Suriname did not result solely in the transfer of state functions, like the repressive apparatus to the former colony. In addition, a new development aid-agreement between the Dutch and the Surinamese state, that included 3.5 billion Dutch guilders, opened possibilities towards an interventionist role of the state. The committee on development aid cooperation between Holland and Suriname (CONS) reflects the changed role of the state. The CONS influenced the strategic

national issues and the allocation of development aid, while official planning institutions and the government were often not involved. The bureaucratic fraction of the Surinamese comprador class⁵ was privileged to become the representative of Dutch neo-colonialism with respect to its interest at the state level. The administration of the huge amount of 3.5 billion Dutch guilders of development aid for the period 1975-1985/1990 was entrusted to the exponents of this fraction and the representatives of the Dutch state in the CONS. On the one hand, this is an expression of the dependent character of the comprador class. On the other hand, this can be considered an attempt towards the consolidation of the Dutch political and economic power in Suriname.

The development plans of the independent republic had a populist character. This can be considered a response by the state to the increased social conflicts within and against the state in the 1969-1975 period. Many plans formulated within the populist framework have not been realized. This was due to the contradictions inherent to populism. Besides, the plans were insufficiently worked out.

Despite the huge amount of Dutch aid in the 1975-1980 period the economic structure remained skewed with few or no perspectives for improving the socioeconomic conditions of the lower social strata. This was also due to the weak planning institutions and the insufficiently worked out plans.

⁵The comprador class is composed of local representatives of foreign capital in several ways. The main task is the creating of accessibility for foreign capital to markets (land, labor, credit), the distribution of goods and services and to the state bureaucracy. The bureaucratic fraction is composed of top functionaries of political parties and the state bureaucracy, who creates facilities and incentives for foreign capital interest.

5 Military regime

The Political Independence Of Suriname In 1975 Was Short-Lived When Non-Commissioned Officers Of The Surinamese Army Seized State Power In February 1980. Despite The Enormous Amount Of Dutch Aid And The Interventionist Role Of The State In The Economy, The Development Strategy In The 1975-1980 Period Did Not Result In Achieving Self-Reliance And Other Stated Development Objectives. In Official Declarations, The Military Motivated The Coup By Referring To The Ineffective Democracy, Corruption, The Ethnic-Based Political System And Dutch Neo-Colonialism.

The Military Regime Attempted Reforms In Four Areas: The Political System, The Economy, Education And The Social Relations. Some Of The Projects Were Rather Successful, Such As The Decentralization Of Governance. But Other Projects, Such As The National Alphabetization Campaign, Did Not Achieve The Formulated Objectives And Goals. Ultimately, The Military Regime Was Confronted With The Problems Of Legitimacy, Obtaining A Mass Basis, And The "Withdrawal" Into The Barracks. The Legitimacy Crisis Was Expressed In Labor Strikes, Social Protests, Memoranda Of The Professional Organizations And Counter Coup Attempts Initiated By Various Middle Class Fractions.

The Legitimacy Of The Military Regime Showed A Strong Decline From 1983-1985. This Was Particularly Due To The Deteriorating Social-Economic Situation That Was Influenced Primarily By External

Factors. The Suspension Of The Dutch Development Aid In December 1982, The Execution Of 15 Prominent Surinamese Civilians And The Crisis In The International Bauxite Industry Caused A Serious Decline In The (Foreign Exchange) Revenues Of The State Of Suriname. To Solve The Problem Of Legitimacy A Process Of Redemocratization Was Initiated In 1983 That Ultimately Resulted In The Elections Of November 1987.

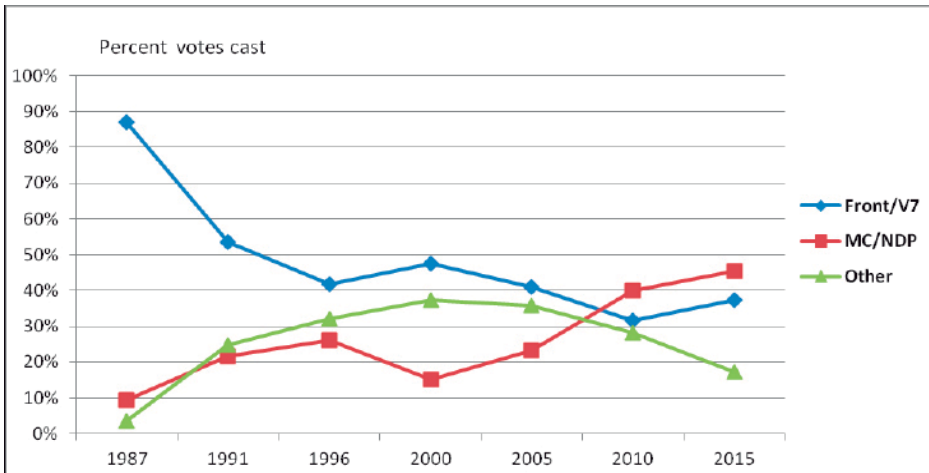
The Redemocratization Started With An Informal Dialogue Between The Military Leaders And The Leaders Of The Traditional Mono-Ethnic Political Parties (KTPI, NPS And VHP). This Should Be Considered As Safety Measure To Prevent A Continuing Isolation Of The Military Regime From The People. Two Issues Have Probably Played A Role In The Choice Of The Dialogue Partners. First, The Idea To Halt The Isolation From The People Was To Utilize The Emotional-Affective Ties Of The Traditional Civilian Political Leaders With Their Ethnic Rank And File. Secondly, The Military Opted For Dialogue Partners Who Were Prepared To Accept A Balanced Withdrawal Of The Military, Leading To A Sharing Of State Power (Menke, 1988). In Particular In The Areas Of Defense And Internal Security, The Power Should Remain In The Hands Of The Military. This Sharing Of State Power Was Laid Down Formally Prior To The Elections Of November 25, 1987 And Can Be Found In The Decree "National Army" Which Was Adopted On November 19, 1987 By The National Assembly. That The Claim Of The

State Power By The Military, According To This Decree, Goes Further Than Defense And Internal Security, Is Evident From One Of The Tasks Of The "National Army" Namely: Cooperation With The Aim Of Maintaining And Safeguarding The Continuation Of The Revolutionary Process And, In Relation To This, Supporting The Government. As Regards The Nature Of The "Dialogue" And The Dialogue Partners, Military Regimes Normally Opt For Civilians Who Prefer Juridical-Political Changes To Social Economic Changes (Menke, 1988). In The Process Of Redemocratization In Suriname, On Each Occasion Since The Structural Character Of The Dialogue In September 1985, Emphasis was laid on juridical-political matters.

6 Elections in the post military period 1987-2015

In the post military period (1987-2015), seven elections were held under a new constitution. These elections were based on a proportionate system per district to elect members for the National Assembly. After a new constitution was accepted by referendum in 1986, the first elections in the democratization process were held in 1987. The "Front for Democracy and Development" (FRONT), an alliance of three mono-ethnic political parties (VHP, NPS and KTPI) won the 1987 elections with a landslide. They won 40 of the 51 parliamentary seats and obtained 87% of total votes casted nationally (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Percentage of votes cast nation-wide by political organizations, 1987-2015



Source: Menke (2000a). Centraal Hoofdstembureau (2005, 2010). <<http://www.dna.sr/verkiezingen/uitslag-verkiezingen-2015/>>.

The emphasis on the implementation of juridical-political changes formed the basis for the victory of the FRONT. Paradoxically, the emphasis on the juridical-political

aspect - coupled with the neglect of social-economic policies for the poor contributed to the crisis of the new FRONT civilian regime in the 1990s (Menke, 1991).

The Front implemented a monetarist development strategy that had negative implications for social class relations. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1992 was far from comprehensive and resulted in a deteriorated socioeconomic situation for the poorer sections of the population (Menke, 1998). This is reflected in the declined electoral support for the FRONT in the 1996 elections. But more important is the significant change in votes cast by the participating political organizations in the 1991-2015 period. The main change regards the votes cast by two

major political organizations: Front/V7 and MC/NDP. From 1991-2015 the percentage votes cast for Front/V7 shows a systematic decline, while the MC/NDP percentage increased (Figure 1). An exception is the 2000 elections when the NDP had a lower percentage votes cast than the previous elections.

After a gradual increase in votes from 1987-2010, the NDP, as a single party in the 2015 elections, succeeded to obtain a higher share of the votes cast by V7 a combination of mostly mono-ethnic parties, the PL, BEP, and DA'91 (Table 2).

Table 2 - Votes cast and seats in the National Assembly (DNA) by political organization in all districts, elections 2015.

Political Organization	Abs	%	Seats DNA
AC	27314	10.5	5
ANC	1109	0.4	
APS	843	0.3	
DOE	11168	4.3	1
DRS	664	0.3	
MF	1130	0.4	
NDP	117751	45.5	26
NOP	415	0.2	
PALU	1735	0.7	1
PING	317	0.1	
V7	96584	37.3	18
Total	259030	100.0	51

Source: <<http://www.dna.sr/verkiezingen/uitslag-verkiezingen-2015/>>.

6.1 Electoral decline traditional mono-ethnic parties

Some insights in voting behavior can be obtained by comparing the votes cast nation-wide per political organization between two or

more elections. Formally, this is not justified, because of Suriname's proportionate electoral system by district, with differences of the voter-seat ratio between districts. In other words, the number of available seats in the respective districts is not rela-

ted proportionately to the number of voters. It seems that calculation of the nation-wide votes cast per political combination (with exception of the three interior districts of Sipaliwini, Brokopondo and Marowijne) reflects by and large the trend in the remaining coastal districts.

Although Suriname has a proportionate system by district, an analysis of national figures has the advantage that one can determine the national electoral support as well as the changes related to previous elections. Electoral instability is helpful to assess the decrease or increa-

se of the percentage of the valid votes cast between two elections (Menke, 1996). It can be calculated by the instability index: the sum of the percentage gains of all political parties that had an electoral growth compared to previous election results. This index ranges from 0 to 100. An index of 0 indicates no change, thus no instability. Nation-wide the electoral instability from 1987-2015 for the Nieuw Front/V7 is negative (-50.1), which is quite high. The electoral instability for the NDP/MC for the same period is + 35.7 and for the remaining parties +13.3% (Table 3).

Table 3 – Electoral instability nationwide 1987-2015

Year	FRONT/V7*	NDP/ Millennium	Other parties	Total
1987	87.1%	9.3%	3.7%	100%
1991	54.2%	21.9%	24%	100%
1996	41.7%	26.2%	32.1%	100%
2000	47.5%	15.1%	37.4%	100%
2005	39.4%	22.2%	38.4%	100%
2010	32%	40%	28%	100%
2015	37%	45%	17%	100%
Loss (-) gain (+) 1987-2015	-50.1%	+35.7%	+13.3%	100%

Source: Menke (2000b). Centraal Hoofdstembureau (2005, 2010). <<http://www.dna.sr/verkiezingen/uitslag-verkiezingen-2015/>>.

*1.6% of the political party SPA that was not in the FRONT in 1987 is included in the figures of FRONT. V7 is the new name of the FRONT political combination in the 2015 elections, complemented with the political parties PL and BEP.

After analyzing the election results in the 1987-2015 period, we arrive at the following conclusions.

The FRONT/V7 could not restore the declining electoral results since 1991, (apart from a short revival in the 2000 elections, which is

due to the ‘crisis’ and fragmentation of the Bouterse - Wijdenbosch coalition from 1996-2000). The steady electoral decline of the FRONT/V7 since 1991 went to the advantage of the NDP/ Millennium Combinatie and “other parties”.

In the 1996 and subsequent elections in 2000, 2005 and 2010, the Front/V7 attained less than half of the votes cast nation-wide. The category “other parties” increased nationwide in the 1987-2005 period from 3.7% to 38.4% (Table 3).

What are important influenced the electoral instability? There are four important factors: the demographic composition of voters; the electoral system; the social characteristics of voters and the social policies.

The role of the changed demographic composition of voters can be derived from the changing demographic structure of the Surinamese population by ethnicity and age. From 1950-2012, the Creole & Mixed and East Indian remained the largest ethnic groups. However, the procentual decrea-

se of the initially major groups of Creole & Mixed, East Indian and Javanese is evident. As a consequence, the Maroon became the third group in the 2012 census, surpassing the Javanese. The remarkable growth of the Maroon by 162% from 2004-2012 is explained primarily by high natural increase of this group (Menke, 2015).

Most remarkable in the intercensus period 1950-2012 is the changed ethnic composition of the population, in particular the enormous growth of the Maroon contribution from 9% in 1950 to 22% in 2012 (Table 4). The majority of the Maroon voters are according to opinion polls affiliated with the NDP and the ABOP.

Americasbarometer, a study executed in 26 countries of the America's, indicates a strong asso-

Table 4 – Population by ethnicity, 1950-2012

Ethnicity	Census 1950*		Census 2012	
	Population	%	Population	%
Creole	74918	37%	88856	16%
Mixed		0%	72340	13%
East Indian	63770	31%	148443	27%
Javanese	35949	18%	73975	14%
Maroon	19180	9%	117567	22%
Indigenous	3546	1.7%	20344	3.8%
Chinese	2468	1.2%	7885	1.5%
European	2626	1.3%	1667	0.3%
Other	1703	1%	7166	1%
Don't know		0%	1805	0%
Not stated		0.0%	1590	0.3%
Unknown	401	0.2%		0.0%
Total	204561	100%	541638	100%

*Source: Van Lier (1971); Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek (2013).

ciation between party identification and ethnicity in Suriname (Menke et al., 2013, p. 162-163). The *Pertjajah Luhur* is mainly identified with by Javanese (70%), the *BEP* and *ABOP* are made up mainly of Maroon (resp. 84% and 95%), and the *VHP* mainly of East Indian voters (98%). Various opinion polls indicate that the influence of ethnicity on voting behavior is diminishing. The National Democratic Party (NDP) is not only the largest party in the 2015 elections, but it also has the highest multi-ethnic identification and became in the last held 2015 elections the largest political party.

Age is another demographic variable of influence on voting behavior. Various opinion polls since 1991 indicate that older voters are more likely to vote on the traditional mono-ethnic parties, while younger voters have a greater chance to vote on the NDP and other recently established parties.⁶

The electoral system also influences the electoral instability. It was indicated before that proportionate electoral system by district was introduced in 1987, with vast differences in the voter-seat ratio between districts. The three interior districts – *Sipaliwini*, *Brokopondo* and *Marowijne* – and the coastal district *Coronie* need far less votes than the other districts to win a parliamentary seat. One of the implications is that Maroon parties (*ABOP* and *BEP*) and multi-ethnic parties with

a strong appeal on Maroon voters (*NDP*) are likely to win most seats in the interior districts.

Finally, it is important to address the role of social policies. The *NDP* coalition government (2010-2015) implemented social policies. The most important measures were increasing the old age (*AOV*) and the child allowances, introduction of general health insurance and the introduction of the project “after school care” (*na-schoolse opvang*) an after school support project including meals and supervision of students. These social security measures probably had a direct and positive effect on the living conditions of the poor.

7 Conclusion

From 1949-1980 and during the first civilian elected government (1988-1991) following the military regime, the traditional mono-ethnic political parties (*VHP*, *NPS* and *KTPI*) dominated elections. Nationwide their electoral support reached between 60% and 90% of the votes cast. From 1991-2015, the electoral support of these parties reduced and reached a low point (below 40%) since the 2005 elections.

The 2015 election in Suriname marked a historical transition. The National Democratic Party (*NDP*), led by the former leader of the military regime (1980-1987), won the majority of the parliamentary seats.

⁶Opinion polls are conducted by various institutions: Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie (*SWI*), *IDOS*, *INDEST* and *NIKOS*.

From the perspective of the NDP, the electoral power shift is explained by structural factors: The demographic changes, the social characteristics of voters, and the electoral system.

In addition to the structural factors in the post military period that influenced the electoral transition from 1987-2010, the 2010-2015 NDP coalition government implemented important social security measures with a positive impact on the poorer sections of the voters. On the other hand, the decline of the mono-ethnic is due to their strong emphasis on juridical-political policies rather than implementing effective social policies to improve the living conditions of the poor.

The challenge for the NDP that won the 2015 elections is to establish a new government, which is able to sustain the implemented social policies during the previous 2010-2015 term. In case, these policies are not sustained in order to meet the created expectations, the recent electoral and political power shift might be short-lived.

REFERENCES

ALGEMEEN BUREAU VOOR DE STATISTIEK. Demografische en sociale karakteristieken en migratie. In: **Resultaten Achtste (8ste) Volksen Woningtelling in Suriname**. Paramaribo, 2013. v. 1.

CENTRAAL HOOFDSTEMBUREAU. **Officiële verkiezingsuitslagen 2005**. 1 CD- ROM.

_____. **Officiële verkiezingsuitslagen 2010**. 1 CD- ROM.

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. **Censo demográfico 2010: características da população e dos domicílios: resultados do universo**. Rio de Janeiro, 2011.

LIJPHART, A. **Democracy in plural societies**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

MENKE, J. **Post-koloniale staat, militair regime en herdemocratisering in Suriname**. In: SWI FORUM, jrg. 5/1, Juni 1988.

_____. The State in the development process of Suriname. In: JEFFREY, H.; MENKE, J. (Ed.). **Problems of development of the Guyanas**. Tam-menga, Suriname: Anton de Kom University of Suriname, 1991.

_____. **Restructuring urban employment and poverty**. Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam. Paramaribo: SWI, 1998.

_____. Traditie en verandering. De verkiezingen van 25 mei 2000 nader beschouwd in de post-militaire periode. In: **SWI-Forum voor Wetenschap en Cultuur**. Paramaribo: Foundation for Information and Development (SWI), 2000a. v. 16/2-17/1.

_____. Democracy and governance in multi-ethnic societies: the case of Suriname, in: RYAN, S. (Ed). Good governance in the Caribbean: the way forward. **Caribbean dialogue: A Journal of Contemporary Caribbean Policy Issues**. v. 6, n. 3-4. p. 67-88, 2000b.

_____. **Ras en Etniciteit in volkstellingen van Suriname.** Paramaribo: IGSR, Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname, 2015. Print in progress.

_____; SCHALKWIJK, M.; SCHALKWIJK, J.; SELIGSON, M. **The political culture of democracy in Suriname and in the Americas, 2012: towards equality of opportunity.** Report Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). Nashville, Tennessee: Vander Bilt University, SWI, 2013.

NERI, M.; MENKE, J. **Sustainable combat against poverty in Suriname: Main Report, final version.** Paramaribo: UNDP, 2001.

SEDNEY, J. **De toekomst van ons verleden: democratie, etniciteit en politieke machtsvorming in Suriname.** Paramaribo: Vaco N.V., 1997.

VAN LIER, R. **Frontier society: a social analysis of the history of Surinam.** The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.

*Artigo recebido em julho/2015.
Versão aprovada para publicação
em setembro/2015.*

