

# Party Outcasts

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## **The Underrepresentation of Female Parliamentarians in Belize**

by

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## **Abstract**

Adding to the feminist literature on women's underrepresentation in parliaments around the world, this thesis presents Belize as an elucidative case. Primary and secondary data were used to identify the barriers to women's electoral success. Interviews were conducted between May 2013 and February 2014 in Belize. An extensive review on feminist literature outlined three types of barriers: (1) cultural; (2) structural; and (3) institutional. The literature and primary data led to the conclusion that the largest barrier in Belize is institutional where the political party is the critical gatekeeper to women's success.

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## List of Acronyms

BWPC	Belize Women's Political Caucus
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FPTP	First-Past-the-Post
GOB	Government of Belize
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
NWC	National Women's Commission
OAS	Organization of American States
PRC	Political Reform Commission
PR	Proportional Representation
PUP	People's United Party
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
SMD	Single-Member District
UDP	United Democratic Party
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
UNIBAM	United Belize Advocacy Movement
UWG	United Women's Group
WIN	Women Issues Network
WIP	Women In Politics

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## Introduction

The fight for gender-equality worldwide has substantially improved the status of women. But women's journey from marginalization to lionization continues to be a formidable struggle. Politics epitomizes the hardship. Women's achievement in other fields reveals a drastic contrast to their paucity in parliament. While glass ceilings continue to challenge women in many areas, politics is the "hardest, highest glass ceiling" (Hilary Clinton, Concession Speech, 7 June 2008). Globally, women are severely underrepresented in nationally elected office. The lack of women at the highest levels of decision-making has triggered worldwide concern because it threatens democratic legitimacy. Democracy operates on the central principle that the decisions made on behalf of people must be made by people that represent their interests. Although international discourse, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), cites the importance of women in parliament, countries continue to share a lack of women in the highest stage of decision-making.

The global phenomenon has spurred extensive research which has offered a multitude of explanations. Many place the onus on women. With only one woman elected to the House of Representatives, a case study of Belize provides insight into modern-day obstacles to women in politics, reaffirming and defying the existent literature.

## Her Stories

During the August 7, 2013 sitting of the House of Representatives, Honourable Dolores Balderamos-Garcia, an Opposition member, questioned the Sergeant at Arms' character. She stated that not only had he been convicted for assaulting a woman, but he had also publicly urinated in front of the House while inebriated (*7 News*, 8 August 2013;

*News* 5, 8 August 2013). Before she finished speaking, she was interrupted by ruling party member Minister Michael Finnegan, who yelled across the room, “Is the lady finished? You are crude; you are a crude woman!” He asked her if she had seen the size of the officer’s penis when she witnessed his public urination. In addition to his inappropriate question, he threatened her, “And the things I know about your husband; you ought to be careful.” (7 *News*, 8 August 2013). Finnegan was not reprimanded for the outburst. Instead, a video<sup>1</sup> of the sitting reveals Prime Minister Dean Barrow and Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega laughing at the display. The Prime Minister interjected and accused Balderamos-Garcia of “character assassination” (Ramos, *Amandala*, 13 August 2013). Balderamos-Garcia repeatedly expressed concern about the outbreak at the sitting, but the Speaker did not admonish Finnegan. No member, not even those from her own party, defended her against the blatant verbal assault. The Speaker himself remained silent as the lone female member was publicly humiliated on national television.

The day after the incident, the women’s group of the official Opposition, the People’s United Party (PUP), held a press conference demanding that Finnegan apologize to Balderamos-Garcia and resign from his position. The group’s president, Wendy Castillo, stated that “Finnegan gave Belizean women a vivid colourful display of the kind of shameful treatment they justly seek to avoid when entering politics” (7 *News*, 12 August 2013). Balderamos-Garcia shared that she was hesitant to return to the House (7 *News*, 12 August 2013). More women’s groups joined in the outrage, but Finnegan did not resign. He refused to apologize to his colleague. Even though Prime Minister Barrow

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<sup>1</sup> The video can be found at the URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgw5BRBev\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgw5BRBev_w)



was recorded laughing during Finnegan's attack, he directed the minister to issue an apology. Following orders, Finnegan called a national radio station to apologize to the Speaker of the House, the members of his party, and the members of the Opposition. He did not apologize to Balderamos-Garcia. Instead, he insisted that she apologize to the Sergeant at Arms (*Wake Up Belize*, Krem Radio, 12 August 2013; *News 5*, 13 August 2013). In an interview with media house *7 News* (12 August 2013), he told the reporter that "politics is a big man game." The issue thereafter dissipated.

Belize annually recognizes March as Women's Month. In spite of that, then-president Gina Tillet of the United Women's Group (UWG) of the PUP was publicly humiliated on the front page of a national newspaper in March 2011. *The Guardian*, the media organ of the United Democratic Party (UDP), published an unflattering photo of Tillet in which she was sitting on the floor with her legs apart and a bottle in between them. Stamped across the photo was the caption "PUP Role Model." The photo was not relevant to any news story about Tillet. Instead, the accompanying story was about her brother who pleaded guilty to abusing his common-law wife. The umbrella organization for women's groups, Women's Issues Network (WIN), along with UWG, reprimanded the publisher Alfonso Noble. Lisa Shoman, an Opposition Senator, told media houses that the photo had one purpose: "to attempt to humiliate and degrade the President of the United Women's Group of the People's United Party" (*7 News*, 23 March 2011). UWG and WIN demanded an apology from the publisher and the UDP, but they received none. Noble responded, "I don't think that I, in any way, violated her, if we were to look back and see the origin of that picture. That picture had its genesis at Facebook...I will not offer any apology for what I did" (*7 News*, 23 March 2011). Again, the issue was forgotten.

Belize held its first women's empowerment rally on March 6, 2014. The rally was organized by the National Women's Commission (NWC), the women's department of the Government of Belize, and the Special Envoy for Women and Children, Prime Minister Barrow's wife Kim Simplis-Barrow. The name of the rally was "20,000 strong" and invited women from all six districts to travel to Belize City for a day of empowerment where successful women would deliver inspiring speeches. The organizers invited Honourable Balderamos-Garcia to present a speech as the only woman in the House. She rejected the invitation:

*I was personally invited but I don't take decisions just on my own. I have to consult with the Party Leader. I have to consult with the leaders of the party, and we had to take a decision to respectfully not participate, but mainly because we believe that it is not something that is real. It is not something that is going to change the lives of women in our country. (Plus TV, 5 March 2014)*

Women of the Opposition did not attend, except for Patty Arceo, a former member of the House of Representatives. She expressed the importance of unifying women as a collective in Belize and rallied women from the division she previously represented to attend (Arceo, Personal Interview, 24 February 2014).

In addition to the bipartisan conflict, the Roman Catholic Church expressed opposition against the rally because the "invitation does not speak to the complementary role between men and women as taught to us by Christ through Her Church" (Bishop Dorick Wright, Roman Catholic Church Press Release, 5 March 2014). The press release, issued on the day before the rally, also spoke against the NWC because of its stance on equality among sexual orientations. The rally expressed no motives other than the empowerment of women as a collective. The Special Envoy, Kim Simplis-Barrow, appeared on television to express her disappointment at the Church, particularly since she

was not contacted with any concerns before the statement was released (*Open Your Eyes*, 6 March 2014).

Each of these incidents illustrates the attitudes towards the advancement of women in Belize. In each story, the political party plays a role. Party loyalty and party rivalry shape how members treat each other, their opponents, and the Belizean public. The influence of party politics pervades every part of Belizean society where the majority of citizens strongly identify with one of the two dominant parties<sup>2</sup>. Political parties monopolize the political space. A change in government drastically changes the composition within social classes and reassigns social status; the shift in power relations is visible and cyclical, occurring each time the incumbent party is defeated. Daily issues are politicized. The party's power is exemplified in its role as gatekeeper to elected office.

### **Making Space**

What obstacles hinder women from entering electoral politics in Belize? In this thesis, I show how the political party is the largest barrier to female political representation in Belize. The political party sets the political culture which interacts with the rules of politics in Belize to create an atmosphere which excludes women. I focus on state government level, specifically the House of Representatives because it is the single national representative body of people directly elected by the citizenry. The other chamber of the bicameral legislature is an appointed Senate. The first chapter is descriptive. I set the context in which politics occurs. In Chapter 2, I identify and analyze the leading explanations of female representation worldwide. I divide the literature into

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<sup>2</sup> The United Democratic Party (UDP) and the People's United Party (PUP) are the two dominant parties in Belize. The UDP is currently the ruling party.

three types of barriers: (1) cultural (2) structural and (3) institutional. In Chapter 3, I analyze the impact of Belize's machismo culture, influenced by its geographical location in Latin America, the presence of Hispanics and Mayans, and its self-identification as a Caribbean country. In Chapter 4, I examine structural barriers, in particular three socioeconomic resources considered crucial for women seeking office: (1) education (2) employment and (3) income. In Chapter 5, I show that institutional barriers, specifically the political party, are the largest obstacles to women's electoral success. I argue that even in spite of a culture moving towards egalitarianism and in spite of women's progress in education and within the labour force, cultural and structural advancements are insufficient for electoral success. Ultimately, the political party chooses whom to recruit and nominate. Cultural and structural improvements essentially become negligible in a system where unregulated male-dominated political parties control access to political space. My final chapter is the conclusion where I recommend the implementation of institutions that can counteract the dominance of the political parties.

## **Chapter 1: The Belizean Context**

Belize is a small multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic state located on the Caribbean coast in Central America. The Caribbean country, bordered by Guatemala and Mexico, is the only English-speaking nation in the Latin American region. English Creole is widely spoken throughout the country. Belize is often lumped together with other Latin American countries or overlooked in scholarly political research. With a population of approximately 300,000 people, Belize is home to several cultures and ethnic groups which include Mestizos, Creole, Mayas, Garifunas, East Indians and Mennonites (Census

of Belize, 2010). Spanish is heavily spoken in the Northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk which consists mainly of Mestizos, a mix of Spanish and Yucatan Maya; Garifuna is spoken in the Southeastern district of Stann Creek where the Garifuna first settled; different forms of Mayan are spoken in Mayan communities dispersed throughout the country.

Gaining independence from Britain in 1981, Belize is a member of the British Commonwealth. Unlike its neighbours but similar to the Anglophone Caribbean, Belize is a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster system. The Executive Branch consists of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. A 31-member elected House of Representatives and a 12-member appointed Senate compose a bi-cameral legislature. General elections are held every five years. Two political parties are dominant: the People's United Party (PUP) and the United Democratic Party (UDP). The PUP was Belize's first nationalist party. Rt. Hon. George Price, a founding member of the party, is considered the "Father of the Nation" for having led Belize to independence. The UDP formed as an amalgamation of three parties which had formed in opposition to the PUP and has been the ruling party for the last two consecutive terms under Prime Minister Dean Barrow (2008-2012<sup>3</sup> and 2012-2017). Since independence, seven general elections have been held: the PUP won four and the UDP won three. Formally, democracy prevails in Belize; substantively, major issues threaten true democracy (Vernon, 2012).

Over seven general elections, only five women have ever been elected to the House of Representatives. That means men have represented 97.1% of elected representatives while women have represented a mere 2.9% (NWC & UNDP, 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> An early general election was held in March 2012, diverging from the routine five-year period.

Additionally, men represented 94.4% of the total number of candidates while women represented only 5.6% (NWC & UNDP, 2012). In the most recent general elections held in March 2012, the ruling UDP did not present any female candidates; the PUP Opposition ran three women. Of those three women, one woman sits at the House of Representatives. The frighteningly low number of women in government since independence has gained attention from the international community, stimulating interest from women's groups in Belize. Still, women's descriptive representation has yet to be addressed in political campaigns and platforms. Women remain neglected, both now and historically.

An anomaly in the region, suffrage was simultaneously granted to both men and women in 1954 when Belize (then British Honduras) held its first general election. This makes it particularly challenging to apply literature on neighbouring Latin American countries, where the movement for women's suffrage was slow and difficult, to Belize which did not need such a movement. Additionally, Belize has not experienced any authoritarian or military regimes like its Latin American neighbours and has never experienced armed conflict. During the Cold War, Belize did not yield to any Communist regime and was firmly in America's democratic bloc. That further separates it from Latin America. Despite these significant historical differences, little research has been conducted on Belize's political culture, making the country a blind spot in academic research.

Today, Belize is plagued by various social issues. It has been ranked as the third most dangerous country in the world, with 44.7 murders for every 100,000 inhabitants (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014). In another report, Belize is the lowest

performing country from the region in “Women in parliament indicators” (World Economic Forum, 2013). Forty-one percent of the population is below the poverty line (CIA Factbook, 2013). Drugs present a major problem for Belize as the Mexican cartel and other Central American drug gangs penetrate the country’s borders. Belize has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Central America. The country also experiences corruption, clientelism, as well as a high unemployment rate and domestic violence rate.

### **Organization and Methodology**

In the following chapters, I apply the literature on cultural, structural, and institutional barriers to Belize to answer the question, “What is the largest hindrance to women’s political representation?”

I use news reports and newspaper articles to apply the literature to Belize in addition to books and academic articles that focus on Belizean women and Belizean political culture. I employ survey data from the 2012 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) on Belize to gauge general attitudes towards women in politics. To augment the secondary data, I use ten in-depth personal interviews conducted in Belize between May 2013 and February 2014. Five interviews were with women who ran for office: Patty Arceo, Alifa Elrington-Hyde, Anna Banner Guy, Anne-Marie Williams, and Chandra Cansino. Patty Arceo is one of the five women elected to the House of Representatives since Belize’s independence in 1981. She served under the PUP for the term 1998-2003. Alifa Elrington-Hyde is a current Belize City councillor; Anna Banner Guy is a current Belmopan City councillor. Anne-Marie Williams has run for municipal elections and at multiple UDP political conventions. Chandra Cansino ran for her constituency in UDP’s internal political convention but lost to Santiago Castillo in 2011. I

interviewed an appointed Senator who asked to remain anonymous. Of the remaining four interviews, one interview was used to gauge political ambition. I recruited a woman in law, a profession considered to precede a career in politics (Lawless & Fox, 2010). To further understand the status of women in Belize, I interviewed Carolyn Reynolds, the Director of Women's Issues Network (WIN) which is the umbrella organization of all women's groups in Belize. I also interviewed a consultant knowledgeable on Belize's political landscape who asked to remain anonymous. I interviewed Anne-Marie Williams who serves as the Executive Director of the National Women's Commission, the governmental organization for women's issues. Lastly, I interviewed a woman in one of the highest tiers of decision-making within government; her position is appointed. She asked to remain anonymous.

## **Chapter 2: Understanding Women's Underrepresentation around the World**

In spite of women composing half of the world's population, they only make up 21.9% of parliaments around the globe (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 24 July 2014). The global phenomenon is magnified in the developing country of Belize. Belize has the lowest percentage of women in parliament in the both the Caribbean and Latin American region (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 24 July 2014). The small Commonwealth state had no elected women in its parliament the term prior to the most recent general elections. This common feature among most democracies worldwide leads to one question: Why? In this literature review, I evaluate the pertinent leading explanations of why women are not



active in electoral politics. I focus on three types of barriers identified within the literature: (1) cultural (2) structural and (3) institutional.

## **Cultural Barriers**

### **A tool-kit**

The definition of culture is elusive. It includes people's customs, traditions, and mass attitudes (Norris & Ingehart, 2008). But culture is not a unified system that guides action. Instead, culture is a tool-kit from which individuals choose a specific line of action (Swidler, 1986). The view of culture as a tool-kit contradicts Max Weber's view of culture where people's interests determine their actions. I use Ann Swidler's "tool-kit" conceptualization in my thesis because it creates a framework that explains why people choose actions that contradict their cultures. People do not rationally choose each of their actions, as Weber's theory proposes. Action is "necessarily integrated into larger assemblages" which Swidler terms "strategies of action" (2000: 276) where strategies are a "general way of organization action" (2000: 277). Because these strategies rely on people's habits, moods, and world views, culture has an independent causal role. Culture influences the actions through the organization of these strategies. Culture confers meanings onto our actions, creating a context for the things we do and say. It contributes to how we view gender-equality and whether it is promoted, rejected or simply ignored.

Culture manifests itself is through gender-roles. Stereotypes and expectations of men and women are part of the tool-box each person has. Women have historically been assigned to the roles of mother and wife, relegated to the private sphere while men orbit all spheres. An editorial written in the 1980s explains the "separate world of men and women." (*History Workshop*, 1983)

*The virtually seamless web of child-attendance, house-cleaning, shopping, helping out one's neighbours, and so on which makes up a housewife's working day performance creates around her a mini-universe of those with shared preoccupations. Even a woman in waged employment re-enters this world the moment she leaves the workplace (History Workshop, 1983: 2)*

This binary division persists more than thirty years later. In the United States, the number of successful female professionals leaving their careers to fulfill traditional roles is increasing (Lawless & Fox, 2012:9). Our acceptance of gender-roles is evident when employers discriminate against women in fear that they will become pregnant and go on maternity leave. In American law firms a mere 20% of partner positions are held by women (American Bar Association, July 2014). American politics further shows how entrenched traditional roles are. When Hilary Clinton's daughter announced her pregnancy, Clinton was dubbed "Nana President" and her competency to be a leader and grandmother simultaneously was questioned. Grand-parenting while in office has not been problematic for male candidates.

If a culture is firmly patriarchal, not only is an electorate less likely to vote for a female candidate but a woman is less likely to run. If a woman does run, she will find it difficult to gain financial support as donors may lack confidence in her ability to win. A study on culture's effect in eighty countries confirms the far-reaching and detrimental influence of traditional cultures (Norris & Inglehart, 2008). Even with affirmative action mechanisms like gender quotas, traditional attitudes still undermine women's chances for electoral success (Norris & Inglehart, 2008). On a study on the islands in the Pacific region – a region with the lowest numbers of elected women - cultural beliefs were the main reason that levels of women in parliament remained low, despite international effort (Zetlin, 2014).

Where egalitarian political cultures have shown increases in women's representation, some patriarchal cultures reflect a similar trend. This occurrence shows the importance of the context in which culture interacts. In some patriarchal cultures where women succeed, the preferred strategy chosen from the tool-kit is nepotism, where men in high roles choose women because of family connections (Krook, 2010). This happens in Latin American countries. In European countries, where women's successes in education, employment, and cultural life has not translated into more women in parliaments, political education is pinpointed as another hindrance (Beshiri & Puka, 2014).

Culture does appear to have a role. But what exactly is it? Is it causal or does it simply interact with a larger obstacle? How do developing and developed countries differ? Writing on Indian politics, Dhanda (2000) asserts that there is "nothing particular" about Indian culture that needs transformation for women to engage more in politics. She reasons that women's relegation to the private sphere is an ubiquitous feature of all patriarchal cultures but women's infiltration into politics is a challenge to the patriarchy. Instead of focusing on changing culture, Dhanda suggests implementing quotas. Her suggestion reflects another perspective – using mechanisms to widen the tool-kit. Culture in itself will not enable women to enter politics. Instead, feminists should arm women with legal mechanisms that women can use to combat the patriarchal culture and enter the male-dominated field of politics.

## Religion

Religion is one dimension of culture as it helps in shaping society. It can be the most dominant part of culture or play a smaller role. In some cases, religion can remove

tools from our kit; in others, it can add a few instruments. Before modern education, religious institutions were responsible for the dissemination of both sacred and secular knowledge (King, 1987). Examining world religions, King finds that religious authorities divided men and women, allowing men access to religious offices and placing women in secondary roles, preventing them access from secular knowledge. The interaction between the general culture and religion depends on the specific society that is being studied. Religion interacts with a culture by consolidating the traditional attitudes present in the culture (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2014). But religion can also provide women with networking skills and give them leadership positions that may be harder to attain outside religion. Some religions, through church participation and group gatherings, were the only vehicles through which women experienced autonomy and empowerment (Chong, 2006). Religion allowed women to practice their “nondomestic talents and abilities” (Chong, 2006: 712) before they were allowed any space in the public sphere.

Religion can simultaneously empower women and restrain women; its particular effect is heavily dependent upon the society in which it acts. Religion has the dual power to “both liberate and oppress, injure and heal” (Chong, 2006: 718).

### **Structural Barriers**

The structural explanation of women’s underrepresentation focuses on the gender gap in socioeconomic resources that facilitates political activity (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995; Elder, 2004). Women’s progress inside politics is often a reflection of their progress outside politics (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). Political interest does not translate into political participation at any level. Resources like money, time, and civic skills, help to transform interests into action (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995).

Women lag behind men at the highest form of political participation - running for office. Politicians and researchers identify the lack of women in the “eligibility pool” as a major reason. The eligibility pool refers to the “professional careers from which candidates are typically drawn and political careers are launched” (Elder, 2004: 30). In a large cross-country study, researchers find truth behind the “eligibility pool” argument, stating that of the five socioeconomic factors they studied, only the proportion of women in professional occupations is consistently associated with their representation in parliament (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). In this section, I review three socioeconomic resources that enable women to enter these eligibility pools and run for politics.

### Education

Education’s importance is not overstated. Governments allocate a portion of their annual budgets to education and international organizations forge treaties to improve education worldwide. Its importance fuels university students’ protests for lower tuition and teachers’ strikes for higher wages. In political participation research, a similar consensus exists: higher levels of education lead to higher levels of political participation (Ballington & Karam, eds. 2005; Elder, 2008; Lovenduski, 1998; Mayer, 2011; Verba, et al., 1995). Evidence has been demonstrated in a number of countries including India (Spary, 2014) and Latin American countries (Escobar-Lemmon & Taylor, Robinson, 2005).

Access to education affects participation at a number of levels: voter turnout, civic engagement, political knowledge, and ultimately electoral politics. The largely uncontested view that education positively leads to political involvement has naturally led to the suggestion that access to education will lead to more representation of minorities in

government. It follows that women with higher levels of education are more likely to seek elective office. This is because education develops women's cognitive skills, allowing them comprehend, engage, and analyze political content. It also gives them access to political issues, resulting in the attainment of political knowledge. Other than the enlightening effect of education, education is one way to acquire political capital by facilitating networking and the development civic skills. Moreover, education is correlated with socioeconomic status and income which are crucial factors when seeking office. Education empowers women by increasing their confidence, expanding their options, and helping them make better decisions. Educational attainment has begun to deteriorate the argument that there are no eligible women from which parties can recruit, as women's presence increases among educational institutions.

College experience has a liberating effect on women's attitudes towards traditional roles. Almost all the women in an American survey (95.6%) rejected the idea that women should remain at home and allow men to be the leaders of their country (Elder, 2004:9). This is in agreement with Sardernberg's (2012) conceptualization of culture as open to re-negotiation and challenges – of “constant fluidity and contested meanings” (13:2012). In a much older study, Rule discovers that U.S. states which spend more on education have higher party recruitment levels of female candidates (1981: 68).

At the same time, a number of studies (Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Campbell, 2009; Hillygus, 2005; Kam & Palmer, 2008) have tested the relationship between education and political participation and found that the observed causal relationship may be spurious. Focusing on higher education, Kam and Palmer test whether education is a direct cause of political participation or a proxy for “unobserved pre-adult experiences and

predispositions” (2008: 612). Essentially, college attendance is not an isolated factor but can be an effect of pre-existing characteristics. Instead of higher education causing political participation, there could be a confounding variable causing both enrolment higher education and political participation. Kam and Palmer offer parental characteristics and individual abilities as two examples of variables that could be the cause of college attendance and political participation (2008:613). In their study, they use a matching technique to create two groups whose political participation can be compared by having controlled for pre-adult experiences. What they discover is that once these pre-existing characteristics are accounted for, the effect of higher education is “indistinguishable from zero” (2008:613). Caudillo (2014) finds that women who have been exposed to full-time working mothers have a higher likelihood of participating in political activity. Mothers’ employment could then be a confounding variable, challenging the causal relationship between education and political participation. Evidence from Uganda, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Ghana also reveal that women who participate in literacy classes are more likely to send their children to school and monitor their progress (Department for International Development, 2005). These studies demonstrate the impact of the mother’s education. In a study which responds to Kam and Palmer’s work, Mayer (2011) also uses the matching technique and has contrasting results: educational advancement does lead to increased political participation. Moreover, higher levels of educational attainment also contribute to a higher female voting rate which in turn is expected to contribute to election of female candidates (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). Furthermore, Kam and Palmer analyze Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry’s argument which states that educational attainment acts as a sorting mechanism because it

leads to higher income and status. They show that this argument is weak because it still portrays education as an exogenous variable instead of a proxy. Campbell (2009) re-analyzes Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry's work as well as Kam and Palmer's examination. He argues that this sorting mechanism is useful, but only for electoral activity, of which competition is a hallmark.

## **Employment**

Employment is critical when seeking elective office. High levels of women in the labour force is expected to lead to an increase in female parliamentarians because paid employment prepares people for politics. It provides people with "managerial skills and broader worldviews than are available in the household" (Rosenbluth, et al., 2006: 169). Paid work requires people to perform certain tasks. The completion of these tasks contributes to the development of civic skills needed for politics. But entrance into the labour force does more than equip women with skills. It helps in the erosion of traditional gender roles (Anderson, 1975).

Despite the importance of employment, the labour force is another area that mirrors unequal gender relations. Glaringly, the wage gap between men and women continues to exist (Global Gender Gap, 2013). Without equal resources to male candidates, women are disadvantaged.

Participation in the labour force is connected to level of education. This connection between employment and education makes it difficult to identify causal relationships. For example, in many poor countries, with each additional year of schooling, people earn 10% higher wages. (Center for Global Development, 2002).



## **Income**

Differences in income determine differences in political participation (Friedman, 2010). An individual's income is positively correlated with his or her political participation (Beramendi & Anderson, 2008). The effects of income have been found to be linear where individuals below the median income in society are less likely to participate versus those above the median income who are more likely to participate (Beramendi & Anderson, 2008). Income can act as a proxy, identifying people who have more resources, education, and time to participate in political activity. Higher income can also offer women more leeway in considering running for office (Lawless & Fox, 2004: 19). People with lower income do not have the same access to public office and, unless recruited, do not consider running as much as higher income persons would. Income is also important in creating political space where people can mobilize, gather, and pursue agendas (International IDEA, 2005). Without the ability to meet basic needs, political space is unattainable.

## **Institutional Barriers**

Political institutions are sets of rules that shape human interaction (Kittilson, 2010). They determine who gets what, who does what, and who decides (Rao & Kelleher, 2003). Two political institutions - electoral systems and gender quotas – affect women's representation. I review the literature on these institutions and introduce another: the political party.

## **Electoral System**

The electoral system considerably impacts female political participation (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999, Wängnerud, 2009). Women's representation increases

under proportional representation (PR) systems (Wängnerud, 2009). Three features aid women: party lists, proportional representation, and large magnitude (Wängnerud :2009:54). Magnitude refers to the number of politicians elected within a constituency. In single-member districts (SMDs), each constituency elects one politician; in multi-member districts (a feature of PR systems), each constituency elects more than one politician. A worldwide comparative analysis shows that party lists and multi-member districts (MMDs) improve women's chances. (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). These characteristics reduce competitiveness and risk which encourages parties to nominate more women and voters to select women. Multi-member districts tend to be less adversarial because of the inclusion of more candidates and the lowered pressure to eliminate all other candidates. That attracts women who may have been intimidated by antagonistic campaigns. PR systems also mitigate unfavourable attitudes towards women by party leaders and voters (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Wängnerud, 2009; King, 2002). Furthermore, by removing the "non zero-sum nature of SMDs," (King, 2002: 163) MMDs give campaign sponsors more confidence in women's ability to win, and, as a result, removes the disincentive of financially supporting women. If this relationship is causal, will a change from a multimember district to a single-member district result in less women in politics? An analysis of American states that switched from MMDs to SMDs shows that there is a negative effect on female representation when moving to a single-member district (King, 2002). That further confirms the important role of the electoral system.

Practically, electoral systems may be less beneficial to women's success than theory suggests (Roberts, et al. 2012; Salmond, 2006). Studies do not account for

differing contexts among countries. This explains why electoral systems have small or even no effects in some countries. To test this theory, researchers analyzed the difference in elections before and after electoral change and found that, although positive change occurs in most countries, the change is small (Roberts, et al. 2012). The change is between one-third and one-half the size of the expected change (Salmond, 2006).

Changing a country's electoral system does not necessarily translate into greater female descriptive representation. Research indicates differences between developed and developing countries (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Matland, 1998). While many factors identified in research do lead to positive results, their effect may be triggered by a certain level of development (Matland, 1998). This indicates the existence of a threshold. If a minimum level of development is not met, "the variables that assist women gaining representation in developed countries simply have no effect" (Matland, 1998: 120). While PR systems do help women, this may only occur if background conditions are met (Roberts, et al, 2012). These findings show factors interact with the social context in which they exist. Large magnitude, for instance, ceases being effective after a percentage of women has been elected (Matland, 1993). In Norway, after there were 20% women in parliament, district magnitude no longer had an effect (Matland, 1993).

The effectiveness of a proportional electoral system depends on a multitude of factors. That dependence makes it difficult to determine whether a PR electoral system leads to a representation of women or whether it merely interacts with a number of other contextual variables.

## Gender Quotas

Another institution praised for its effect is the gender quota. Policies determine what the government considers when allocating resources. When a government implements gender-equal policies they set a tone for the country's attitudes by providing “concrete and more subtle cues that help people make sense of the social and political landscape” (Kittilson, 2010, p. 218). Advocates believe that quotas can advance women’s status in all levels of society. In five Nordic countries – Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Norway – political parties have adopted voluntary party quotas. They resulted in an increase of women parliamentarians (International IDEA). In countries with extremely low female representation, quotas are often absent. Quotas act as a legal mechanism that not only encourages women to seek office but also prevents masculinized institutions from excluding them. Gender quotas mobilize women into groups, allowing them to identify themselves as a united group. Quotas also act as a “fast track” option to issues in representation (Dahlerup, 2005). Despite their popularity in research, policies alone are insufficient in counteracting women’s unequal representation (Rae & Kelleher, 2003). In a study on Latin American countries, the positive effects of quotas were offset by informal institutions (Zetterberg, 2009). The concentrated power in party leaders, for instance, resulted in party leaders choosing women whom they knew versus women who were qualified. This is one example of the balance between formal and informal institutions. In another country, Timor-Leste, gender-equal policies were not effective until women began to act upon them by educating other women about the legislation and making opportunities available (Costa, et. al. 2013). Similar to Latin American countries Informal institutions constrain women in Timor-Leste. The women’s

caucus remained “nested within the traditional way of doing politics” (Costa, et. al., 2013: 345).

### **Political Parties**

The political party is a hallmark of democracies. The party, as a group of people with the aim of representing a citizenry, has key roles in the democratic process. Political parties recruit candidates, nominate candidates, and endorse candidates. Even if voters want to elect women, voters are not given the power to nominate candidates (Dahlerup, 2005). That exclusive power makes the party a gatekeeper to electoral success. Parties’ attitudes towards women also have psychological consequences. Research has indicated that when parties fail to recruit women for prominent positions, women’s engagement in politics suffers (Reingold and Harrell, 2010, p281). When parties do not adopt policies that are favourable towards female representation, they become the primary barrier to an increase of women parliamentarians (Krook, 2010).

When parties within a country recruit mostly male candidates, a masculinized atmosphere is created – one that signals to women that they do not belong in the political arena. This forms the institutional culture which is the “collection of values, history, and ways of doing things that form the unstated rules of the game in an organization” (Rao & Kelleher, 2005:66). Institutional culture is critical in defining the organization’s values, which is often contradictory to its mission statement (Rao & Kellher, 2005: 66). Formally, women are granted equality within democracies. But informally, parties’ stance on equal opportunity of women is considered mere lip service. Former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard delivered a speech about sexism and misogyny in the House of Representatives in October of 2012. In her speech, she revealed the double-standards

about women in politics by exposing then Leader of Opposition's sexism. Tony Abbott as Opposition leader took a strong position against sexism, asserting that those who hold sexist views do not belong in high office. Gillard reminded him of his sexist views by identifying remarks he made in interviews. When asked about women in politics, Abbott answered, "Yeah, I completely agree, but what if men are by physiology or temperament, more adapted to exercise authority or to issue command?" and in another, he expressed a similar sentiment, "If it's true, Stavros, that men have more power generally speaking than women, is that a bad thing?" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, October 2012). Gillard's speech was pivotal in that it addressed the issue of formal expressions of concern and substantive action. Even if women possess the skills considered necessary for a political career, the biases of gatekeepers can be the largest obstacle to qualified women willing to run. Furthermore, if the mass attitudes towards women in a country have begun to shift towards gender-equal culture, sexism can be entrenched within the political institutions (Wängnerud, 2009).

A long-standing argument, called the "role model" hypothesis, states that the presence of female parliamentarians encourages female political participation. Role model effects result in symbolic representation (Zetterberg, 2009). Female presence in governments positively affects women citizens' self-perceptions and encourages them to participate (Zetterberg, 2009). This is because women in high political positions are signs to female voters that they, too, can attain that position. Other research, however, contradicts this hypothesis, suggesting that role model effects result when the first women in society are elected. As the number of women in parliament continues to increase, other barriers hinder the expected empowering effects (Brockman, 2014).

Despite the consensus in research about the importance of descriptive representation, party leaders often justify their recruitment of mainly male candidates by stating that there are not enough eligible women to recruit from – an argument known as the “supply and demand” model (Krook, 2010). Yet, women today outnumber men in educational institutions worldwide and continue to increase their numbers in the labour force (UNESCO, 2014). Two theories explain why male leaders rarely recruit female candidates: the outgroup effect and the distribution effect (Conway, 2001). The outgroup effect refers to party leaders’ discrimination against those unlike themselves. The distribution effect, on the other hand, refers to gatekeepers’ biases that men are more likely to succeed in elections than women because men have always been successful in politics (Conway, 2001).

Both effects are heightened when political parties are centralized. Centralization is a critical organizational structure because it indicates the “distribution of control over decision-making within the party hierarchy,” (Caul, 1998:80). Centralization can be beneficial to women’s representation because it concentrates the power within one visible figure. That person, normally the party leader, can be pressured by women’s organizations to adapt measures to increase female representation (Caul, 1998). But centralization can also be harmful towards female representation because it can magnify a leader’s biases towards women, particularly if he is unchallenged by civic society and his party members.

Two other party organizational features impact women’s representation:

institutionalization and the location of candidate nomination (Caul, 1998).

Institutionalization refers to the formal regulation within a party. The degree of

institutionalization can bar women from accessing office. High levels of institutionalization foster women's participation because it denotes a rule-oriented process. If the rules do not discriminate against women, women may have better prospects in a highly institutionalized political environment (Caul, 1998).

The location of nomination refers to where a candidate is nominated – in a town (a local level) or at the national level (a centralized level). Because women often work in community politics, localized nomination is more welcoming towards female candidates, enabling them to eventually advance to the national level.

The political party can have great control over women's political access. The connection between political parties and the political culture is the missing link in explaining why women's underrepresentation continues to be a worldwide issue. Varying levels of economic, social, and cultural advancement, a proportional electoral system, and the presence of quotas do not result in more female parliamentarians. There is no formula for increased female representation. But there will always be a context in which these factors operate. This is the political culture. The political culture interacts with the larger general culture. The identified factors intervene between these two levels (Lehman, 1972). Lehman offers a revolutionary movement as an example. The success of that movement depends on the new regime's power and effectiveness along with "intrasocietal cleavages" (Lehman, 1972: 365). Political institutions wield immense power and the culture practiced within those organizations can exert great influence on women's presence in politics.



### **Chapter 3: A Gender-Equality Culture**

Formal equality between men and women has been present in Belize's constitution since independence. The right to vote, a major struggle for women worldwide, was granted to both sexes simultaneously. Despite these formal measures of gender equality, gender equity is challenged by informal constraints such as traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and socialization. Culture's role is maximized in small states where people know each other and many personally know their leaders (Vernon, 2012). Culture is fluid; the tools within your tool-kit expand or diminish. More than a fixed system of shared meanings among a group of people, culture is ever-changing, allowing it to be challenged and values to be "re-signified" (Sardenberg, 2012). The perceptions of gender is "always social and cultural constructions and, as such, open to challenge and change," (Sardenberg, 2012: 6). A gender-equality culture provides women with opportunities for upward mobility; the opposite imposes traditional values and restricts women's progress (Wängnerud, 2009: 56).

Three cultures – the Mestizo/Hispanic, the Mayan, and the Caribbean – largely influence Belizeans. Belize's geographical location in Central America contributes to the heavy presence of Hispanic culture throughout the country. Through migration, the Mestizo became the largest population (Census of Belize, 2010). During the Caste War of Yucatan in the nineteenth century, thousands of Maya and Mestizo fled to Belize for refuge; many remained and settled in the Northern part of the country. But the first settlers in Belize were the Mayans, whose Maya ruins remind us of the great civilization that dwelled in Belize. They continue to reside in communities throughout the country, following their own traditions and fighting for land rights. The third pillar of cultural

influence is the Caribbean. From Belize's British colonization, its parliamentary democracy, and its Caribbean Community (CARICOM) passport, the country's identity is decidedly Caribbean (Vernon, 2012). These three cultures intersect in their treatment of women and their hierarchical gender relations. Each is a male-dominated culture which views women as subordinate to men. Their traditional gender roles and expectations of men and women curtail the behaviour of Belizeans and inform men and women how they should behave.

"Machismo" describes the hyper-masculinity existent in Latin American communities. A "real man" is aggressive and invulnerable while his enemies are assigned feminine traits (Stevens, 1965; Basham, 1976). Men are dominant while women are submissive and accepting. Basham captures the macho personality: "The macho is a man who knows more than he tells, who conquers women at his pleasure, who suffers no injustice without response, and who, above all, never evinces fear" (1976:127). Machismo is often juxtaposed with Mexican culture. The amplified masculinity creates rigid gender roles. Virility is prized in men; virginity in women. Women in this highly masculinized context belong in the home as mothers and wives.

The Caribbean society is similarly patriarchal with overtones of intensified masculinity where women are dependent economically, emotionally, and socially upon men. Popular music like dancehall and soca presents women as sexual beings available for the pleasure of men. Though some social scientists have analyzed such music as sexually liberating and empowering for women, the prevailing message in popular Caribbean music displays a "macho, paternalistic, disciplining, oppressive attitude toward women and women's sexuality"(Frank, 2007:176). This attitude pervades all areas of

Caribbean life. Historically, a legacy of slavery and colonialism has also contributed to the oppression of women. Women have been excluded from leadership in male-dominated organizations such as politics and business (Wint & Dunn, 1997: 73). The Mayan of Belize do not have particular rights as indigenous people like other countries. Nevertheless, news stories and anecdotal evidence suggest that the Mayan remain loyal to their traditions. The marrying of their daughters under the age of eighteen and delegation of women to the role of mother and wife underscore their view of women.

Masculine domination, heterosexuality, and female subordination are hallmarks of the Belizean culture.

*We're surrounded by cultures dominated by males. If you look at Latin America machismo Caribbean machismo, and the Maya, our roots, there's machismo. The men lead so it's ingrained in us. Even us as women we can't deny sometimes if you're led by a man, sometimes, you feel more protected* (Personal Interview, February 2014).

Belizean society is "laced with patriarchy" (Personal Interview, February 2014). Ann-Marie Williams, the executive director of NWC, rejects the idea that gender equality has been reached in Belize. She explains, "they'll say, 'look at all these women who are teachers, but the principals are all men'" (Personal Interview, February 2014). Focus groups conducted by the UNDP revealed similar views: "The things that men do and say, they can get away with. Women can't. Even if we're not doing anything wrong..." (Lewis, 2012). This was confirmed by another interviewee who says "The advances that women have made so far are in spite of sexism. Many women are taught that this isn't the kind of role that they should be playing. In some areas in Belize, that applies not only to politics but almost any activity out of the house," (Personal Interview, May 2013). The media's portrayal of women in politics further conveys the message that women do not

belong in the House. After a woman ran a highly contested seat, a media house showed a photo of her losing male opponent doing community work. When showing her photo, the image they chose was of her cleaning up after the victory party, despite the fact that she won that seat (Personal Interview, May 2013).

The interviews raised the important issue about nation-wide cultural differences. Williams also spoke about the intra-national differences. In the 2010 census, the NWC included questions to gauge the attitude towards female leadership in Belize. The results revealed disaggregated views. Williams explained, “We know that in the North where the cultures are more traditional, we have to do much more work because they are not amenable to women as a prime minister but in the city and other places, women leaders, they are very enthused about it” (Ann-Marie Williams, Personal Interview, February 2014). Her view on the differences in political culture was echoed by a Cabinet minister who spoke about deciding whether certain constituencies were favourable to women. She explained, “For example if I ran in Toledo West - that is a Mayan community. What are my chances of success? Are they receptive to women holding elected office?” (Cabinet member, Personal Interview, May 2013) Another political candidate supported the view, explaining “Like in the Creole culture, I think women stand a much better chance of being elected as opposed to the Mayan culture. I think that’s changing and has been changing but it still applies to some cultures where the man is seen as the boss” (Personal Interview, May 2013). A city councillor expressed that “We live in a region where there is no gender equality. Men can practice bad moral values but women can’t” (City Councillor, Personal Interview, June 2013). That description fits the masculinized culture present throughout Belize.

When members of Belizean society act against these norms, negative consequences often follow. The case of the United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM) versus the Attorney-General of Belize highlights the consequences that follow the breaking of norms. UNIBAM, led by Caleb Orozco, is the country's first Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) advocacy group. UNIBAM seeks the amendment of anti-buggery laws in Belize on the basis that the law is discriminatory and stigmatizes Belize's gay society. Orozco has received many death threats and has been physically assaulted because of the case (Stephens, Huffington Post, May 2013; *7News*, February 2012; UN AIDS Caribbean, 2 February 2012). As a gay man, he has violated society's norms. By challenging laws which criminalize homosexuality, he has challenged the heteronormativity prevailing in Belize. The case has highlighted the overwhelming homophobia in Belize and throughout the Caribbean, which is consistent with the cultural machismo of the region. Though a decision was to be made in May 2013, over a year has passed without a resolution. Other examples of the gender hierarchical relations are the high rates of sexual violence throughout the region. It has been called an "epidemic" with Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados having the highest rates of domestic violence and rape in CARICOM (Singh, *Jamaica Observer*, 25 August 2013). Hegemonic masculinity in Belize demands that men be heterosexual, aggressive, and brave. Any other form is rejected and punished. Women absorb these social cues and, consequently, refrain from infringing on men's monopoly of political space.

The political gender role socialization hypothesis is another dimension of the cultural barrier to female political representation. This hypothesis asserts that women do

not want to enter electoral politics as much as men because they are still taught that politics is for men (Elder, 2008: 31). Family, education, peers, and the media are all channels through which socialization occurs. Through socialization, we are assigned the tools for our kits, with men getting more than women. The lack of women in government since independence is a constant reminder to women that politics is, as Minister Finnegan declared on national radio, “a big man’s game.” In an interview with Belize City councillor Alifa Elrington-Hyde, she offered an explanation:

*The ugliness of politics would deter anybody from getting involved. It’s really not a nice arena. You have to deal with... a lot of people trying to ridicule you, trying to look up your history to see what bad things you’ve, done bad decisions you’ve made*  
(Personal Interview, 25 February 2014)

But as another interviewee noted, “when women are not interested in politics, it’s because of systemic problems. It’s not because the women are lacking. It’s because the system is lacking.” (Personal Interview, June 2013). The ruthlessness in politics is often a deterrence for women. One interviewer noted “Politics requires a lot of wheel and dealing and I don’t know if women are necessarily comfortable in that...you have to be constantly negotiating hardball” (Personal Interview, June 2013).

Education and religion are two powerful agents of socialization. Belize has a Church-State education system. About a half of the population is a Roman Catholic (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2013; Census of Belize, 2010). As the dominant religion, the Catholic Church operates most of the schools in Belize. Catholicism is hostile towards women because it is a male-created structure that excludes women from key roles (Kassem, 2012). Because of its central place in education, girls and boys are further socialized to follow strict roles where the female is given a supportive role to the male in

a religious teaching known as complementarianism. Females are excluded from roles of power as they begin school. Religious education is taught weekly in schools and though the constitution affords religious freedom, the vast majority of students enrolled in Catholic schools, whether they are Catholic or not, attend these classes. Many Catholic high schools are all-female or all-male. If a female student is impregnated while in high school, she can be expelled from the school (Paredes, 2002). The Ministry of Education does not have any policies protecting these girls or any policies for girls who are impregnated while in primary school. Furthermore, unmarried female teachers working at Catholic-governed schools who are impregnated are asked to marry or are fired (Paredes, 2002). The Church and the education system have taught and continue to teach women that their role in society is mother and wife, applying punishment for girls who have pre-marital sex and teaching women to remain in supportive roles.

The impact of the Church-State partnership in education is evident in the reaction towards the first women's empowerment rally, evident in the hostility towards UNIBAM, and evident in the lack of protective policies for young unwed pregnant women within the system. It is also evident in the unwillingness of women to identify themselves as feminists in Belize. In each of the interviews, I asked the women if they considered themselves feminists, without offering any definition of the word. The initial response of eight respondents was negative. There was a lack of consensus on what the word meant. I later offered the definition that a feminist promotes equality between men and women. While some women changed their initial answers, others remained adamant against using the label. One respondent said she did not want to be a feminist because "A feminist would probably be a political fan for women" (Personal Interview, May 2013). Most of

the respondents had considered feminists radical women who wanted superiority over men. A woman noted, “Saying you’re a feminist could limit your position in many things. I’m a feminist so I want to develop women so I believe in the development of women so I would then pick a woman over a man...it kind of leads you to that.” (Personal Interview, 4 February 2014). Because of the notion that identifying as feminist predetermines policy choices, she refused to accept the label. The Director of the largest women’s group was also reluctant about identifying herself as a feminist, explaining “I would say I’d be more the equalizer. I see [that] things should be equal so if that’s a part of feminism, then I’d be a feminist” (Personal Interview, May 2013). The lack of knowledge about feminism and the reluctance to identify oneself as a feminist are reflections of the subservient roles women are expected to play.

In her study, Elder (2008) found that the political gender role socialization was a reality in American society. Elder explains that although traditional roles are starting to be rejected in America, subtle forms still exist. Belize, a developing country, has not arrived at the rejection of traditional roles yet. As illustrated by the introductory story, there are explicit expectations for women. In Belize, there are divided gender roles but they are not typical roles. Granted, the female is expected to be mother and housewife while the male has access to the public sphere. In addition to the private sphere, however, the female is expected to do “double-duty”, that is, have a job as well as manage her domestic responsibilities at home. Whereas this phenomenon is recent in developed countries, it has been the norm in Belize where female-headed households are common due to the rise in single mothers. In 2012, a newspaper article notes that Belize’s single mother rate is higher than America’s rate of 40% (*The Reporter*, 21 June 2012). It also muses that the



“vast majority of youths that join gangs come from fatherless homes.” (*The Reporter*, 21 June 2012). The Government of Belize launched a program named “Supporting Single Mothers” after an increase in fatherless children was observed (though no statistics are available) (*News 5*, 25 June 2010). It becomes “difficult for women to participate in political life when their major concern is survival and they have no choice but to spend much of their time trying to meet the basic needs of families” (Ballington & Karam: 2005: 43). That is a situation a large group of Belizean women are finding themselves in as the number of fatherless households rises. If a woman is a single mother and breadwinner, she may consider electoral office a third fulltime job (Ballington & Karam, 2005). Patty Arceo, one of the five women to sit in the House of Representatives, has run three times – of which two were successful, giving her experience in both local and national government. She expressed interest in running for the upcoming general elections in 2017 but explained why that was not feasible:

*This time coming around as much, as I would like, I can't because I am at a crossroads right now as a mother with a young child and I know if I go out there campaigning, I will not be with my child the amount of time that I should be...Now when our males, they run, yes a lot of them they are fathers but when they come back home, they don't have that stress that women have because the wife stayed home and is already taking care of the children and the other family issues (Personal Interview, February 24, 2014).*

Restricting women to gender roles in the private sphere prevented them from attaining skills necessary to run for politics; assigning them double-duty now ensures that women do not have the energy to pursue political activities (Welch, 1978: 372). The attitude that women belong in the private sphere not only acts as a deterrent but as a disadvantage for women who do run. If they choose to run, they are not allowed to abandon their duty as

housewife and housekeeper. An interviewee observed that “Most electoral bodies aren’t set up for women who have two and three responsibilities. You know they have home, community, job, and politics. Men usually have a wife to take care of the first two.” (Personal Interview, June 2013). Instead, they “arrive at the starting point exhausted” (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008:8) because of their domestic responsibilities. Belizean women experienced this burden as indicated by the UNDP’s focus groups. One woman said, “Sometimes, I feel like I have to put my son on the back burner” (Lewis, 2012) while another credits her strong support structure for her ability to run: “I had support- if I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have been able to do it. My husband stepped in with the children...,” (Lewis, 2012). When women do participate in politics, they are not the politician. They are “organizers, vote-getters, and food providers for the country’s political parties” (Barry, 1995: 120). These secondary roles, though important, divulge the impact of gender roles. Women are allowed access to the public sphere, only if they maintain private sphere duties.

Studying professions that typically precede political careers, Lawless and Fox (2004) find that as women’s domestic responsibilities decrease, their interest in running for office increases (Lawless & Fox, 2004:11). An interviewee warned that the issue is beyond women being socialized against these roles: “You have to look at what leadership means and what does political leadership mean more importantly and you know what are the costs that are involved.” (Personal Interview, June 2013).

Another explanation is the political confidence hypothesis (Elder, 2008; Lawless & Fox, 2010). Women are significantly less likely than men to believe that they are knowledgeable enough to be good politicians (Elder, 2008: 40). These levels of political

confidence are not reflections of women's experiences, education, or resources. Elder finds that in the younger cohorts of her study, more female college students than male college students had experience in student governments. Nevertheless, men maintained greater political confidence (Elder, 2008: 40). Lawless and Fox (2010) have a similar theory known as political ambition. In an American survey of people whose careers normally precede politics, even the most qualified women in the highest tiers of professional accomplishment are significantly less likely than men to demonstrate the ambition to seek public office. That may explain the paradox that exists in Belize: where more women than men are educated and where many women are chief executive officers, few women seek office.

Interestingly, when women do choose to run, they win, suggesting that the electorate are accepting of female leadership. In a 2012 survey conducted by Latin American Public Opinion Project in Belize, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement "Some say in general, men are better political leaders than women." The majority of respondents (62.%) disagreed with the statement that men make better leaders while 15.2% of the population strongly disagreed. This questionnaire along with women's success when they do run suggests that the electorate favourably views female leadership. Culture in Belize, though patriarchal, is changing. All of the interviewees indicated a positive shift towards women in power from the general public, stating that the country's male leadership has left the people wanting an alternative. A woman who had run at a political convention noted, "I think the electorate want to. It's the selectorate who don't want to put up women candidates...I could tell you that in the past whenever you had women running along with men, they often times

topped the polls,” (Personal Interview, February 2014). An informant who won elections twice explained that culture is a hindrance to women succeeding: “I don’t believe they don’t want me because I’m a woman and believe me, I come from a community that is very macho,” (Personal Interview, February 2014). Another informant said that the electorate is not less inclined to vote for a woman but that “the problem is the women are not presented to them. Women aren’t losing elections. They aren’t placed there,” (Personal Interview, May 2013). An informant said that throughout her life, she has never heard of people not wanting to vote for women. She said that the support for women is there but that when women do get elected, they are held to higher standards than their male counterparts (Personal Interview, May 2013). The agreement among the women on this position suggests that the patriarchal culture may be more emphasized within the institutions themselves. The broader culture seems to be shifting towards one that accepts and promotes women in power, though it may take more time to see significant changes.

But will a shift to a gender-equal culture lead to higher numbers of women in parliament? That it has not in other countries with more egalitarian cultures reveals the multifaceted solution to low numbers of women politicians. An interviewee explained culture’s limited impact: “in Belize your party affiliation is a much more powerful indicator of voting than whether you’re male or female which isn’t to say that women don’t pay a price when they actually go to the electorate” (Personal Interview, May 2013). Politics in Belize is not ideological. It is generational: “political allegiances in Belize frequently follow the traditional political loyalties of one’s family and friends or are the result of personal favors (or the possibility of them) distributed by party representatives” (Barry, 1995: 11) .

Whether or not women want to run is bound to whether they are able to run – an ability attached to one’s socioeconomic resources. To understand women’s ability to run, an analysis of their socioeconomic resources is necessary.

## **Chapter 4: Structurally Unsound**

Is the greatest barrier to women’s national representation cultural constraints? Or is women’s desire to run suppressed by their lack of resources? In this chapter, I will analyze three major socioeconomic resources that contribute to political participation and measure their impact upon Belizean women’s political participation at the electoral level.

### **Education**

For the academic year 2012-2013, a total of 20,539 students attended secondary schools in Belize, of which 51.8% were females and 48.2% were males (Ministry of Education, 2013). The gap dramatically increases in junior college and universities. Of a total of 3,818 students enrolled in junior college, 40% are males whereas 60% are females. Of a total of 4,662 students enrolled in the University of Belize (the only public university in Belize), 36% are males whereas 64% are females. Despite Belize’s educational situation, women are still underrepresented nationally. Still, in a 1998 study of 2013 women in Belize who actively engage in politics, non-governmental organizations, or churches, one of the two corrective strategies was the education of women (Lewis, 2012: 45). The most recent study on gender in politics in Belize also concludes that it is the “powerful combination of education with practical strategies” (Lewis, 2012: 91) that will result in an increase of female political participation. Educational attainment, however, has not translated into female participation. For Belize

City's municipal elections in 2012, women were scantily represented on the party slates: the UDP presented one woman, the PUP two and an independent party Vision Inspired by the People (VIP) one. Consequently, only one woman is in the council of the most populous city in the country. At 9.1%, this is lowest it has been since 1983 (Lewis, 2012:49). The capital city Belmopan has two women on its council (28.6%) but, unlike Belize City, has never had a female mayor. Similarly, the town councils have experienced a decline in female representation with 18.4%, falling below 20% for the first time since 2000 (Lewis, 2012: 49). Of seven town councils in the country, one council elected no women, one elected three, and the remaining voted for one or two (Lewis, 2012: 50). In addition to these boards, of 191 village councils in Belize, 51 have no elected women. This means that more than one in four villages in Belize has no women on its council (Lewis, 2012: 52). Since the last general and municipal elections in 2012, the number of women represented throughout the entire country has been discouraging despite women's continued advancement in higher education.

If education causes political participation, the effect of higher percentages of women in post-secondary institutions should mean an increase in female in electoral politics. The Belizean context suspends this relationship. Interestingly, the failure is not unique to the small Caribbean country. Kerala, a state in south-west India, is considered exemplary for its treatment of gender issues and its achievement in the rapid improvement of general quality of life. Women in Kerala fare much better than women in other parts of India. They have significantly higher literacy rates, higher employment rates, less children, and a longer life expectancy (Justino, 2003; Tharamangalam, 2010). Despite this, their participation politically remains low like the rest of India. Mary E. John

(2005) writes that the deeply engrained patriarchy which permeates all parts of India almost nullifies the effect of highly educated women in Kerala. In this case, culture proves to be a greater determinant of women's participation than education. The Belizean culture could also explain why women's educational lead has not been reflected in the Parliament.

Though the debate continues as to whether education is a cause or a proxy, in Belize, the debate leans towards proxy as education is apparently not a direct cause of women's political representation. The number of women enrolled in tertiary level institutions alarmingly surpasses the number of men. Still, this has not resulted in an increase of women in politics. Instead, female political participation has lowered in village, town, and city councils and has remained exceedingly low nationally.

Applying Campbell's analysis to Belize, people are more likely to get involved in electoral politics if their interests are at stake. Women's issues in Belize are not election issues. The crime rate and the current state of the economy are normally the centre of each party's campaign. Belize has not nationally discussed, for example, gender quotas or abortion policies. In the last election, neither party focused on policies that address gender inequality in Belize. As women continue to be neglected during elections, this thesis agrees with Campbell's analysis that a person is more likely to get involved when their interests are at stake. In addition to Campbell's analysis, the hypotheses on political confidence (Elder, 2012) and political ambition (Lawless & Fox, 2010) may explain the phenomenon. Though women are more educated, they still doubt their ability to run a good political campaign.

## **Educated and Unemployed**

In Belize, there is a high female unemployment rate, despite educational advancements. The unemployment rate in Belize is 14.2% (Statistical Institute of Belize, September 2013). Of the total unemployed population, 9.6% are males whereas 21.5% are females; this is more than double the rate of male unemployment. This is even more surprising when you consider Belizean women's lower participation rate in the labour force than men (44.7% female versus 80.9% male). Education has not yet led to more participation in the labour force. A lack of women in the labour force creates a gender gap in politics because it prevents women from entering the eligibility pool, allowing political parties to argue that there are not women available to recruit from.

Globally, women have surpassed men in levels of education. In 2014, the global enrolment ratio is 93 men per 100 women which is substantial improvement from 1970 where the ratio was 160 men per 100 women (Chamie, *Yale Global Online*, 6 March 2014). Still, women are underpaid and underemployed. Do women simply not want to run? Lawless and Fox (2013) attribute the phenomenon to a lack of female political ambition, to which they offer five main reasons: (1) young men are more likely than young women to be socialized by their parents to consider politics as a career path; (2) young women are less exposed to political content and discussion than their male peers; (3) young men are more likely to have participated in organized sports, leading to more competitiveness and a desire to win; (4) young women are less likely to receive encouragement to run for office; and (5) young women are less confident about their qualifications for politics than equally qualified men.



## Financially Insecure

There is no available data on income gaps between men and women in Belize but it is possible to deduce from the available data that women have lower levels of income than their male counterparts. The poverty rate in Belize is 41.3% (UNDP, 2012), with 16% classified as extremely poor. Women are more likely to be poor and more female-headed households were poor (Kairi Consultants, Ltd, 2002). The per capita income is \$5,812 (UNDP, 2012) and with the female unemployment rate almost double the male's (SIB, 2013; PAHO, 2013), it is possible to conclude that overall, women have lower levels of income than men. Carolyn Reynolds, the executive director at WIN explains that, at all levels of economic development, women have harder time accessing money, whether it's for a loan or land (Personal Interview, 2013). That adds to the financial gender gap.

Income is an extremely important factor when seeking political office in Belize. The country lacks any regulation on campaign financing. Political parties operate as private organizations. Without limits to campaign finances, a campaign can become an extremely costly venture. If a new candidate is running, she is expected to undertake the financial burden. The Organization of American States (OAS) released a report on the lack of regulation which indicates that political parties become " beholden to donors" from both the local private sector and international investors. It also indicates the presence of patronage politics, which can lead politicians to spend exorbitant amounts of money. The OAS's report is supported by media houses which report the widespread clientelism during election time. A PhD dissertation (unreleased, 2012), not yet released, by a

Belizean used 69 elite interviews to discover the rate of patronage politics. His interviewees included all prime ministers and politicians from both dominant parties. He offered a conservative estimate – that 20% of the electorate is involved in handout politics. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests it is much higher. During election time, voters will openly boast about voting for the politician which offers more money. Buying votes is a popular headline during elections, where people are given money, promissory notes, or favours. Vernon offers many reasons for the rise in handout politics which will be elaborated on in another section. What vote buying does is create an unfair field for candidates where poorer candidates are unable to compete. Furthermore, incumbent candidates often use government taxes to fund their campaigns, creating more inequality. If women in Belize want to run and win, they must ensure that they can endure the financial hardship that a successful political campaign requires under these conditions.

Each of the socioeconomic resources is related where education leads to employment and employment leads to income. Though some studies have found that education has the most powerful effect, the case study of Belize suggests that other factors are at work. In a comprehensive study of developed and developing studies, Kenworthy and Malami, study five of these factors: women's educational attainment, women's share of the labour force, women's professional occupations, strength of women's movement, and level of economic development. Higher degrees of each factor are expected to increase female political participation but their analysis in both studies contradicts this expectation. None of the factors are statistically significant to the dependent variable – the share of seats in parliaments held by women (1999:251). After performing multiple checks on their variables, Kenworthy and Malami's findings suggest

that cultural determinants are stronger than socioeconomic ones. Belize presents a similarity to many developed countries where more women are educated than men but less women are employed. The attainment of education, then, seems to be an unreliable predictor for electoral participation since there is no country in the world where fewer women are educated but more hold office. As Lawless and Fox have found, even with comparable education, women's political confidence is significantly lower than men's, revealing that qualifications is not the biggest barrier. Though socioeconomic resources are important in giving women the ability to run and the tools to win, what is more important is to gain understanding of why women do not run in spite of resources. Belize reveals that possessing the necessary skills and resources to run for office does not naturally lead to more women seeking office.

## **Chapter 5: Political Institutions**

The chief executive officer (CEO) of the current Prime Minister is a woman. Of twenty-one CEO's, eight (38.1%) are women (Lewis, 2012). CEO's are career public servants who are appointed by the newly elected government to act as leading administrators within a ministry. The number of female CEO's indicates that women are leaders within government. In addition to these female CEO's, eighteen women serve as Heads of Departments in ministries (Lewis, 2012). That results in a total of twenty-six women serving in senior management positions within government. Within the Senate, three of six appointments by the ruling party were assigned to women while two of a total of three roles were appointed to women by Opposition. In regards to non-competitive

seats, it appears that women are capable of reaching the highest levels within government. Despite their qualifications and experience, many women do not seek office.

If culture can be contested and re-negotiated, and if resources important for women's success can be attained, what explains the lack of women represented politically? I argue that Belize's male-dominated institutions bar women from entering. An "old boy's club" atmosphere, widespread corruption, party rivalry, unregulated political parties, and the electoral system itself are all institutions that deter women from entering office. The masculinization of political parties excludes women. The marginalizing effect is exaggerated by the political institutions. Gatekeepers to the formal political arena wield the power to choose who can be let in and who must remain disenfranchised. The most powerful gatekeepers are the political parties and the context in which they operate is critical in understanding the behaviour of Belize's parties.

### **Belize's Pseudo-democracy**

Belize's governance is deceptively democratic. In a study on Belize, respondents were asked whether they supported democracy. Approximately 71.9% of respondents answered affirmatively (LAPOP, 2008). In that same survey, Belize had the highest percentage among the Americas in regards to viewing core government institutions as legitimate (LAPOP, 2008). A central tenet in democracy lies in the principle that people are able to vote for leaders who represent them and their interests. How can the absence of women in politics be reconciled with the public's support for democracy and recognition of legitimate institutions? Belize has received positive assessments globally because of its stable democracy (Vernon, 2012). Though Belize may be democratic formally, substantively, its institutions fail. The first and only established political reform

commission released its findings in 2000 under a PUP government. Though the commission had members from both parties, the UDP suspended its participation to protest the appointment of a judge. Nonetheless, the commission continued its mission to report ways to improve Belize's political system. The report was ignored and no government has attempted to implement the recommendations within it. The chairperson of the commission, Dylan Vernon, later worked on a dissertation which identified issues that hinder Belizean democracy. These include the lack of separation between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, two-party rivalry, the FPTP electoral system, political corruption, the lack of campaign finance regulation, and growing patron politics (Vernon, 2012:16). These issues create a political arena unwelcoming to newcomers, especially women.

### **Political Parties: Setting the Tone**

Political parties are a key factor in the representation of women because of their exclusive role at recruiting and selecting candidates. In Belize, political parties have tremendous influence. They set the political culture. By nominating persons loyal to their agendas, they greatly – almost exclusively - contribute to whom gets represented. This “powerful task” operates under “no legal framework to regulate political parties” (Palacio, 2011: 83). Undeniably, political parties are institutions that act as “central players in the process of political representation” (Hussy & Zaller, 2011:311). The Westminster model, Belize's small size, and the electoral system each add to the concentration of power within political parties, chiefly the ruling political party.

The Westminster model, applied to a small state, creates problems that undermine democracy. One threatening effect is the power it bestows upon the winning party. David Hinds, a Guyanese political scientist, elaborates.

*Because Westminster model in the Caribbean confers on the winning party absolute power and the losing party no power, and because the winning party is unlikely to incorporate the interests of the losing party, the stage is set for permanent conflict. Ruling parties contain or marginalize opposition parties while opposition parties try to sabotage the work of the ruling parties. This antagonism is total, because what is at stake is the power of governments to control almost every aspect of the society. This has led to a crisis of governance that is reflected in the inability of the governmental system to transform formal democracy into substantive democratic outcomes and advance the cause of nationhood. (2005:4).*

Scholars have taken democracy in the Caribbean for granted by focusing on structures and ignoring outcomes. Seven free and fair elections in Belize grants Belize an air of stable and legitimate democracy but an understanding of what occurs during these elections reveals the deceptive reality. Though it is known within Belize that parties serve their supporters while ignoring any opposition, Minister Mark King gave credibility to the anecdotal truth when he declared the practice on national news. He told media houses,

*"We as a government, we as a UDP government we are a mass party, we have a lot of supporters, we look after all Belizeans in general. But, of course with any mass political party, you look after UDP first, you look after Belizeans second and you look after PUP last. (5News, 22 May 2014)*

Whichever the ruling party, the practice is the same. Family and friends of ministers are known to rapidly and cheaply attain land and other material upgrades, some of which are reported on the nightly news stations. The Deputy Prime Minister, Gaspar Vega, for instance, was questioned for underselling prime property on one of Belize's tourist destinations, an incident exposed by the Opposition. He explained the occurrence by

saying to the reporter “I am not a normal person in Belize; I work much harder than a lot of other people.” (*News5*, 2 August 2012). Other than public outrage, he, like many ministers before him, experienced no repercussion. More alarmingly, the former Prime Minister of Belize, Said Musa, was audiotaped saying “Dis wahn blow ova like wahn lee breeze” after he and then Minister of Finance Ralph Fonseca were accused of stealing Venezuelan grants for house-building worth twenty million dollars of Belizean currency (*Amandala*, 23 April 2010). Though he and Ralph Fonseca were charged, they were acquitted, teaching Belizeans that political corruption is unpunishable. The permanent conflict manifests itself publicly in House sittings when instead of discussing bills, the UDP and PUP will accuse each other of corruption. *KremTv*, an independent radio and television show notes that “Increasingly, Belizeans have been tuning out the House Meetings, seeing them as circus and platform for political grandstanding.” (*KremTV*, 7 August 2013). What occurs is a halt in progress in a nation that is overwhelmingly divided by party politics. The Westminster model in Belize and Anglophone Caribbean has polarized parties, promoting self-interest and corruption. Interest groups and minorities are powerless. The elite make decisions amongst themselves and the promotion of women in politics has never been on the agenda.

The corruption that occurs within political parties has been noted by each new government. The fourteen-year old political reform commission discussed the lack of regulation of parties, a concern that has been noted before: “A longstanding concern about the political system is that the country has no laws regulating the formation or activities of political parties. This means that any one person can declare that a political party exists, and the party’s victorious candidates are automatically given a constitutional

role in government” (Barry, 1995:10). Interestingly, they did not recommend the regulation of political parties though the chairperson expressed dissenting views (2000). A lack of regulation of political parties means that parties act as private organizations with internal regulations that do not need to be available to the public. They do not have to register themselves and are accountable to no external rule. In Lewis’s (2012) analysis of gender and politics in Belize, she also emphasized the importance of party regulation: “Systems with clear regulations for the operation of political parties are beneficial for women, and indeed they play a role in insuring the effectiveness of democracy” (2012:60). This idea, that regulation affects women’s decision to seek office, is supported by other literature (Caul, 1998).

In Belize, the parties show low levels of institutionalization which results in party leaders showing favour towards certain candidates who are then nominated. An informant revealed that “When the PUP or UDP has an opportunity to run a buddy or a woman he doesn’t know, he would take the chance to run a buddy” (Personal Interview, February 2014). Low levels of institutionalization allow these incidents to occur without repercussion as there are no mechanisms in place to prevent such biases. A lack of regulation also makes it more difficult for outsiders to understand the process, and, consequently, consider beginning the process. Women are further discouraged when they see how female candidates are treated. An informant described what happened to her after she announced her candidacy: a member of her opposing party posted on a social media network that she should say “who she is sleeping with” (Personal Interview, June 2013). But she still ran and remains positive for women’s future in politics: “We’re in the transition phase. I really believe in the next ten years much more women leaders will



emerge in politics but it will take a few more of us to go out there and get burnt first,” (Personal Interview, June 2013).

A woman elected to the House of Representatives explained that after election, she was not assigned a ministry, despite her qualifications in the area. After more than a year without being assigned to a ministry or given specific duties, she was finally given some work under a ministry. That assignment she credits to the public, saying, “I honestly believe that the government was pressured to put me in a ministry” (Personal Interview, February 2014). I asked her if she thought her gender played a role. She answered affirmatively, explaining that the men that were assigned the ministry she wanted were less experienced than her in that area. She said it was unfortunate that party leaders think a woman “does not merit a position based on her gender” (Personal Interview, February 2014) in spite of visible qualifications. If parties had fair regulations implemented, experienced elected representatives would receive appropriate ministries. Instead, the ministry in this situation was assigned to a male of far less experience. This example highlights the importance of institutionalization in parties and exposes how leaders’ biases undermines women’s progress.

When elected women raise issues in the House of Representatives, the male-dominated political culture dismisses them as “women’s issues” and consider them less important than other issues. An informant explained this through her own experience regarding a feeding program: “Let’s say a feeding program for a preschool is important. If you put it as ‘feeding program’ they look at it like “hah she mussi want we maintain fi she pickni” (Personal Interview, February 2014), that is, the feeding program is seen as a cover-up for her to feed her own children. She elaborated that any social issues raised by

women are not as respected as they would be if those same issues were raised by men. In another interview, an informant explained that political parties “can determine how they run their conventions to select their representatives”(Personal Interview, June 2013). If the party leader did not like you, he could declare his support for the opposing candidate which can severely reduce your chance of winning the convention. Masculinized political culture discourages women from running and hinders elected women from effectively representing their constituents. Absent of regulations, the political culture operates freely and discriminatorily. The need for more women in the House was noted by all interviewees. One of the informants with access to more information shared that she expected differences in attitudes between women who had won and women who had lost. Instead, she found the same consensus present in my research: women want support from other women within the institutions to be able to combat the masculinized atmosphere (Personal Interview, May 2013). An informant who lost a race contemplated on the experience: “politics is a man’s world very much. When I got in it for a little while, I wondered if my loss was a blessing in disguise after I learned how it was” (Personal Interview, June 2013).

Why, then, would a commission reject party regulation? The commission’s explanation towards unnecessary regulation is that political parties do not use public resources. Though that is true formally, it is not true in reality. As an informant in Lewis’s study wondered, “If parties are unwilling to follow rules and regulations as a party, what should people expect when they are in government,” (2012:60). The informant is right. The incumbent party is known to use government funding for their campaigns during election time as well as using the public purse throughout the term to

appease their supporters. Immediately before Mother's Day 2014, the UDP Minister of Finance, who is also Prime Minister Dean Barrow, distributed \$850,000 to seventeen UDP area representatives (*News 5*, 16 May 2014). Under the guise of a government program, these ministers proceeded to give away cheques to mothers within their constituencies. Minister Santiago Castillo was given \$50,000 for the occasion. *News 5* reported that only UDP representatives were given money to donate, in spite of its being labelled a government program. When Castillo was interviewed on national news, he said, "If you will recall, when the People's United Party was in, whatever they did, they did only for the PUP" (*News 5*, 16 May 2014). The lack of regulation enables politicians to blur the boundaries of ethics and legality, as they seek office and when in office.

The absence of regulation in the Westminster system also magnifies the party rivalry in the country – a polarization that exists among Belizeans throughout the country. The ideologies of the parties hardly differ with people rarely educated upon election issues or the party's constitutions. How a person votes is reduced to their party affiliation in Belize, where gender and ethnicity are apparently negligible to winning an electoral race. There is a tacit understanding among voters that the two major political parties are still the vehicles to election success (Palacio, 2011: 82). This is both evident in the inability of independent parties to gain seats within the House of Representatives and in the success of different ethnicities including Mestizos, Taiwanese, Mennonites, and Mayan. Still, the lack of women who do seek office remains undemocratically low. The influence of a citizen's party affiliation and its impact upon electoral success demonstrates the crucial role of political parties as gatekeepers to women's political success. In an interview, an informant said that it is "absolutely clear that the biggest

barrier is the party” (Personal Interview, May 2013). She acknowledges that “there are lots of issues but I still really believe that it’s the political parties that are the greatest barrier” (Personal Interview, May 2013). My thesis asserts that argument. Political parties are the largest obstacle because they set the political culture: an old boys’ club that discourages women from running and undermines women when they have won. When only a few women have been elected to the House and only one woman is in the House at one time, it is difficult for this old boys’ club to be recognized by the men who perpetuate it.

### **The FPTP: Facilitating the *Old Boys’ Club***

The male domination of party leadership results in a masculinized institution that marginalizes women. The marginalization of women is further promoted by the electoral system. Belize practices majoritarian voting, using single member districts. To seek office at the national level, a person is required to fill out a form which is then vetted by the executive committee of the party. If accepted, that person is required to run within the party against other aspirants for a division at a political convention. The winner of the convention will be the party’s candidate in the general election. This process is a part of Belize’s adaptation to the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. FPTP systems force parties to present one candidate for elections, leading them to pick most favoured candidate. This need to ensure that all other candidates running are losers creates a more adversarial campaign process than the alternate electoral system of proportional representation (Salmond, 2006). After voting, the FPTP system bestows the power upon the candidate and party that gained the majority of the votes. A PR system, in contrast,

allows parties to gain seats within the House in direct proportion to the votes they received during elections. This allows for a more representative (and hence democratic) government as it enables minorities, who are unable to gain the popular votes, to gain influence within government and prevents the two-party rivalry prevalent in FPTP systems worldwide. It also encourages compromise within the government since it does not confer total power to one party, allowing more decision-makers at the national level. No country has ever changed from an FPTP system to a PR system but many have changed proportional representation.

Do proportional representation systems work in countries that use them? In PR systems, voters can readily see if a party is fairly nominating diverse candidates. The leading countries for female representation in Parliaments are Rwanda (63.8%), Andorra (50%), Sweden (44.7%), and Seychelles (43.8%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, November 2013). These countries have PR systems. These examples indicate the importance of the electoral system on the election of women. The Nordic countries, hailed for their high representation of women in politics, each use a PR system. The presence of only one female in Belize's House of Representatives in 2013 further confirms the literature. Winning an election has become extremely important to political parties who are aware that the ruling party gains total power. As such, party leaders aim to increase their chances of winning a post by nominating a candidate who has the highest chances of winning. Women are risky so they appear less on the list. The political reform commission considered the PR system but decided not to comment it. WIN-Belize, as the umbrella organization, was given a grant by the United Nations Development Programme, to promote female political representation. According to WIN's Executive

Director Carolyn Reynolds, a part of the two-year project is to lobby for a change from FPTP to PR (Personal Interview, May 2013). The project expired in June 2014, with no lobbying for this change and few, if any, results. The project did not receive attention from the media and its impact upon women in politics is not noticeable.

The FPTP system provides Belize's masculinized institutions with greater power, enabling parties to further marginalize women. To run for a seat at the House of Representatives, a person must undergo an internal competition known as a political convention. The outcomes of Belize's political conventions are known to be heavily influenced by the party leader's preference. A recent example which shows a party leader's influence occurred in February 2013 within the UDP. The Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega's position was challenged by the Minister of Youth and Education Patrick Faber. Prime Minister Dean Barrow supported the incumbent Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega. With the party leader's support, Vega easily met Faber's challenge. When Faber was asked by a reporter about the "unfair hand in so far as the unprecedented step of the leader having come out and endorse your opponent," (*Channel 7 News*, March 2013), Patrick Faber demonstrated immense party loyalty explaining that "There is nothing wrong with that..."(*Channel 7 News*, March 2013). In regards to women being recruited and nominated, the male-oriented culture makes it particularly hard, especially with the Prime Minister's vast influence through high centralization and little institutionalization.

Political conventions are also known to be superficially democratic – an event held only to appear in line with the principles of democracy. One practice within political conventions is that the candidates running meet and decide who is allowed on the voter's

list. At a UDP convention held in June 2014, UDP supporters who had signed a petition to recall Minister Elvin Penner who had been embroiled in an immigration scandal – were removed from the list. These disgruntled voters shared their stories on national news. One supporter said, "We all are UDP and we voted twice for Mr. Penner and we signed to recall him because he was not doing what he was supposed to do for us" (*7News*, 9 June 2014). Alberto August, the party chairman, explained the situation, "'Jules in every convention we go through the list. We went through the list with the candidates and some of the key people. On Wednesday we went through the list and we decide that there were some people who we were not going to allow to vote and that's what we are doing today" (*7News*, 9 June 2014). A former PUP aspirant and relative to a contestant in the convention wanted to vote at the UDP convention but was also unable to because of the exclusive list. She explained, "I believe that convention should be open for us to have real democratic elections but pitifully that's how the parties are - both parties would have done the same. I have nothing against them." Even more alarming is that the son of UDP aspirant, Tony McNab, was also blacklisted and disallowed to vote. This practice of choosing votes at a political convention severely weakens democracy as it discriminates against voters and punishes supporters who practiced their right to recall a minister who allegedly sold Belizean passports. The media have begun to call these conventions rigged conventions because of the lack of transparency that occurs within them. In March, a UDP convention was boycotted by aspirant Delroy Cuthkelvin because of a similar issue regarding the voter's list. Cuthkelvin explained that each candidate met and discussed a list of those who would not vote, which included "executive members of the P.U.P. in the constituency, persons who run for village council for the P.U.P...very short list," of

approximately 200 people (*News 5*, 17 March 2014). He later found out that another meeting was held with candidate Melvin Hulse where more than 800 persons were removed from the list. The convention, he claimed, was fraudulent. The candidate who received the private meeting won that convention. These incidents demonstrate the problems which arise from an absence of regulation, even within parties. They also show that if the executive committee of a party does not favour a candidate, that candidate will not win the convention. Hence, if a political party were to include women at all their conventions, they could easily assure that she was unable to progress beyond that stage. This is a reason that party quotas may not be as effective as desired. Noteworthy is that the PUP does possess a party quota, and, of the five women that have successfully been elected to the House of Representatives, four are PUP members. The PUP also has an active women's group whereas the UDP has no gender quota and no women's group, suggesting that these mechanisms do assist women in reaching higher ranks within the party.

### **The Foot Soldiers**

Women are more politically active than men in voting (Political Reform Commission, 2000; Personal Interviews, May 2013 - February 2014). Williams as the Director of the National Women's Commission commented on the unique situation:

*“[Women] are the foot soldiers. They are the ones who get all the men elected. It's overwhelmingly female. You see the men are there but the women are the workers. The men are there and they provide finances in the background but it's overwhelmingly women who turn out to vote just like in national elections.*

Belizean women “have always the political arena, but generally only as support staff, such as campaigners and purveyors of food. Women are yet to demand their places as



candidates for the Municipal Elections and in particular the Parliamentary Elections,” (Palacio, 2011:61). Women are “organizers, vote-getters, and food providers” (Barry, 1995: 120). Still, they still do not seek office. This is against literature which indicates that women are less active at all levels of political participation, suggesting a general reluctance towards political activities. Belizean women are interested in politics. But they do not seek office. The question is why. An informant’s response is, “Women don’t want to upstage the men. They know what’s going on. They are gender conscious. They see that they are not represented,” (Personal Interview, February 2014). Again, the male dominated leadership within parties dictates to women that they are unwelcome – unless they are appointed to select seats. Schvedova links this to the masculine model of politics, explaining that politics is “often based on the idea of ‘winners and losers’, competition and confrontation, rather than on systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across party lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do so in small numbers,” (2005:35).

### **Corruption: The Password to the Old Boys’ Club**

The hesitance to seek office extended beyond the intense political rivalry. In a small and poor state, another institution exists within Belizean politics: handout politics. Women do not want to engage in the clientelism that is required to succeed in electoral politics, expressing the sentiment that “in politics, you cannot maintain a high level of integrity if you want to get the work done,” (Personal Interview, May 2013). “People want to be paid or to beg you for something for your vote. It didn’t

have to be money. It could be sand for your yard,” (Personal Interview, February 2014). But regulation of handout politics will “not happen from within because parties will not regulate themselves” (Personal Interview, February 2014). Political parties in Belize have “succeeded in monopolizing the political space, creating the impression that for any other body, active participation in political debate is illegitimate,” (Shoman, 1995:315). An absence of financial regulations, intense party rivalry, the Westminster model along with the FPTP electoral system, and the poverty throughout the nation has created an environment for clientelism where politicians offer incentives to citizens for their vote and support. In such an environment, loyalty becomes the most prized feature. “Party loyalty is a much more salient qualification for political office than experience, education, or political savvy,” (McClaurin, 1996:170). Politicians do not nominate and recruit people based on qualifications; they choose people they can trust in an unregulated political landscape where “political consciousness is debased and dialogue is virtually non-existent” (Shoman, 1987:59). Furthermore, because parties are not required to make a list of donors, politicians are frequently seen as puppets for large campaign donors, both locally and internationally (OAS Report, 2013). In a report by the OAS they expressed grave concern over the absence of regulation but also noted the difficulty in implementing rules:

*“The most significant obstacle would be resistance from all the stakeholders, except the people. Candidates, political parties, and contributors would all oppose this measure since they benefit handsomely from the status quo...The two major political parties have both expressed support for campaign finance reform. However, neither party has during their governing term acted to*

*introduce and pass legislation to regulate campaign financing”*  
(OAS, 2013:10).

The political reform commission recommended campaign finance reform for two main reasons: “(a) there is an undeniable link between campaign contributions and official corruption that should be regulated in the interest of democracy, and (b) there is a growing perception that only those parties and candidates with substantial wealth or access to it are able to successfully compete in elections” (2000, 13.6). These reasons still exist today and act as a hindrance to women who want to enter politics. Each informant was asked what they would like to change about Belizean politics. All women mentioned campaign financing. Ann-Marie Williams described the role of handouts when she ran for UDP’s political convention: “People wanted to be paid or to beg you for something. It didn’t have to be money; it could be sand for the yard.” (Personal Interview, May 2014). When interviewed after her loss in the convention, she lamented about patronage politics, stating, “It’s unfortunate that hand out politics is alive and well and it’s not going anywhere. As you all know and everybody knew I was the only one not paying out there that day,” (7News, 6 December 2011). An informant conveyed the inequality caused by a lack of financing regulation, explaining that regulation “would remove a lot of inequalities...How do you raise funds? How do you really sustain a campaign when someone, perhaps, is willing to wheel and deal versus you?” (Personal Interview, May 2013). Repeatedly expressed by the women interviewed, and in support of previous research on the issue (Lewis, 2012), women displayed hesitance at engaging in handout politics. The reform also addressed its presence in its report, stating, “It is a well-known fact that the practice, while illegal, is rampant” (2000: 13.22). In his PhD dissertation,

Vernon attributes the presence of handout to the small size of Belize and the poverty within the nation but is not optimistic about future improvement. He writes that “both politicians and clients have become politically dependent on the clientelist relationship,” (Vernon, 2012: 276), labelling it a mutual clientelist dependency – a “warning sign that political clientelism has reached dangerously high levels of entrenchment” (Vernon, 2012:277). Politicians want votes and people rely heavily upon assistance from their ministers, whether it is giving them food for a day or tuition for their children’s education. Vernon explains, “the electoral support of the poor and the middle class is the politician’s key to the doors of political power. It was the competition for this support, in a context of weak substantive party distinctions, that led the PUP, and then the UDP, to expand political clientelism,” (Vernon, 2012:276). The Prime Minister and the Cabinet virtually possess all legislative power. It is almost impossible for the Opposition to make any real legislative contributions. Increasing the ruling politicians’ power is that the electoral management body “as is the culture in Belize, appears to serve political parties only...the political culture in Belize has entrusted the election management body directly into the hands of politicians..” (Palacio, 2011:6). The intense competition for power during election periods has resulted in the increase of handout politics in Belize. Corrupt electoral practices and the intense party competition are carried over into the post-election period; this results in political parties being “motivated less by national concerns and more by the need to maintain or secure party hegemony.” (Hinds, 2005: 6). This structure explains why political parties have not taken strides towards increasing female political participation. The First Past the Post System and the importance of winning and power have led to politics becoming “an exercise in anti-development and anti-nationhood

(Hinds, 2005: 6). The Westminster model and the electoral system have exacerbated the winnings and the losses, leading to an “all or nothing” attitude towards elections. Notable is that most of the patrons are women who tend to ask for smaller handouts like food or clothing. Men, though fewer than the female clients, receive larger incentives such as land or housing (Vernon, 2012), again showing differences between genders.

The task of getting into political office in Belize appears to be a ruthless with overtones of illegality. But what happens when women get into office? The masculinized ethos of political institutions is felt more harshly. With few numbers of women in national politics at the same time, it is difficult to change the male-style of leadership. This is evident in Balderamos-Garcia’s treatment by other men in office and by the media. After she was publicly humiliated in the House, WIN-Belize issued a press release stating, “Although there is a move to prepare women for political leadership, the institutionalized masculinity of politics remains the same,” (WIN Press Release, 13 August 2013). A woman noted that male officials make deals outside the denoted places at bars where women are unwelcomed or reluctant to be. She says, “People have said that I need to make an effort to go into that scene - that those are the rules of the game. That’s how the game is played but I’m not interested in going to a bar. That’s just it. I’m just not interested in that and, really, if I was perhaps very ambitious politically, I would decide that that in fact I should I should do that,” (Personal Interview, May 2013). Another informant confirms the occurrence, calling it “the boy’s club” where male officials gather “with a bottle of whiskey or a box of whiskey to see who’s going to run here or who’s going to run there,” (Personal Interview, February 2014). She says that women are rarely at such decision-making forums, “women who are seeking leadership won’t be seen

drinking or buddy socializing but in those buddy socials, that's where key decisions, unfortunately are made," (Personal Interview, February 2014). Their description of an *old boy's club* was confirmed in Lewis's analysis of gender and politics in Belize. She notes that "even when women are successful in politics, they are not fully part of decision-making," sharing a response from a woman who indicated that "Even when they appear to be consulting you, behind closed doors people have already called each other, the decision has been made," (Lewis, 2012: 63).

Party ideology has often been identified as another factor in the recruitment of female candidates. In Belize, two of the parties are not ideologically different. In fact, they are very similar. Party loyalty is the critical feature. If women pass the level of nomination and are elected, they are institutionalized by their party to adhere to the party line. This supports the argument that an increase in female parliamentarians does not necessarily translate into the advancement of women's interest and the feminist agenda. Any deviation from the party's platform is discouraged; if the party does not discuss women's interests, women parliamentarians, consequently are expected to also remain silent. Essentially, the partisan identity outweighs elected women's intentions and interests. When women do run, they run as partisans and that identity shapes how they represent women in general (Barrow-Giles, 2013: 3).

To apply this situation to Belize, one can analyze the speeches made by party leaders. On the night that Prime Minister Dean Barrow was re-elected for a second consecutive term, he declared that his party's (United Democratic Party) candidates that did not win will play "an integral part" (*San Pedro Sun*, March 8, 2012) of running the country's affairs. He also boldly threatened his opposition, proclaiming, "don't test us

because we will not back-out...or else it will be ‘tit for tat our butter for fish’” (*San Pedro Sun*, March 8, 2012). The re-elected leader’s victory speech was an assertion of the dominance of his party, not a unification of his people and Belize. This speech is only one symptom of the two-party Westminster model that treats the opposition party as an outcast and unwelcome in the governance structure. In another example, in May 2013, thirteen babies died at the main public hospital of the country, Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital. After an investigation, it was revealed the babies died because of poor hygiene practices which led to the spread of a bacterial infection. While the public called for the Minister of Health to make a statement, the Prime Minister defended his Minister of Health Pablo Marin, asserting that the minister had no need to make an apology as he was winning where it mattered, that is, in the on-going village elections (*Channel 7 News*, *Channel 5 News*, May 2012). What these public speeches show is the immense power of political parties and the importance of party loyalty. With a few women in political parties, it is difficult for women’s interests to be advanced. In Belize, corruption is a serious concern. Thus, ministers in the ruling party are often trying to cover up scandals and advance their own self-interests. There is little room for the woman.

Political parties are organized in such a way that the key portal to electoral success is largely inaccessible. The two main parties in Belize are highly centralized, giving their party leader the ability to promote openings for women. Being highly centralized, however, can also be disadvantageous to women’s political representation. If a party leader believes that a woman cannot win, he will likely choose a male candidate instead. Though a high degree of centralization provides a target for women’s groups who are lobbying for greater female participation, women’s groups are largely inactive in

Belize and inconsistently promote a feminist agenda. In spite of UNDP's project with WIN-Belize to increase women's participation, in spite of international agreements such as the Convention to Elimination Discrimination Against Women, and in spite of the (few) calls from civil society, the issue of women's representation has yet to be tackled by political parties. An informant commented that the ruling party has the capability to implement change because of the concentration of power within the winning party. When asked about the possibility of implementing mechanisms to increase female political representation, she says, "It's funny because it can be done once the government has the political will. Once they want something changed, they can get it changed easily. It's when it's from the outside, that's the barrier," (Personal Interview, May 2013). The importance of women's organizations in the increase of female representation has been supported by the literature and demonstrated in countries like Rwanda. In a political system where winning elections is the most important consideration, women's groups can play a crucial role in mobilizing support and resources for female candidates. On an individual level, a woman will have a difficult time gaining donors and support, but through an organized bloc, a woman has the collective effort to assist her (Conway, 2001). A woman's group in Belize which has been created to support female candidates is the Belize Women's Political Caucus (BWPC). The caucus was established in 1991 with the objective "to increase the participation of women in the political process; the increase the number of women in elected and appointed positions' to lobby for equality and equity for women' and to support candidates who support our goals," (BWPC Newsletter, February 2000). Since its establishment, the BWPC has met irregularly, held inconsistent annual meetings, and offered support to no female candidate. Because women's groups



are not active in Belize, the centralization of parties acts against women's interests. When political parties are old boys' clubs, power centered in the leaders of those clubs is detrimental to promoting gender equality.

Indeed, what is not on the party's political agenda is neglected by the political system. A study sponsored by the United Nations on Belize revealed the extreme importance of political parties: "Political parties are the gatekeepers to the electoral process – very few individuals can be successful in politics without the endorsement of a political party, particularly at the national level" (Lewis, 2012:9). Women's issues and the importance of female representation has not been a major component of any political campaign.

The level of nomination also contributes to women's success. Being a small country, there is an unwritten and understood rule in Belize: the only way to get into politics is to know someone. Therefore, if a qualified woman wants to run, she would have to find the endorsement from a party. This makes the nomination process for a woman an obstacle in itself. Rule argues that a critical stage of recruitment actually precedes formal nomination. Still, the political party plays a significant role. She writes, "It is in the decision-to-run phase of the selection process that support or opposition of party influential and sponsors is of great significant. It is reasonable to assume that women potential candidates, no less than men, will ordinarily decide against high risk nomination races where they believe they cannot win" (1981:62). But in Belize, all nomination races are high risk when a candidate is not endorsed by the party's executive, evident by the practices that occur at political conventions. In regards to the recruitment process and the level of nomination factor, Sanbonmatsu (2006) covers a hole in the

literature. She studies how the beliefs of party leaders affect female nominations. Party leaders misperceive the extent to which voters support women candidates. She writes, “Party leader views about women candidates may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Where party leaders are skeptical about women’s chances, women candidates are less likely to be recruited. In turn, party leader doubts about women may mean that they are not recruited and that the number of women in the legislature is unchanged” (2006:446). In Belize, party leaders, affected by the culture of gender inequality, are likely to doubt women’s chances of success. Since the two main parties are highly centralized and unregulated, the party leaders’ beliefs can play a major role.

To illustrate the underrepresentation of women, it is important to look at the composition of the two main parties in Belize. The National Executive of the People’s United Party has twenty-eight members; five are female including two of five Deputy Party Leaders and the Chair of United Women’s Group (Lewis, 2012). This represents 17.9% of the executive which is against the policy in the PUP constitution which states that all party bodies must include 30% women. In the ruling party, the UDP, of thirty one members in the Central Executive, six are female, including position of Director of Women. This is 19.4%; there are no stipulations in the ruling party for percentage of women on party bodies. Furthermore, neither party promotes gender equality in their manifestos. This is because neither party views greater inclusion of women as necessary to winning elections and, consequently, they do not actively seek to promote women as candidates (Barrow-Giles). Until the public sees female political participation as an important element of campaign platforms, parties in Belize have no incentive to promote gender equality.

A positive finding in Caul's study is that women's activism within a party can lead to material results. The political party is the most effective channel for the increase in female political participation. Caul writes, "Activists at high levels of office within the party, such as the National Executive, have the most power to press for increased representation and new candidate rules" (Caul, 1998:95). Still, how many feminist activists must be at that high level within the party to have their interests recognized? And how can women reach that status within a party?

Between 2008 and 2012, there were no elected women in Belize's House of Representatives. Thus far, eight women have been elected. Despite these very low levels of female political participation and in spite of women's unique educational advantage, there was no lobbying for a gender quota until 2012. Locally, women's groups were not raising awareness about female political underrepresentation. Conferences, projects, and workshops only began occurring after the input from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). On March 8, 2011, the National Women's Commission and the UNDP signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (UNDP, 2012) initiating a campaign to promote female's political participation at the national level. Since this partnership, there has been more national attention on the issue of creating gender equality in national platforms. Following the March 2012 elections, the Government of Belize appointed two female Senators, Joy Grant and Lisel Alamilla, and assigned them Ministerial portfolios. One woman, as opposed to none in the previous election, was elected to the House of Representatives. What role does the international community play?

Latin American studies have shown that international pressure is powerful in developing countries. In the 1990's, the political participation of women became a very urgent matter. The international system re-energized this movement for gender equality via international conferences including those held by the United Nations. Another very important conference was held in Beijing, China, in 1995: Fourth World Conference on Women. This conference called for at least 30% of representation by women in national governments. In September 2000, leaders at UN Millennium Summit in New York agreed to "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." (cited in Mutume, 2004). The support for women's political representation by powerful international actors has institutionalized women's equality in world society. It has also created global pressure for states to incorporate women. By legitimizing women's equality, the international community has helped advance this agenda worldwide (Paxton, et. al, 2006).

In Belize, the extent to which the international community has helped women's political participation is questionable. Because of the grant by the UNDP, there has been movement in Belize by women's groups (National Women's Commission, Women Issues Network). There has also been a publication commissioned by the National Women's Commission in the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation with funding and support from the United Nations Development Programme Belize. This publication, "The Situation Analysis of Gender and Politics in Belize, 1998-2012," is presently one of the only comprehensive analyses on women in politics and utilized focus groups and interviews of female politicians. In October of 2013, the

executive director of the BWPC announced a 2-year plan to promote female political participation. She also declared that the ultimate objective of the caucus is to attain gender equality in political races and government by 2020 (*Channel 5 News*, October 22, 2013). The question is whether these announcements and movements have begun occurring if it were not for the MOU signed with UNDP and the funding provided by UNDP? The Government of Belize, political parties, and women's groups before 2012 seem to suggest that nothing would have been done without the funding and the regulations of this funding. Another factor, however, is the effectiveness of such projects. The project gained attention from the media at its conception but has not followed. An informant that is familiar with the work of WIN commented,

*“To be perfectly honest with you, I don't think there's the strength or the organizing that we have the hope to get there by the next election. I hoped that it might be possible but given the amount of progress in the last year and the approach that's been taking, I don't see it happening. I would love to be proved wrong but I think it's really unlikely,”*(Personal Interview, May 2013).

Another women's group is the National Women's Commission, a government organization. The NWC seems to be making a greater dent towards increasing female political participation due to their regionally acclaimed project “Women in Politics” (WIP). In its fourth session, this project trains a number of women to run for politics in local and national government. The executive director of NWC explains that WIP challenges politicians' assertion that there are no qualified women because it presents them with a pool of women who have completed the program. She explained that an ongoing analysis of the three successful cohorts is being conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. From the first cohort of approximately fifty women, five ran for village elections and three were successful.

Civil society and international society play an important role in the promotion of female political representation. Their work in Belize, however, seems minimal. Research on the adoption of quotas has argued that without the mobilization of women, quotas would have never been adopted even if they were adopted by the male elites. Women's mobilization is the mechanism which finally triggers the adoption of quotas. (Krook, 2005: 9). Though WIN-Belize has stated its goal to lobby for quotas, its campaign, if it has been launched, appears to have minimal outreach. In the political reform commission of 2000, the notion for a 30% quota for the appointment of women was reviewed but rejected. WIN's campaign was for electoral gender quotas. National discussion about this mechanism is yet to be held. But can quotas really increase the number of women in the House? Formal mechanisms will not be effective when informal structures continually erode their purpose. In Belize, where a lack of regulation and corruption are rampant, it seems counterintuitive to implement a legal mechanism to increase the number of female parliamentarians. The rules will be ignored and women will continue to be party outcasts.

## **Chapter 6: Disempowering the Selectorate**

*Women are the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world.  
It is past time for women to take their rightful place, side by side  
with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their  
children's and grandchildren's fates, are decided.*

- Hilary Clinton, 2012

The question is not why aren't women in politics. The question is what is preventing them from attaining electoral success. Research that places the onus on women to carve political space fails to view the issue in its entirety. In the totality of circumstances, the problem is not women's inability or lack of desire. The problem is a

political culture that undermines women's chances for success whenever possible. In Belize, the political party has monopolized all political space. A largely silent civic society and a lack of political knowledge in general thrusts the political party into the most powerful position: the deciders of whom sits at the House of Representatives.

When women organizations remain mute in midst of the issues or offer responses that leave much to be desired, the public and the leaders are signalled that the behaviour is acceptable. The attack against the only woman in the House of Representatives caused momentary uproar but is now stashed in the archives where all other acts against women remain. The cues that it is okay to mistreat women continue to accumulate. In September 2014, the present Minister of Education Patrick Faber was accused of assaulting a woman employed by his ministry (*News 5*, September 8, 2014; *Amandala*, September 9, 2014). The woman made a report to the police about the attack but the report was immediately withdrawn, eliminating any possibility of an investigation. When questioned by reporters, the minister abandoned the interview, insisting that the allegations are a smear tactic by the opposing party. Though the Opposition has been clamouring for the minister to explain the incident, no such discussion has occurred. The behaviour of the most visible people in a country teach the public what is acceptable. When that behaviour consistently treats women with hostility, the *old boys' club* digs its roots deeper into society's fabric.

Interestingly, when women run, they win. The electorate want to see women leaders. Women are equipping themselves with the resources needed to run a campaign. But cultural, social, and economic advancement is subverted when there are no rules. There is no framework under which these factors can positively affect women's political participation because the background conditions have not yet been met. Belize is still

below the threshold of development that is required for these factors to yield results. Presently, the greatest obstacle to women's representation in Belize are the political parties. Monopolizing political space, political parties are the most powerful actors. Their power is magnified in a country that lacks regulation. While sexism in the general culture fades, sexism in the political culture amongst the male elite remains entrenched.

The old boys' club model of politics erodes women's opportunities. Women reject the male-dominated institutions that are characteristic of Belizean politics. The problem lies within the selectorate – the gatekeepers to electoral success. Parties recruit; parties nominate; and parties endorse. Where their support is absent, the candidate's chance of succeeding is minimal. Parties are treated as private entities. Without rules, they are unaware of how to enter and succeed. Even when women overcome the odds and win office, the work they can do to promote the feminist agenda is limited to their party's agenda. Where candidates are viewed as partisans, party loyalty becomes the determining factor in what elected representatives can do. This is evident in the sole elected woman's absence from an empowerment rally. She did not attend because her party did not want her to – a response she declared on national news. When women organizations are weak, female candidates seeking office and unendorsed by their party experience insurmountable challenge. The lack of women at the highest level of office send the signal to the citizenry that politics is an old boy's club where women are unwelcome and uninvited. The ruling party has the power to change this but no government in power has made the promotion of female representation an issue of importance. The Belizean woman remains barred in her pseudo-democracy.



Clientelism amplifies the problem. Because Belize is a small country, the people are poor and need the money, and the parties are not ideologically different, patron politics has become the new method of campaigning. Both politicians and citizens are mutually dependent upon this dangerous system where politicians want to secure votes and people desperately need the money. Women do not want to pay for votes. With no campaign finance regulation, women considering politics feel that any success they achieve will be tainted by illegal actions required to win. Power is so centralized that the leaders' biases leak through all levels. Regulation cannot come from inside the party; it must come from pressure outside the party. Until then, women continue to be excluded from the parties. Their interest, qualifications, and resources become irrelevant.

Women's tool-kit needs to be expanded. Legal mechanisms that weaken the *old boys' club* must be implemented to give women a fighting chance in a male-dominated field. The lack of regulation in political parties allows for blatant abuses of power and discrimination against women. But if civic society pressured its leaders, these mechanisms could be installed. A constitutional gender quota would force leaders to nominate women and give them their rightful place at the decision-making table. While international effort continues to occur in Belize to address this situation, its effectiveness remains minimal. The onus of work is on the civic society, particularly the women's organizations. There is strength in numbers and there is even greater strength during election times where leaders willingly succumb to voters' desires. Disempowering the selectorate will empower the electorate. True democracy requires a correction of this power imbalance. Women can no longer be outcasts at the highest level of decision-making. It is time they are invited to the party.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I

A total of ten women were interviewed between May 2013 and March 2014. Ethics approval was received from Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) Board at Memorial University of Newfoundland. This appendix is a copy of the Informed Consent Form which each woman signed before the interview.



#### Informed Consent Form

*The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.*

**Title:** Barred Women: Understanding Female Political Underrepresentation in Belize

**Researchers:**

Jessica Habet, MA student, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dr. Amanda Bitter, Associate Professor, Memorial University of Newfoundland

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "*Barred Women: Understanding Female Political Underrepresentation in Belize.*" This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any other information given to you by the researcher. It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

**Introduction:**

As a part of my Master's thesis, I am completing research on politics in Belize, focusing on gender issues with my central question being, "What hinders women from entering electoral politics in Belize?"

This is an important issue as Belize since there is currently only one elected women in the National Assembly. Furthermore, in 2011, Belize was rated at last position (131<sup>st</sup>) on the Global Gender Gap index along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Brunei. To improve women's representation at the national level as well as improve Belize's image in the international arena, it is urgent to understand the obstacles that are hindering women from entering electoral politics.

**Purpose of Study:** To identify the obstacles hindering women from becoming involved in politics in Belize

**What you will do in this study:** The participant will engage in an interview with the researcher, providing insights into Belize's political landscape.

**Length of time:** The interview can range from 45 minutes to two hours.

**Withdrawal from the study:**

You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If during an interview you have decided to withdraw from the study, the notes taken and the recorded data will be destroyed. The only time that the data cannot be destroyed is after the thesis has been submitted.

**Possible benefits:** The information you provide will be used in a research project which may be able to help policy-makers and the Government of Belize increase women's political participation.

**Possible risks:** There are no risks in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Though these are one-on-one interviews that will be conducted in person, your identity will not be revealed to anyone besides the researcher and supervisors.

- a. To maintain privacy of your identities, the consent forms will be stored separately from the interview transcripts and recorded data. Interviews will only be recorded by a tape recorder (no video-recording will occur).
- b. **Recording Data:** The interviews will be audio-recorded. These audio recordings will be kept in a secured and locked drawer in the researcher's home. They will be transferred to a laptop which will be secured with a password. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to this data. The recorded data will be stored for

a minimum of five years (in accordance with Memorial University of Newfoundland's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research). Again, names and consent forms will be stored separately from the data attained in the interviews.

- c. If you rather not be audio-recorded, you can indicate this option at the end of the consent form. Your interviews will then be recorded via note-taking.

### **Anonymity:**

By default, your identity is kept anonymous. For this research, however, you have the option to allow the researcher to disclose your identity. This means that you give the researcher the permission to use your identity and attach it to the information you provide.

You can indicate your preferences at the end of the consent form.

If you have decided to opt for the default option and remain anonymous, these are the measures that will be taken to protect your privacy.

- a. You will choose what label you would like to be referred to as
  - i. Informant
  - ii. High ranking public official
  - iii. Member of Parliament
- b. Your party affiliation or institution to which you belong will not be referred to.
- c. You will choose whether you can be directly quoted.

It must be noted that absolute anonymity may not be possible. Due to the small size of the Parliament and Belize's relatively small population, people may be able to infer who is being referred to in the publication of the data. Nonetheless, every reasonable effort will be made to ensure that your identity is protected once no explicit permission has been given to disclose your identity.

**Reporting of Results:** The data you provide will be used in a Master's thesis at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Your identities and affiliated institutions will not be mentioned unless you have provided explicit permission.

**Sharing of Results with Participants:** If wanted, you will be able to attain a copy of the Master's thesis via email.

### **Questions:**

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

Jessica Habet  
Graduate Student  
(501) 227 2577 [Belize number]  
(709) 693 3694 [St. John's number]  
[jlh800@mun.ca](mailto:jlh800@mun.ca)

Amanda Bittner  
Associate Professor  
(709) 864 8186  
[abittner@mun.ca](mailto:abittner@mun.ca)

**Consent:**

Your signature on this form means that:

I have read and understood what this study is about and appreciate the risks and benefits.  
I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and  
my questions have been answered.

- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation at any time.
- ☐ I agree to give the researcher permission to disclose my identity, thereby removing my anonymity.
- ☐ I agree to remain anonymous.
- ☐ I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio-recorded during the interview.
- ☐ I agree to the use of quotations and that my name is used to be identified in any publications resulting from this study.
- ☐ I agree to the use of quotations but do not want my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study.
- ☐ I do not agree to the use of quotation.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the thesis has been submitted, and the data I have provided will be destroyed.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights, and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

**Your Signature:**

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.”

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix II

Of the ten women that were interviewed, five had run for office. One woman was appointed to a position within Cabinet. One woman held a leading administrative role within government. Three women acted as research consultants as they had previously been involved on similar research on Belize or had work experience in the field. The last woman held a pipeline career and was interviewed to measure political ambition. Of the ten women, one woman participated in two interviews because of her experience running and her work in the area.

Interviews were face-to-face and casual, allowing informants to discuss topics beyond the questions. The questions for the different interviews were similar and adjusted to suit the interviewee.

### *A. Interview Questions for Women Who Ran For Office*

Background:

1. What led you to get involved in politics?
2. What was your main motivation for running for election?
3. Tell me about your family background: did you come from a political family/activist family?
4. Were you involved in a political party/not-for-profit organization/or community activity before you ran for political office?
5. Did you have role models? Did they influence your decision to run?
6. How did you choose which political party to join?
7. Did you encounter any hurdles/obstacles in the election process? (Nomination, fundraising, campaigning, etc.?)
8. What were some of the barriers/obstacles you encountered?

Perceptions of Feminism/Equality/Justice:

1. What are your experiences as an elected representative?
2. What kinds of goals did you set out with when you decided to get involved in politics?
3. Do you seek to focus on issues that concern women in particular? What kinds of issues?
4. Do you think of yourself as a feminist? If so, was this label a help or hindrance to you?
5. Do you think having women in the formal political arena is important/ necessary? Why?
6. Do you think there is a minimum number of women that should be in the legislature?
7. What do you believe hinders women from engaging in electoral politics in Belize?

### Cultural explanations

1. What about Belizean culture? Do you think that Belizeans, as a people, are less inclined to vote for a female leader?
2. Do you think that Belizean women are socialized against leadership roles?

### Political Institutions

1. What about political institutions: Belize has a “First Past the Post” system (like most of the countries in CARICOM). It has been argued that this system is unfavourable to the success of female candidates and other minorities. This is because political parties must choose one candidate to represent them (instead of a number of candidates). Do you agree or disagree with this view?
2. The countries which have higher percentages of women in national politics are normally those with gender quotas. Do you think this is necessary for the advancement of female political participation in Belize?

### Ending Questions

1. According to a survey conducted last year, the general attitudes of the Belizean population are favourable to a female leader. The survey responses revealed that Belizeans viewed women as less corrupt than their male counterparts and as more financially responsible. The percentage of women in politics does not seem to mirror this view. This leads me to ask, do you think the biggest obstacle for women to run and succeed is within their own political party?
2. If you could change anything about Belizean politics, what would it be?
3. Is there anything else you would like to say or comment on?

### *B. Political Ambition Interview*

The questions to gauge political ambition were chosen from Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox’s surveys in their book *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run For Office*.

1. Have you ever considered running for politics?
2. Has anyone ever encouraged you to run for politics?
3. (If interview has not considered running) Would you discuss what reasons you have to not run for politics?
4. How closely do you follow national politics in Belize?
5. How closely do you follow municipal politics?
6. How would you characterize the political leanings of Belize City?
7. How would you describe your party affiliation? You do not have to answer if you do not want to.
8. How would you describe your own political views?



9. What classification best describes you from the following? Would you consider yourself a. a strong feminist  
b. feminist  
c. Not a feminist  
d. anti-feminist
10. Would you publicly identify yourself as a feminist?
11. Why wouldn't you identify yourself as a feminist?
12. Do you think there should be a minimum number of women that should be in the legislature?
13. In your professional career did you have any obstacles that hindered you because of your gender?
14. What do you think hinders women from engaging in electoral politics in Belize?
15. Do you think Belizeans as a people are less inclined to vote for a female leader?
16. In the foreseeable future, can you see a female prime minister?
17. Do you think Belizean women are socialized against leadership roles?
18. Either professionally, or outside of work, have you ever done any of the following things?
  - Engaged in regular public speaking
  - Conducted significant research on a public policy issue
  - Solicited funds for an organization, interest group, or cause
  - Ran an organization, business, or foundation
  - Organized an event for a large group
19. If you have ever considered running, what would be the first office you would seek?
20. In thinking about qualifications to run for office, do any of the following apply to you?
  - Do you know a lot about public policy issues?
  - Do you have relevant professional experience?
  - Are you a good public speaker?
  - Do you have connections with the political system?
  - Can you raise enough money?
  - Do you have connections within the political system?
  - Can you raise enough money?
  - Are you a goolff self-promoter?
  - Are your politics too far out of the mainstream?
21. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "I don't like to make deals to get things done."
22. What do you think about the implantation of gender quotas in Belize?

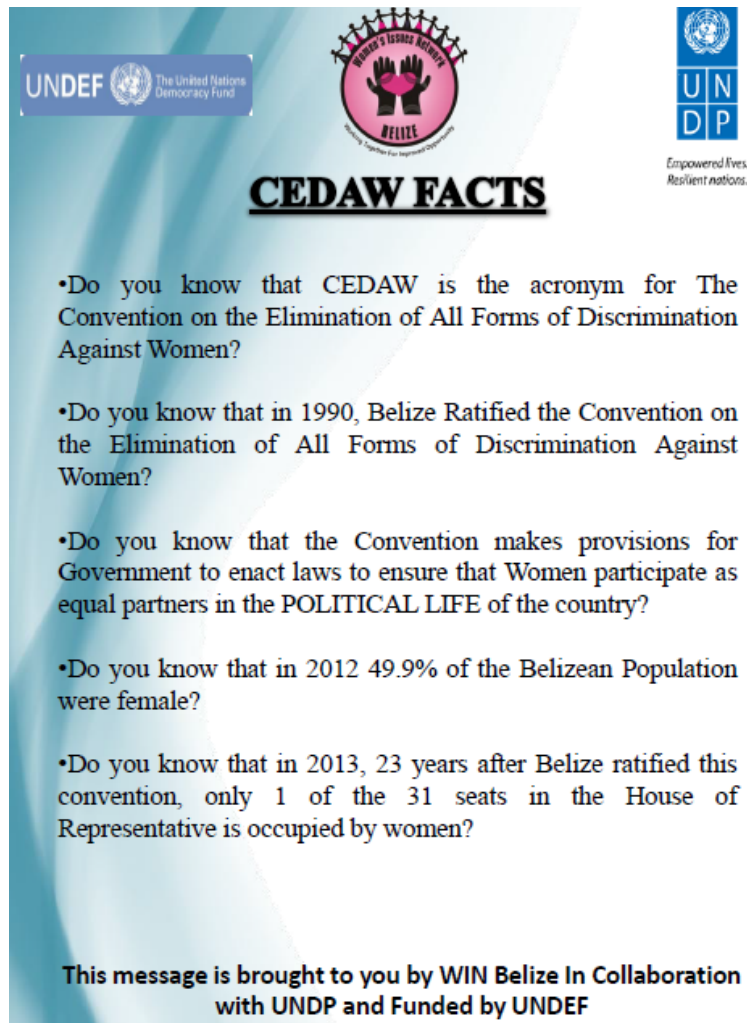
23. If you married or lived with a partner, what would be the division of labour in the household tasks?
24. If you could change anything about Belizean politics in general, what would it be?

*C. Interview with Research Consultants*

These interviews contained similar questions but were more focused on the experience of the women's experience in the field or in research on the field. As such, the interview was more of a discussion than question-led.

### Appendix III

The presence of women's organizations and their work in Belize is not consistent. They do attempt to promote a feminist agenda through print and online but the reach seems minimal. Below are examples of their outreach.



The infographic is titled "CEDAW FACTS" in bold, black, underlined text. It features a light blue background with a subtle wave pattern. At the top left is the UNDEF logo (United Nations Democracy Fund). At the top center is the Women's Issues Network Belize logo, which includes a pink circle with two hands holding a heart and the text "WOMEN'S ISSUES NETWORK BELIZE" and "Working Together For Improved Governance". At the top right is the UNDP logo (United Nations Development Programme) with the tagline "Empowered lives. Resilient nations." Below the title, there are five bullet points, each preceded by a pink dot. At the bottom, a black box contains white text stating: "This message is brought to you by WIN Belize In Collaboration with UNDP and Funded by UNDEF".

**UNDEF** The United Nations Democracy Fund

**WOMEN'S ISSUES NETWORK BELIZE**  
Working Together For Improved Governance

**UNDP**  
Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.

**CEDAW FACTS**

- Do you know that CEDAW is the acronym for The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women?
- Do you know that in 1990, Belize Ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women?
- Do you know that the Convention makes provisions for Government to enact laws to ensure that Women participate as equal partners in the POLITICAL LIFE of the country?
- Do you know that in 2012 49.9% of the Belizean Population were female?
- Do you know that in 2013, 23 years after Belize ratified this convention, only 1 of the 31 seats in the House of Representative is occupied by women?

**This message is brought to you by WIN Belize In Collaboration with UNDP and Funded by UNDEF**

Source: Women Issues Network at [winbelize.org](http://winbelize.org)



Excerpt from a pamphlet released by the Women's Department, found in the References section of University of Belize's library in Belmopan City, Belize

