

Cover Page



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CHAPTER SIX

Politics or Politricks?

The Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis

Figure 6.1: Location and Map of St. Kitts and Nevis¹



1. Introduction: the Eastern Caribbean Political Context

On the 10th of August, 1998, 61.7 percent of Nevisian citizens cast a vote in favor of secession of their island from the federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.² Although the referendum just failed to reach the two-thirds majority in favor of independence that the constitution requires for this to succeed, the result of the referendum reflected the strong dissatisfaction among Nevisian citizens with the existing federal union with their larger sister island. As the referendum failed to result in the dissolution of the federation, as of yet the Eastern Caribbean island state of St. Kitts and Nevis remains the smallest federation in the world, and the smallest UN-member state in the Western hemisphere. The federation has a total population size of about 50.000 people, of whom approximately 35.000 live on the island (and federal state) of St. Kitts, and the remaining 15.000 people on the island (and federal state) of Nevis. Attaining independence and UN-membership

¹ Retrieved from the CIA World Factbook (CIA World Factbook 2011)

² Officially, the name of the country is Saint Christopher and Nevis. According to the Constitution, both denotations are permissible (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 1.1). In recent decades, the more popular St. Kitts and Nevis has become the most often used name.

only in 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis is the youngest independent Caribbean state, and as of yet the last former British West Indian colony to acquire statehood.³

In terms of demographics, the population of St. Kitts and Nevis is for over 90 percent composed of blacks whose ancestors were brought to the islands as slaves, with small groups of mulattoes, Indians, and whites making up the remainder of the population. English is the only official language on the islands and is spoken by everyone, and in terms of religion virtually the entire population is Christian, and consists of Anglicans, Evangelicals, and Catholics (CIA World Factbook 2011). According to World Bank figures, in 2010 St. Kitts and Nevis had a GDP-per capita figure of US \$12,500, which is comparable to that of the other Eastern Caribbean island states, and makes the federation a middle-income country (World Bank 2011).⁴ Although no data such as the Gini-coefficient are available, in terms of the distribution of welfare secondary sources suggest that no major income differences exist in the country, and that the population as a whole has become more affluent in recent years (Griffin 1994: 238). Due to migration to mainly the United Kingdom and the United States, about 32,000 Kittitians and Nevisians live in a foreign country.

In the academic literature, St. Kitts and Nevis is usually analyzed as part of the wider Anglophone Caribbean region.⁵ According to scholars who study this region, the political systems of the Anglophone Caribbean are characterized by 1) the preservation and maintenance of political democracy, 2) the predominance of Westminster-Whitehall political institutions, and 3) a distinct Caribbean political culture, which has a number of authoritarian features (Peters 1992: 20-21; Payne 1993a: 58; Thorndyke 1993: 151-154; Sutton 1999; Duncan and Woods 2007; Hinds 2008). Unlike larger, non-Anglophone countries in the region such as Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic,⁶ the formerly British West Indian islands have for the overwhelming part experienced only

³ Whereas most of the former British island colonies in the Caribbean are now independent countries, Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British Virgin Islands continue to be British Overseas Territories.

⁴ In 2011, the federation furthermore had a Human Development Index of 0.735, and as such ranks 72nd in the world in terms of human development (World Bank 2011).

⁵ Several other names for this region are sometimes used, such as the West Indies, the Eastern Caribbean, the Commonwealth Caribbean, the Lesser Antilles, or the Windward and Leeward islands. These names cover different groups of islands, but St. Kitts and Nevis forms part of all of them.

⁶ In fact, larger Caribbean states have seen some of the most authoritarian and repressive governments in history, such as Fidel Castro's communist regime in Cuba, the governments of "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier in Haiti, and Rafael Trujillo's 30-year rule of the Dominican Republic.

democratic rule since their independence.⁷ In fact, the prevalence of democracy in the Anglophone Caribbean has raised the attention of several scholars, and has resulted in what the distinguished Caribbean scholar Jorge Domínguez calls 'the Caribbean question' (Domínguez 1993: 3).⁸ Since attaining independence in 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis is one of the West Indian island states that have commonly and consistently been ranked as a democracy.

Whereas many scholars have cherished and applauded the Anglophone Caribbean islands for the preservation of democratic political institutions, others have expressed more mixed views on the democratic nature of the region. According to David Hinds, a scholarly divide can be observed between academics who primarily examine formal democratic institutions and who are generally positive about the level of democracy in the region (which is what Hinds calls the 'formalist' perspective), and those who emphasize informal political aspects, political culture, and the more substantial quality of democracy (the 'anti-formalist' perspective; Hinds 2008: 393-394). The latter group of scholars highlight that Westminster institutions are unsuitable for the Caribbean political context, as they primarily generate extreme partisan polarization, top-down authoritarian leadership, and the exploitation of state resources to finance clientelism and patronage (Peters 1992: 21; Duncan and Woods 2007: 211-213). On the basis of these considerations, it can be hypothesized that the formal, democratic institutional structure camouflages the more authoritarian political features of the Caribbean (Emmanuel 1993: 2-4).⁹

Against this theoretical background, the present chapter will offer an overview of the influence of size on the political system and context of St. Kitts and Nevis. The analysis is based on field research conducted in the federation in

⁷ The Marxist New Jewel Movement (NJM) that ruled Grenada between 1979 and 1983 constitutes the sole and major exception. Larger former British colonies in the Caribbean such as Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Barbados have also maintained democracy since their independence. Guyana, which is located on the Southern American continent but is often perceived to be part of the Caribbean in terms of (political) culture, witnessed authoritarian rule between 1964 and 1985 under the rule of Forbes Burnham. It is now commonly seen as a democracy.

⁸ The specific quotes of Domínguez in this context are: "no other region in what has been called the Third World has had, for so long, so many liberal democratic polities. (...) The Caribbean's capacity to sustain liberal democratic politics is impressive. Since independence (...) ten of twelve (...) Anglophone Caribbean countries have consistently held fair elections and have been free from unconstitutional transfers of power" (Domínguez 1993: 2-3).

⁹ In the words of Donald Peters; "[i]n spite of the existence of open, regular elections, opposition parties, and other institutional aspects of a modern democracy, the governmental system of the Eastern Caribbean does not function like a democracy" (Peters 1992: 2). In similar fashion, Anthony Payne argues that "[t]he political order of the Commonwealth Caribbean (...) is unique – a mixture of First World theory with Third World practice, British form with Caribbean vitality. It is not without its flaws; it may not live up fully to some of the ideals of democracy" (Payne 1993a: 72).

January 2011. As part of the research, semi-structured interviews were held with thirteen Kittitian and Nevisian respondents, among whom the Governor-General, government ministers, members of parliament affiliated with the government and the opposition, journalists, the ombudsman, academics, and the executive officer of the chamber of commerce.¹⁰ The chapter starts off with an overview of the political history of the federation, after which two sections are devoted to outlining the microstate's democratic institutions and explaining their continued existence. Subsequently, the influence of size on the politics of St. Kitts and Nevis is examined by analyzing the nature and quality of contestation and inclusiveness. In four successive paragraphs, I assess the characteristics of political competition, the relations between political and societal institutions, the effects of closeness and direct contacts, and the political participation of citizens. The chapter ends with a summary and evaluation of the main findings.

2. Political History and Democratization of St. Kitts and Nevis

Like the other islands of the Eastern Caribbean, the indigenous Carib and Arawak populations of St. Kitts and Nevis were virtually annihilated by the European colonizers.¹¹ The Europeans imported slaves from the African continent to work on sugar plantations, and the contemporary population of the federation is therefore in large majority composed of descendants of these slaves. The islands of Saint Christopher and Nevis were discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493, but in subsequent centuries control over the islands changed frequently between the Spanish, French, and British colonial administrations.¹² In the beginning of the 17th century, the first British and French colonies in the Caribbean were established on St. Kitts (hence called the “mother colony” of the Caribbean), and the island was divided into British and French zones.¹³ The first African slaves were imported to the island to work on newly established sugar

¹⁰ A complete list of the people I interviewed can be found in the appendix. Throughout the chapter, I occasionally use interview quotes to underline or illustrate my findings and the analytical narrative. Due to the strong interpersonal relations and the smallness of St. Kitts and Nevis's society, I have decided not to disclose the names and professions of the people to whom the specific interview excerpts belong.

¹¹ In 1626, the British and French settlers on St. Kitts massacred large numbers of Caribs in a place that is now known as Bloody Point. These events have now been documented as the Kalinago Genocide.

¹² Saint Christopher (*San Cristóbal*) was named after the patron saint of travel, whereas Nevis was named after *Nuestra Señora de las Nieves*, a reference to a 4th century miracle in ancient Rome.

¹³ Over the course of the 17th century, the French and British used St. Kitts as a base from which they established colonial administrations on nearby islands.

cane plantations in this period as well (Simmonds 1985: 58; Harris 2008: 1-3). After 1713, both St. Kitts and Nevis finally came entirely under British control.

In 1660, what is now known as the 'old representative system' was established on the British part of St. Kitts (Harris 2008: 2). This system of colonial government strongly resembled the Westminster political model, with a Governor representing the British monarch on the island, and a legislative assembly in which members of the plantocracy and a number of merchants were represented. Despite formally being a British colony, the old representative system thus largely enabled the settlers of St. Kitts and Nevis to rule their islands as they desired. Although the system was designed for the exploitation and control of slave workers who formed the backbone of the islands' economies, conflicts between the assembly and the Governor time and again resulted in political deadlock (Simmonds 1987: 278-279). As a solution, the British government took over control and the islands became a British crown colony in 1867. Under crown colony rule, the powers and prerogatives of the Lieutenant-Governor were overwhelming and virtually unchecked (Peters 1992: 59; Inniss 2005: 29).¹⁴

From the 17th to the 20th century, the British experimented with various federations and unions between their West Indian island colonies, but in 1882 the three-island unit of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla was formed, with the Governor and central authority residing on St. Kitts, which was the largest of these islands (Midgett 2004: 45). Although London later decided to integrate these islands into larger units,¹⁵ in 1962 St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla again became a separate British colony (Lewis 2002: 12-14). From the beginning of the union onwards, strong antagonisms characterized the relations between St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Kitts and Anguilla, as the two smaller islands opposed and challenged the dominant position of St. Kitts in the union. In particular, the peoples of Nevis and Anguilla felt that the interests and autonomy of their islands were neglected by the central government on St. Kitts (Inniss 1983: 1; Midgett 2004: 45-46; Dee 2001: 14).¹⁶ On the other hand, people on the wealthier island of St. Kitts had the idea that they were forced to carry the

¹⁴ Although the plantation owners were reluctant to transfer their powers to the British government, they were aware of the increased physical security that this would bring.

¹⁵ First the Leeward Islands Federation (between 1871 and 1956) and later the West Indies Federation (between 1958 and 1962).

¹⁶ In the discourse on all three islands, Nevis and Anguilla were perceived to be colonies of St. Kitts. Inniss (1983: 9-10, 68) for example asserts that St. Kitts was in the paradoxical position of being both a colony and a colonizer, and that Britain had forced her to carry the burden of the two other islands. Nevisians on the other hand, felt that they were a colony of a colony, and were hence financially completely neglected (Murray 1993: 6).

financial burden of the two lesser developed islands (Inniss 2005: 5). Whereas a highly profitable sugar industry was established on St. Kitts in the 17th and 18th century, the Nevisian and Anguillan economies were much less successful.¹⁷ On Nevis a small peasantry emerged and the first tourism facilities of the Caribbean were set up, whereas Anguilla's economy was mainly based on fisheries (Inniss 1983: 2).

After the abolishment of slavery in 1834 and the emergence of new and more competitive sugar industries in Brazil and India, the sugar plantations on the Caribbean islands in general witnessed a period of decline. As the richest and most successful sugar colony in the Eastern Caribbean, St. Kitts was initially less affected by these developments than other islands in the region, but the economic situation on the island nevertheless deteriorated in the first decades of the 20th century (Inniss 2005: 45). Whereas Britain for a long time profited from its Caribbean colonies, at the end of the 19th century its control over these islands gradually turned into a financial burden. Several violent riots by the sugar workers occurred when their living conditions became more and more dismal, and in 1932 the Workers League was established, which vied for the representation of workers in the legislative council of the island (Inniss 1983: 102). Since Nevis and Anguilla did not have sugar plantations, no equivalent movements emerged here.

After ongoing riots and violence throughout the Eastern Caribbean, the British government appointed a special royal commission under the leadership of Lord Moyne to review and examine the social and political situation in their West Indian colonies. Although the Moyne-commission did not suggest immediate independence for the islands, it did recommend a host of social and political reform measures (Peters 1992: 62-64). In reaction, the British government decided to abolish crown colony rule and reintroduce elections on the islands, even though the franchise remained extremely restricted (Inniss 1983: 62).¹⁸ In 1940, the Workers League was transformed into the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla Trades and Labour Union, out of which the Labour Party emerged as a political arm. This party was led by the young plantation worker Robert L.

¹⁷ On Nevis a sugar industry was launched as well, but it was far less successful than on its neighboring island because the geological characteristics of Nevis were less appropriate for the cultivation of sugar cane (Dee 2001: 15; Midgett 2004: 46-47).

¹⁸ The franchise established under the 1936 Constitution was based on the following property and income qualifications: 1) ownership of real property of the value of 100 pounds or payment of rent of 12 pounds per annum on real property, 2) payment of direct taxes of 15s. per annum in respect of the district in which the voter resides, 3) salary or income of 30 pounds per annum (Inniss 1983: 62). These requirements effectively excluded the overwhelming majority of the plantation workers from the electorate.

Bradshaw, who became its first leader in 1946, and was elected into the legislative council that same year.

Only in 1952, the first elections under universal suffrage were held in the colony. In all eight constituencies, also those in Nevis (2) and Anguilla (1), candidates from the Labour Party were elected, and Bradshaw became the colony's first Premier. Whereas the party and its leader were extremely popular on St. Kitts, their support on Nevis and Anguilla declined rapidly. In the 1957 elections, three independent MPs were elected on these two islands, who opposed the authorities on St. Kitts and especially the leadership of the Labour Party.¹⁹ In expressing their opposition to the Labour Party, the peoples of Nevis and Anguilla conveyed their feeling that the government only represented Kittitian interests (Simmonds 1987: 282-283; Griffin 1994: 235; Dee 2001: 20-21). In 1965, the People's Action Movement (PAM) party was established and succeeded in forming the first realistic opposition to the Labour Party, winning two seats on Nevis and Anguilla in the 1966 elections (Midgett 2004: 52). Nevertheless, between 1952 and 1980 politics in the colony remained strongly dominated by the Labour Party, and especially by Bradshaw.

After a short militant rebellion (called the 'Anguillan Revolution'), Anguilla seceded from the union in 1967.²⁰ Nevis had expressed its wish for secession already many times before, but both the British and the Bradshaw-governments were reluctant to allow this to happen.²¹ In 1970, the Nevis Reformation Party (NRP) was formed with the primary aim of achieving complete autonomy for the island.²² Winning one seat in the elections of 1971, and six of the nine seats in Nevisian local elections that same year, the NRP rapidly became the largest party on Nevis, thereby overtaking the position of the PAM (Dee 2001: 23-26). The rise of the NRP signaled the ultimate separation of

¹⁹ Since this party however managed to win all five constituencies in St. Kitts, it could manage to stay in power. When he was informed about the rejection of his party on Nevis and Anguilla, Bradshaw angrily declared to put "pepper in their soup and bones in their rice" (Midgett 2004: 43). He also stated that he would "not rest until I have reduced that place to a desert" and that Anguillans would have to "suck each other's bones" (Griffin 1994: 237).

²⁰ After this rebellion Anguilla became a separate British overseas territory, which it has remained until today. The PAM was accused of stimulating the Anguillan secession, and its leaders on St. Kitts were imprisoned (Simmonds 1987: 283).

²¹ In fact, Nevis already opposed the creation of the union in 1882, and Nevisians commonly believe that the prosperity of their island has started to decline from the creation of a union onwards. In 1904, one of the two representatives from Nevis in the legislative assembly made the first plea for secession (Dee 2001: 16).

²² The establishment of the NRP was a direct reaction to the sinking of the *Christena*-ferry and the ensuing death of 227 mainly Nevisian passengers that same year, for which the people on Nevis blamed the central government on St. Kitts.

Kittitian and Nevisian partisan politics, as both Labour and PAM eventually decided not to contest elections on Nevis any longer.

In the meantime, the once unshakable position of the Labour Party on St. Kitts began to erode, as people from the evolving middle-class started to support the more business-oriented PAM (Griffin 1994: 238). Real change arrived with the death of Bradshaw in 1978, and of his successor and co-founder of the Labour Party Paul Southwell one year later. In the pivotal 1980 elections, the PAM won three out of seven Kittitian seats, and together with the two Nevisian seats of the NRP it was able to form a coalition government under the leadership of Dr. Kennedy Simmonds (Griffin 1994: 239; Harris 2008: 14).²³ Shortly after the new government was formed, the two parties which paradoxically both had campaigned on anti-independence platforms started negotiations that in 1983 led to independence for St. Kitts and Nevis (Midgett 2004: 57).²⁴ Whereas the two islands thus jointly formed a new state, it was also decided that the new country was to become a federation, with a separate parliament and government for Nevis (the Nevis Island Assembly and Nevis Island Administration). By contrast, St. Kitts did not acquire its own legislative and executive institutions.²⁵ Furthermore, in the new Constitution a clause (no. 113) was added that provides for the possibility of unilateral secession of Nevis (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 113; Inniss 1983: 76; Dee 2001: 33-37; Griffiths 2005: 3-4).

In subsequent elections until 1995, the PAM-government managed to remain in office, and after 1984 without the support of the NRP. On Nevis the monopolistic position of the NRP ended because many Nevisians were dissatisfied with the party's more moderate stance towards the secession issue since it had entered the coalition government. Accordingly, the Concerned Citizens' Movement (CCM) was formed, which won one of three seats in the Nevisian local elections of 1987, and has consistently occupied two of the three Nevisian seats in the federal parliament since 1993 (Midgett 2004: 58). The

²³ The defeat of Labour was also a result of some rather extreme and seemingly undemocratic statements by its new party leader Lee Moore, who at one point suggested that the country should become a one-party state under the leadership of Labour (Griffin 1994: 239).

²⁴ By coincidence, independence came exactly one hundred years after the British had forced the two islands into one union. After having been denied a legislature in 1882, Nevisians felt that they now finally regained (some) control over their own island (Dee 2001: 31).

²⁵ As a result, both Kittitians and Nevisians claim that the country is not a real federation, but rather a 'pseudo' or 'semi'-federation. Kittitians frequently complain that this is unfair, because whereas Nevisians do have a say in Kittitian matters (through the federal institutions), the reverse is not the case (Griffiths 2005: 3). Nevisians, on the other hand, point to the fact that a large majority of parliamentary seats in the federal assembly are reserved for Kittitian MPs, as a result of which one party from St. Kitts can often form a government on its own, without a Nevisian coalition partner (as has been the case since 1995).

federal elections of 1993 resulted in a stalemate and constitutional crisis when Labour and PAM both managed to win four of the eight Kittitian seats, CCM won two Nevisian seats, and NRP one. The PAM-government thereby lost its majority, but since CCM-leader Vance Amory upheld his campaign promise not to cooperate with any Kittitian party, no government could be formed. Consequently, the Governor-General swore in a minority government of PAM and NRP, which immediately led to protests and riots on the part of Labour-supporters. In the end, under the auspices of a number of societal institutions such as the chamber of commerce and the churches, the four political parties negotiated a joint declaration (the so-called Four Seasons Accord) calling for fresh elections to be organized in the next year (Dee 2001: 43-46).

Table 6.1: Vote Percentage and Seats of Kittitian-Nevisian Parties at Elections²⁶

	Labour		UNM		PAM		NRP		CCM		Other, Ind.		Total
Year	V%	S	V%	S	V%	S	V%	S	V%	S	V%	S	S
1952	84.7	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15.3	-	8
1957	53.6	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46.4	3	8
1961	64.5	7	7.3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	28.2	1	10
1966	44.3	7	5.9	1	35.0	2	-	-	-	-	14.8	-	10
1971	50.8	7	4.4	-	37.0	1	7.7	1	-	-	-	-	9
1975	60.2	7	-	-	23.4	-	16.2	2	-	-	0.2	-	9
1980	50.0	4	-	-	33.9	3	16.0	2	-	-	-	-	9
1984	41.3	2	-	-	47.6	6	10.1	3	-	-	1.0	-	11
1989	37.3	2	-	-	45.4	6	10.9	2	6.4	1	0.1	-	11
1993	43.8	4	-	-	33.6	4	8.5	1	10.9	2	3.1	-	11
1995	49.2	7	-	-	34.7	1	7.0	1	8.2	2	0.3	-	11
2000	53.6	8	-	-	29.6	-	7.8	1	8.7	2	-	-	11
2004	50.6	7	-	-	31.7	1	7.5	1	8.8	2	1.2	-	11
2010	47.0	6	-	-	32.2	2	9.8	1	11.0	2	0.1	-	11

The 1995 general elections resulted in a landslide victory for the Labour Party of Dr. Denzil Douglas, who managed to win seven out of eight Kittitian seats. The Labour Party and Dr. Douglas went on to win the elections of 2000, 2004, and 2010, and have since then always secured comfortable majorities that did not call for the support of a secondary (Nevisian) coalition partner. Due to the fact that Nevis was no longer represented in the federal government, and due to the historical antipathy of Nevisians towards the Labour Party, in 1997 (CCM-) Premier Amory of Nevis decided to invoke clause 113 of the constitution, thereby

²⁶ **Labour** = St. Kitts and Nevis Labour Party (St. Kitts-based socialist party), **UNM** = United National Movement (Nevisian regional party), **PAM** = People's Action Movement (St. Kitts-based centre-right party), **NRP** = Nevis Reformation party (Nevis-based regional party), **CCM** = Concerned Citizens' Movement (Nevis-based regional and secessionist party).

initiating the process of secession (Dee 2001: 47-48; Midgett 2004: 61-62; Nisbett 2004: 11; Griffiths 2005: 5). Whereas the entire Nevis Island Assembly endorsed the proposal for secession, the 1998 referendum narrowly fell short of producing the two-thirds majority in favor of secession that the constitution requires. Although no further attempts at secession have been made since 1998, the secession issue continues to cast its shadow over the future of the federations. In tables 6.1 and 6.2, the results of federal elections and the composition of federal governments have been presented.

Table 6.2: Composition of Federal Governments of St. Kitts and Nevis since 1952

Time Span	Government Party	Head of Government
1952 - 1980	Labour Party	Robert Bradshaw, Paul Southwell, Lee Moore
1980 - 1995	PAM & NRP	Kennedy Simmonds
1995 -	Labour Party	Denzil Douglas

3. Explaining Democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis

Now that the political history and pathway to democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis have been outlined, in the present section a number of factors that have contributed to the maintenance of democratic institutions in the federation will be listed. Having been a colony of the United Kingdom until 1983, democratization in St. Kitts and Nevis was essentially orchestrated and implemented by this colonial power. Already at the outset of colonialism, the settlers imported the British Westminster system of government to St. Kitts and Nevis, and a Governor became the King's representative. For the subsequent three hundred years, the small white and European elite of the islands used the Westminster institutions to dominate, exploit, and oppress the black working class. Although this system basically excluded the plantation workers from political participation and inclusion, it is supposed to have had a large impact on this group in terms of political socialization (Peters 1992: 25-26).²⁷ In contrast to many African and Asian colonies that were colonized for a much shorter period of time, Caribbean populations have ages of experience with Westminster institutions, to the point that they have apparently come to regard the system as autochthonous (Sutton 1999: 69).

Academics frequently ascribe the survival of democracy in the Caribbean to the prevalence of the Westminster system (Peters 1992: 7, 206; Payne 1993a:

²⁷ As Douglas Payne remarks about the Eastern Caribbean microstates: "socialized by over three hundred years of British colonialism, the emergent Commonwealth Caribbean elite could scarcely have become anything else other than liberal democracies" (Payne 1993b: 9; cf. Duncan and Woods 2007: 205).

58-59; Domínguez 1993: 15-17).²⁸ Although Westminster institutions have been maintained after independence and have been cherished for bringing about political stability in the region, many scholars have also asserted that 1) the Westminster system is inapplicable to the (small-sized) Caribbean political context, or that 2) the people of the Eastern Caribbean region only experienced the potentially oppressive and authoritarian features of Westminster institutions, which they have now mastered themselves (Peters 1992: 25-26). According to these academics, the Westminster system has helped to create a political system that is characterized by democratic institutions, but is also marked by polarization, top-down government, victimization, and oppression, and therefore hardly deserves a democratic label. In combination with the size and political culture of Eastern Caribbean states, Ryan (1999: 317) for example argues that Westminster institutions lead to a sharp polarization along political-tribal lines, and that they confer vast powers on the winning party, and little or no power on the losing party.²⁹ Colonial experience in the Eastern Caribbean can therefore not only account for the persistence of representative democratic institutions, but also for the perseverance of a political reality that clearly diverges from democratic ideals. Nevertheless, there is broad scholarly consensus about the socialization and colonization effects on the maintenance of formally democratic political structures in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Although this argument of political socialization in Westminster traditions helps to explain the origins and preservation of democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis, the international political context should be taken into consideration as well. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, the historical supremacy of the United Kingdom in the Caribbean basin was overtaken by the United States, which came to regard the Caribbean as its political backyard (Muñiz and Beruff 1994: 113). Becoming one of the key areas of Cold War rivalry, the strategic interests of the US in the Caribbean further increased after the Second World War, and the 1983 invasion in Grenada demonstrated the American determination not to tolerate the establishment of any Soviet-aligned regime in the region in addition to Cuba. In many ways, the Eastern Caribbean microstates

²⁸ The argument that microstates have witnessed more intense and protracted periods of colonial rule and are therefore more likely to have democratic political systems is repeatedly expressed in the academic literature (Baldacchino 1993: 31; Srebrnik 2004: 333). In addition, several authors have emphasized the tendency of microstates to stick to the political institutions they inherited from their former colonizers (Anckar 2004b: 215-217; Sutton 2007a: 202-203).

²⁹ According to Ryan, “[t]he unfortunate aspect of the Westminster model of governance is that it has encouraged a ‘to the victors the spoils’ mentality. It has ensured that at any time almost half of the population of any given Caribbean society is marginalized and alienated from participation in the development of their society” (Ryan 1999: 317).

became international clients of the United States, which financially and militarily supported these countries in exchange for political compliance (Lewis 1993: 112).³⁰ Since the end of the Cold War, the United States have been increasingly advocating the protection of human rights and democracy in the world, and have turned these into conditions for the provision of development aid. Being heavily dependent on foreign investments, this provides additional incentives for the Eastern Caribbean microstates to preserve their democratic structures.

The location of the Eastern Caribbean microstates in the proximity of a democratic superpower has indeed been suggested as an explanation for their democratic systems of government (Masala 2004: 252-254). Interviews with Kittitian and Nevisian respondents provide further evidence for this notion:

“I think that by and large by their comments, foreign governments can have a disciplining effect on democracy and how it is practiced in countries that are small.”

“We sit under the big nose of the United States; we are in the United States’ sphere of influence. We have to listen to what the United States says to us.”

According to several interviewees, the maintenance of democratic practices is a deliberate strategic attempt to appease the United States, and is actually a façade that serves to camouflage a less democratic reality:

“Of course yes, there is a façade. (...) When Maurice Bishop on Grenada affiliated himself with Castro on Cuba, the United States government said “there will not be another Cuba in the Caribbean”. So what happened to Grenada? (...) Therefore, the need for the façade of democracy is always there.”³¹

In addition to the United States, the role of regional international platforms like the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as additional protectors of democratic government in the region should also not be underestimated, since these organizations have historically taken verbal or physical action when democracy was perceived to be under threat in one of its member states. Most of my respondents however

³⁰ For a discussion about the application of the patron-client model to international relations, see Carney (1989) and Sutton and Payne (1993). In somewhat comparable fashion, Levitsky and Way have argued that international social, geographical, economic, and political linkages can foster democratization (2005: 22-23). Being so small and vulnerable, the Eastern Caribbean microstates almost by definition maintain many of such linkages with the United States and the United Kingdom. In addition, Taiwan and Venezuela have emerged as new major investors in the region in recent years, and in terms of international patron-client relations St. Kitts and Nevis therefore is a client state to multiple patrons. Like it does with many other microstates, Taiwan supports St. Kitts and Nevis in exchange for recognition and support of Taiwan’s positions in the United Nations.

³¹ In this regard, Peters argues that, “domestic politics are closely monitored by Britain and the US, and any policy that they believe may threaten the political stability of the region is quickly nipped in the bud, particularly if there are foreign policy implications” (Peters 1992: 76).

asserted that democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis also follows from a strong yearning for freedom and independence among the population, which is argued to be the result of ages of suppression. This idea is buttressed by several manifestations of the intolerance of Eastern Caribbean populations for leaders who became too authoritarian and were eventually ousted, such as Eric Gairy in Grenada and Patrick John in Dominica (both in 1979). In St. Kitts and Nevis, the defeat of Labour Party leader Lee Moore in the 1980 elections has been explained on the basis of his radical and sometimes antidemocratic positions and statements. In short, present-day democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis can be explained from historical, international, and socio-cultural perspectives.

4. Political Institutions of St. Kitts and Nevis

Like the other former British colonies in the Eastern Caribbean, the political institutions of St. Kitts and Nevis are strongly modeled after the Westminster parliamentary example. The government of the federation is responsible and accountable to the National Assembly, and is as a rule supported by a parliamentary majority. The country is a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch of the United Kingdom is officially the head of state, but an appointed Governor-General performs His or Her duties as a viceroy. Although the country is constitutionally labeled as a federation, a system of devolution that is rather similar to that of the United Kingdom has been adopted, in which the largest constituent state (St. Kitts) has no separate political institutions.³² The public administration of the country is also based on the Westminster example, with functionally specialized departments that are headed by a minister (Simmonds 1985).

According to the Constitution, the Governor-General of St. Kitts and Nevis is appointed by the monarch of the United Kingdom (1983: Art. 21). On His or Her behalf, the Governor-General has among other things the competence to appoint a Deputy Governor-General on Nevis, to appoint senators in the National Assembly, to appoint the Supervisor of elections and members of the electoral commission, to sign proposals of law, to dissolve parliament, and to appoint ministers and the Prime Minister. For many of these duties, the constitution prescribes that the Governor-General shall 'act in accordance with the Prime Minister', which means that the space for political maneuvering of the Governor-

³² After the victory of Labour in the 1997 UK elections, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales each acquired separate assemblies and executives, and several powers and competences were devolved to these sub-national institutions. As the largest country in the United Kingdom, England however did not obtain such institutions.

General is rather circumscribed. Since the British monarch appoints a Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister, new Governor-Generals have been customarily appointed after an electoral victory of the opposition.³³ It is therefore hardly surprising that the Governor-General is often perceived to be acting primarily in the interests of the government (and Prime Minister) of the day.

Elections in St. Kitts and Nevis are conducted under the rules of the first-past-the-post plurality system, with eight single-member electoral districts being contested on St. Kitts and three on Nevis in federal elections.³⁴ Elections are held once in five years, and governments usually fulfill their term in office. In addition to the eleven MPs that are elected in constituencies, the parliament of St. Kitts and Nevis consists of three non-elected senators who are appointed by the Governor-General,³⁵ and the Attorney-General who is an *ex-officio* member of parliament. This means that the federal parliament of St. Kitts and Nevis consists of only fifteen MPs,³⁶ who each represent on average 2,500 citizens. In line with the Westminster system government ministers are also members of parliament, but since the number of government posts usually exceeds the number of parliamentary seats for the ruling party or parties, all ruling party MPs are usually also cabinet ministers. This means that there are no government party-backbenchers in the National Assembly. Government ministers in the federal government are appointed by the Governor-General from among the members of parliament on the advice of the Prime Minister (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 52: 4).³⁷ The contemporary federal government consists of nine ministers, who each head their own governmental department.

Since independence in 1983, the state of Nevis has its own parliament (the Nevis Island Assembly) and its own executive (the Nevis Island Administration). The Assembly consists of five elected members and three

³³ After the PAM-NRP government came to power in 1980, Governor Inniss was replaced by Governor-General Arrindell, and after Labour regained office in 1995, Arrindell was swiftly replaced by the current Governor-General, Sir Cuthbert Montraville Sebastian. All of these Governors have been commonly seen as an extension of the incumbent government.

³⁴ In elections for the Nevis Island Assembly, five electoral districts on Nevis are contested under similar electoral rules.

³⁵ Two of these senators are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister, and one on the advice of the parliamentary opposition leader (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 30, 35).

³⁶ Together with the parliaments of the Federated States of Micronesia (14), Tuvalu (15), and Grenada (15), the parliament of St. Kitts and Nevis has the smallest membership size in the world.

³⁷ The Prime Minister himself is appointed from among the elected MPs by the Governor-General, who has a constitutional duty to select someone who is likely to command the support of the majority of the representatives. In practice this would normally mean the leader of the majority party or coalition.

appointed senators, and the party that controls the majority of seats in the Assembly has the right to form the Administration, which is headed by the Premier of Nevis.³⁸ According to the constitution, the Nevis Island Assembly has the authority to invoke a secession clause, and two-thirds of the members of the Assembly and two-thirds of Nevisian voters must be in favor of secession in order to accomplish full independence of the island (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 113). The constitution further determines that the Nevis Island Administration can rule on issues relating to infrastructure, education, health, fisheries, and labor, and also has its own budget. Regarding other issues (such as foreign affairs and defense), the federal government has the final say (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 106-111; Dee 2001: 35-37).

Judicial authority in St. Kitts and Nevis is exercised by the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC), which is the primary judicial organ of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States³⁹ and has its headquarters on St. Lucia (Gilmore 1985: 314; Lewis 1993: 101). The ECSC-judges in St. Kitts and Nevis are no citizens of the federation, but are nationals of another member state of the OECS; currently both high court judges in the federation originate from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Cases of appeal used to be transferred to the Privy Council in London, but the establishment of the Trinidad-based Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) by the member states of the CARICOM in 2001 has created a second court of appeal, which might possibly replace the Privy Council in the future (cf. Bryan 1998). Smaller criminal and civil cases are dealt with by local magistrates' courts, of which magistrates are appointed by the Governor-General in accordance with the public service commission (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 83). According to Freedom House, the judiciary of the federation is "largely independent and legal provisions for a fair and speedy trial are generally observed" (Freedom House 2012).

Together with six other small island states in the Eastern Caribbean, St. Kitts and Nevis in 1981 founded the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).⁴⁰ Over the years, cooperation within the OECS has led to the

³⁸ Since only two parties contest elections on Nevis, the Administration usually takes the form of a single-party government. At present there are seven ministers in the Nevis Island Administration, some of whom are also members of the Nevis Island Assembly. In 2012, the Nevis Reformation Party (NRP) won three of the five seats in the Assembly, as a result of which it gained a new term in office.

³⁹ In addition to the seven OECS members, the ECSC also is the main judicial organ of the British overseas territories of Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands.

⁴⁰ The OECS was established in 1981 with the Treaty of Basseterre, which was signed in the capital city of St. Kitts and Nevis with the same name. In addition to St. Kitts and Nevis, the

establishment of an economic and monetary union, relatively far-reaching judicial and security agreements, and the establishment of institutions like the ECSC, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, and the Regional Security System (Lewis 1993: 106-111, 115-117; Thorndyke 1993: 171-174; Alexis 1997: 138-139).⁴¹ The OECS-organs thus exercise a number of judicial, economic, financial, and defense competences that usually belong to the domain of national governments, as a result of which these institutions to some extent assume a supranational character. Talks about further political and economic integration are ongoing, and the benefits of this are underlined by almost all my interviewees.

The present overview of the institutional political structure of St. Kitts and Nevis suggests that the country operates as a full democracy, which is also how the country has been classified in annual Freedom House-surveys.⁴² Whereas the academic literature on wider Anglophone Caribbean politics implies that the political reality of the region also inhibits several less democratic or even authoritarian elements, the handful of somewhat recent publications on St. Kitts and Nevis alone do not really reveal to what extent this literature is applicable to this specific microstate as well. In the following analysis of the influence of size on various aspects of contestation and inclusiveness in St. Kitts and Nevis it becomes clear that the country is no exception from the rest of the region, although the federal arrangement creates a number of specific political dynamics that the other Eastern Caribbean microstates presumably do not experience, as the remainder of the chapter will demonstrate.

5. The Influence of Size on Democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis

In terms of Dahl's dimensions of contestation and inclusiveness, as its Freedom House-rankings suggests St. Kitts and Nevis can indeed be classified as a democracy or polyarchy. Acquiring the most positive rankings on both political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House consistently groups the microstate into

independent (UN-member) states of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada are members of the OECS, as well as the British overseas territory of Montserrat.

⁴¹ All OECS-member states and Anguilla use the Eastern Caribbean dollar as their currency, and all members and Barbados are member of the Regional Security System (RSS). This latter organization is a collective security arrangement that played a major role in 1983-Operation Urgent Fury on Grenada and in the restoration of order after the 1990 coup attempt on Trinidad and Tobago (Linton 1993: 240-242). During the unrest on St. Kitts and Nevis in the aftermath of the 1993-elections, the RSS was briefly deployed to maintain order in the federation.

⁴² Freedom House is the only aggregate index of democracy that does not exclude St. Kitts and Nevis.

the cluster of most democratic countries in the world (Freedom House 2012).⁴³ With federal parliamentary elections being organized every five years under conditions of freedom and fairness, and the government of St. Kitts and Nevis being responsible and accountable to parliament, political contestation for the main offices of the state is definitely present. Active electoral rights are granted to every Kittitian-Nevisian citizen of at least eighteen years old, and every citizen who is at least twenty-one years of age has the right to be elected to the National Assembly. For Nevisian citizens, similar provisions apply with regard to voting rights for the Nevis Island Assembly.

Although many of my respondents complained about electoral ‘tricks’ such as the registration of voters in districts where they do not live, or the importation of expatriate supporters by the political parties, in line with the assessments of Freedom House the overwhelming majority of interviewees agreed that the process of voting itself and the counting of the votes occurs in conditions of fairness (cf. Hillebrands and Schwehm 2005b: 569). In order to fully comprehend the influence of size on politics and democracy in St. Kitts and Nevis, however, an analysis of the specific nature and quality of contestation and inclusiveness in the federation is offered in subsequent sections. The analysis will start off with two sections on contestation; one on the nature and contents of political competition (4.1.), and one on the balance of power between the various institutions of the state (4.2.). Subsequently, two sections are devoted to the effects of closeness and direct contact between citizens and politicians on inclusiveness (4.3.) and the characteristics of political participation and elections in the federation (4.4.). The findings are summarized and evaluated in the conclusion of the chapter.

5.1. Contestation: Personalism, Polarization, and Victimization

In the federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, political contestation occurs in the form of direct elections for legislative organs that are organized once every five years. Since the composition and authority of the government is dependent on parliament and continuing parliamentary support, contestation for the executive branch of government is indirectly present. In turn, the government (and especially the Prime Minister) has the competence to make appointments to a host of public institutions, and commonly has a decisive influence in the

⁴³ The Freedom House-scale ranks from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating most ‘free’ and 7 indicating completely ‘not free’. Since independence in 1983, St. Kitts and Nevis mostly acquired a score of 1 on political rights, and a score of 2 on political liberties. Since 2006, this latter score has however turned into a 1 as well (Freedom House 2012).

appointment of the Governor-General, who has the competence to appoint other public officials and to sign and thereby ratify proposals of legislation. As the elections results presented in table 6.1 (on page 9) demonstrate, political competition in St. Kitts and Nevis occurs primarily on the basis of political parties, and in the last two decades federal elections have been contested by four parties. In each of the two islands (and federal states) two parties contest elections, which means that *de facto* two separated spaces of competition exist, with actually no political party vying for nationwide support.

In terms of the indicators of contestation that were outlined in the methodological chapter, on the basis of table 6.2 it can firstly be noted that alternation in office through the ballot box does occur in the federation, although it does not happen very often. The Labour-government that ruled the country from the introduction of universal suffrage until 1980 was removed from office by means of a peaceful transition of power that resulted from a defeat at the polls, and a similar alteration occurred in 1995, when Labour took over power from the PAM-NRP government. Regarding party system-fragmentation and the presence of an opposition, it can be seen in table 1 that the number of parties that are represented in parliament has grown from two to four over the past couple of decades, and the effective number of parties (ENP) has grown from below 2.0 over the 1960s and 1970s to mostly over 2.0 from the 1970s onward.⁴⁴ Despite the lopsided proportion of seats in relation to vote-percentages that results from the majoritarian electoral system, there has always been a parliamentary opposition in the National Assembly.

When it comes to the substantial and programmatic differences between the four parties and the degree to which they represent political alternatives in contesting political offices, a major political cleavage can evidently be observed between the parties that are based on St. Kitts and those based on Nevis. In addition to primarily representing and addressing the demands of constituents on their particular island, this cleavage brings along a programmatic difference between the parties with regard to the issue of (increased) autonomy for Nevis. Whereas the NRP and especially the CCM strongly oppose the union of their island with St. Kitts, Labour and PAM have at various times assumed either an

⁴⁴ As a result of the distorted election outcomes under the plurality rules, the ENP-figure can differ markedly between elections even if the respective proportion of votes for political parties has not shifted much. Whereas PAM in the 2000-elections managed to obtain almost 30% of the votes, this was not translated in a single parliamentary seat, thus leading to a historically low ENP-figure of 1.30.

ambiguous or outright negative stance towards more autonomy for Nevis.⁴⁵ Due to the fact that the two parties of each island however do not express markedly different viewpoints about this issue, this programmatic difference is much less salient at elections than it is in the federal parliament or in the public debate. Furthermore, as Midgett argues, the desire of secession among Nevisians originates primarily from their historical antagonism towards St. Kitts, and is not fueled by a distinct Nevisian identity or sense of community (2004: 44).⁴⁶ This means that this cleavage cannot be identified on the basis of ethnicity or religion, but that it can instead be classified as a centre-periphery cleavage, in which Nevisian parties can be seen as regionalist, nationalist, and secessionist parties that oppose the central authorities on St. Kitts.⁴⁷

With exception of the Nevis secession-issue, substantial differences between the political parties actually appear to be marginal (cf. Griffin 1994: 231, 235). In terms of the indicator of the articulation of political interests by political parties, it therefore seems to be the case that this hardly occurs in St. Kitts and Nevis. On the basis of a review of the most recent political programs of the four parties, I found that election manifestos hardly contain any policy goals or proposals, and that parties primarily use them to denounce the opposition and emphasize how they do things better. Whereas the Sammarinese political parties did outline policy proposals in their manifestos, this cannot be said of the Kittitian-Nevisian parties. Furthermore, in the context of personalistic contestation, election manifestos appear to be hardly relevant, as one of the academics I interviewed points out;

“The manifestos that are put out are hardly read; people collect them as memento. (...) Election campaigns are typically eighteen to twenty-one days; the manifestos come out maybe only ten days before the election. And we don’t have debates between the candidates and between the parties to discuss the policies (...). We don’t have that, so the policies to me only play a second role to personalities and party.”

⁴⁵ The impression that I obtained from my field research is that Kittitians are not so much opposed to increased autonomy for Nevis, but primarily dislike the contemporary set-up of the federation, in which Nevis has its own political institutions whereas St. Kitts does not.

⁴⁶ Specifically, Midgett points out that “Nevisians are not imagining “community” leading to some nationalist impetus, but rather imagine a release from something they do not want to be, but without a necessary conception of what they might become” (2004: 44).

⁴⁷ Again, a comparison can be drawn here between St. Kitts and Nevis and its former colonizer, the UK. The position of the NRP and CCM in many ways appears to be somewhat similar to that of the Scottish National Party (SNP) or Plaid Cymru in Wales, which also primarily advocate nationalist and regionalist sentiments, and vie for more autonomy of Scotland and Wales. Whereas these parties however also adopt a certain (left-wing) position on for example socio-economic issues, the Nevisian parties really are not classifiable in this sense.

Whereas the names, symbols, and rhetoric of the parties on St. Kitts are based on a class cleavage, with Labour claiming to represent working class-interests and PAM supposedly representing the middle-class and business owners, all thirteen of my respondents (and even politicians) agreed that the parties are more or less similar with regard to their political orientation, as the following politician argues:

“The difference now between the parties is individual, personalities. If you look at both parties, what is now the PAM party actually operates under the principles of the old Labour Party.”

According to Griffin, the Labour Party traditionally primarily claimed to represent workers’ interests in order to stigmatize and criticize the opposition, thereby more or less artificially cultivating the notion of a class cleavage (1994: 235).⁴⁸ Instead of ideology, the differences between Labour and PAM now appear to be primarily personal, and both parties primarily appear to serve as platforms to support individual politicians. On the question whether it would make a difference if PAM would be in government now, one of the journalists illustratively asserted that:

“All that would happen is that you would have a different set of persons benefiting. But basically their ideology is the same. I don’t know one thing that is different.”

Whereas the Kittitian parties however still uphold the image of representing different interests, the Nevisian parties cannot even be distinguished in this sense.⁴⁹ Respondents were unable to say whether one of the Nevisian parties is more right-wing or left-wing than the other, or more progressive or conservative. The absence of ideological demarcations between the parties in the federation can in large part be attributed to the homogeneity of the population and the lack of major socio-economic or ethno-linguistic cleavages (Griffin 1994: 233, 235, 242).⁵⁰ In combination with smallness, which creates more intimate and direct linkages between citizens and politicians, homogeneity in St. Kitts and

⁴⁸ Griffin states that “the Labour Party defined the political battle along class lines (...). The task of the opposition, consequently, was quite formidable – erasing the stigma of being elitist in a society that was overwhelmingly rural and working class” (1994: 235).

⁴⁹ The only potential difference between the NRP and the CCM is that the NRP has historically been slightly more open to cooperation with the parties on St. Kitts (for example during the coalition government), whereas the CCM has always principally rejected this.

⁵⁰ In Alesina et al.’s fractionalization index, which measures ethnic, religious, and linguistic fractionalization, St. Kitts and Nevis receives a score of 0.18 (Alesina et al. 2003). Since the index ranges between 1 and 0, with 0 indicating the absence of fractionalization and 1 indicating a completely fractionalized society, this score is rather low. Whereas 90 percent of the population has African ancestry, the remaining 10 percent has a mixed African and European ethnic background, but this difference does not appear to have been politicized in any way.

Nevis appears to create an environment of contestation that focuses primarily on personalities instead of policies. This is not only the case with regard to the aspects of inter-party competition, but according to almost all respondents also applies to voting behavior among the Kittitian-Nevisian electorate, as the following politician points out;

“In St. Kitts and Nevis you find that people are largely homogenous. Yes, you have people who are more affluent than others, but there is not a huge distinction; the lawyer or the politician or the doctor’s kids go to the same school as the farmer or the fisherman’s kids. And so the divisions we see are largely along family lines. (...) People vote NRP because it’s a traditional NRP family, and it happens like that.”

Whereas several scholars have supposed that homogeneity and the absence of cleavages that follow from a small size generate less polarization and a spirit of consensus (Anckar 1999: 30), the case of St. Kitts and Nevis demonstrates that the opposite is true. On both islands, virtually all respondents confirmed that partisan competition is marked by a rather extreme degree of polarization, to the extent that people refer to it as political tribalism. As one senior public official points out;

“The politics is very divisive; sometimes we refer to it as tribal politics. Each political party becomes so obsessed with the righteousness of its own cause that the only thing it sees that the other side should be or should do is to be destroyed. What we see happening now in St. Kitts –Nevis is that both of the major political parties practice the same divide and rule.”

As Peters argues, Eastern Caribbean governments have taken the concept of partisan politics “to its zenith”, since “when a party is elected to power, it virtually eliminates the opposition” (Peters 1992: 9). My various interviewees pointed out that marriages and friendships between supporters of the different parties are uncommon, and that the partisan divide reverberates throughout society and has a profound impact on social relationships of any kind. Since people also commonly display their partisan affiliation by wearing symbols and colors of the party that they vote for, partisan loyalty appears in many ways comparable to support for a sports team.

In such a polarized environment, supporters of the opposition are recurrently harassed and bullied by the party that is in power. Indeed, political victimization of opposition leaders and supporters is another characteristic feature of Eastern Caribbean politics (Peters 1992: 178; Sutton 1999: 75-76), and according to virtually all respondents St. Kitts and Nevis is no exception in this regard. One journalist pointed out to me that:

“You have a tremendous amount of victimization. If a politician feels that you don’t support him, and you have a business, they victimize you. They ensure that you don’t get any of the government services, and you don’t get any chance to get any of the government work.”

With regard to victimization, the small-scale environment and intimate social relationships certainly facilitate the identification of supporters and opponents. As one prominent politician of the Labour party explained:

“In St. Kitts, we know who is Labour, and we know who is PAM. And we know the families who are Labour and the families who are PAM; most of them. And the same thing in Nevis.”

Political victimization creates a climate of anger and fear that further stimulates polarization and partisan loyalties. In addition, victimization and polarization strongly determine the actions and attitude of the government vis-à-vis individual citizens, as one of the scholars I talked to highlighted;

“If someone goes to a minister and says: “minister, I would like to buy a piece of land to build a house or to do some farming”, what will happen (...) is that the minister will find out who that person who wants the land is related to. What is their political affiliation? How many people in the family or in that genealogical stream are members of my party or the other party?”⁵¹

In terms of the indicator of the freedom to support the opposition, it can therefore be concluded that in the polarized and victimization-prone environment of St. Kitts and Nevis, actively supporting the opposition can and will have negative consequences. Paradoxically however, victimization does not appear to limit people’s eagerness to display their partisan affiliation, and this goes as much for government as for opposition supporters. Based on my own observations, Kittitians and Nevisians commonly and continuously wear clothes and accessories that express their partisan affiliations, and therefore also explicitly support the opposition.

Due to the size of the country and the limited number of people who are qualified to assume political positions, the political elite of St. Kitts and Nevis is inherently small. Both my interviews and political developments in the federation however reveal that victimization, antagonism, and feuds also determine intra-elite relations, and opposition politicians claimed to be ignored or pestered by the government. Various interviewees confirmed that policy proposals of the opposition are mostly ignored or immediately rejected without

⁵¹ During my field research, when asked about instances of victimization several citizens mentioned that the government had recently shut off electricity in a district in which many opposition supporters are known to live.

considering their quality or value, as the parliamentary leader of the opposition remarked;

“It is incredibly debilitating, I will tell you that candidly. Because our politics is not about ideas; it is about personalities. (...) And so there is no evaluation of ideas; they start thinking “who did the idea come from; who do they support, and what is their agenda? (...) The victimization is rampant.”

According to the MPs I was able to talk with, parliamentary debates are also characterized by the prevalence of *ad hominem* attacks, just like the public debate in the media.

Just like in San Marino, the presence of partisan competition in St. Kitts and Nevis obscures the fact that contestation is essentially personalistic rather than programmatic. With exception of the Nevis secession-issue no major substantial points of contestation exist between the four parties, even though the labels and rhetoric of the Kittitian parties may suggest otherwise. To a greater extent than in San Marino however, personalistic competition in the federation leads to political polarization and the victimization of opponents. This generates a political environment characterized by fear that has the potential to impede on the freedom of expression or the freedom to form and join organizations (cf. Dahl 1971: 3). In combination with the absence of major politicized cleavages and the interconnectedness of the microstate’s society that results in personality-oriented voting behavior, contestation in St. Kitts and Nevis is thus in conclusion characterized by personalism, polarization, and the victimization of opponents.

5.2. Contestation: The Balance of Power Between Institutions

In the tremendously polarized political environment of St. Kitts and Nevis, politically independent, neutral, and impartial institutions are hard to find. In terms of political contestation, this means that there are only a very limited number of checks on the power of elected politicians, and that non-elected political institutions assume a subordinate position vis-à-vis the politically contested bodies. In addition, in a small and close-knit society where people are generally well aware of each other’s political affiliation, maintaining the *image* of neutrality and impartiality is often even harder than actually being and acting as such, as an academic mentioned;

“At times our democracy then becomes a fight between a government view and an opposition view, and no views in between. I think if you had more views or more people and groups with different views, then you wouldn’t be so polarized and you give people almost a sense to find where the truth lies.”

Regardless of whether it is accurate or not, institutions like the judiciary, the media, the civil service, the ombudsman, and the electoral commission are easily and frequently branded as being politically biased, and according to a majority of respondents this impedes on their authority and performance.

Like in the rest of the Eastern Caribbean, in the St. Kitts-Nevis political system the Prime Minister wields an extraordinary amount of power. Various persons I interviewed called the Prime Minister “the king”, “el supremo”, “a powerhouse”, “a little Caesar” and “an elected dictator”.⁵² One of the scholars I talked to told me that:

“Our politics, our political democracy has been personalized. The Prime Ministers want to get their hands on every single thing in the Caribbean, so they have awesome powers. And because they have such awesome powers, it often dilutes the true picture of democracy.”

In the absence of term limits Prime Ministers often remain in office for a very long period of time, which enables them to establish and expand their power base.⁵³ The omnipotent position of the Prime Minister is legally fixed in the constitution, which explicitly confers powers to him or her individually, and not to the government or the party that controls a majority of parliamentary seats.⁵⁴

With the constitution bestowing such vast powers on the Prime Minister, the other ministers in the government are in a subordinate position to their head of government. The Prime Minister can virtually alone appoint and dismiss ministers,⁵⁵ which creates political dependency and inequality within the cabinet. As one former minister argues;

“In our electoral process, a number of people get elected to office who are not people of independent means. So that when they get elected or nominated to office, they are also dependent on the Prime Minister who already has so much constitutional power (...). And he has these people almost in a state of subservience to him.”

⁵² According to Peters, “[t]he constitutions of the independent Windward and Leeward islands (...) cover all the symbolic apparatus of a democracy, but concentrate power in the hands of one individual – the Prime Minister.” (1992: 89).

⁵³ In St. Kitts and Nevis, Prime Ministers Bradshaw (1952 – 1978), Simmonds (1980-1995), and Douglas (1995 until the present) all remained in office for at least fifteen years.

⁵⁴ According to some of my interviewees, the constitutionally supreme position of the Prime Minister in is no coincidence: “[w]e believe that it was by design. The British did not want to totally and absolutely give up these territories. They could not take on the hassle of politically and administratively running these islands, so they gave political independence. But this constitution would give you [the political leaders, WV] vast and unhindered powers, knowing that you will abuse the power.”

⁵⁵ According to article 52 of the Constitution, “[a]ppointments to the office of Minister, other than the office of Prime Minister, shall be made by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, from among the members of the National Assembly” (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 52).

Several of my respondents asserted that the Prime Minister occasionally interferes in the departments of his ministers, and that real executive power is only to be found in the Prime Minister's office, whereas the other government departments are largely empty vessels.⁵⁶ With regard to contestation, this presents an additional dimension to the personalized nature of Kittitian-Nevisian politics, as political parties appear to be primarily used as vehicles to develop and sustain the power base of individual politicians (cf. Peters 1992: 38-39, 90, 109-111).

The power and influence of the Prime Minister is also visible in his relation with the Governor-General. Although the constitution grants the Governor-General a large number of competences, the Prime Minister has a large influence on these because 1) he has a decisive say in the appointment of the Governor-General, and 2) many of the Governor-General's decisions constitutionally need to occur 'in accordance' with the Prime Minister. Almost all my respondents agreed that in practice, the Governor-General can be seen as an extension of the government of the day, and as someone who always acts in line with the Prime Minister's interests.⁵⁷ As one senior legal official emphasized;

"Each party is going to appoint a Governor-General who is going to do what it wants. And the Prime Minister can dismiss him; he has that power. (...) They are a rubber-stamp, they just rubber-stamp the bills."

In similar fashion as the Governor-General, almost all interviewees alluded to the parliament in terms of a rubber-stamp legislature. Due to the fact that every MP from the governing party is also a government minister, in parliament no group of critical backbench-parliamentarians exists. In terms of the effects of size on executive-legislative relations and the indicator that refers to the status of the legislature, it can therefore be noted that the smallness of the federation's parliament severely weakens its autonomy and authority in relation to the government. One journalist I interviewed illustrated how the absence of a backbench generates executive dominance:

"Because you don't have a big parliament, the government or executive is always in control of parliament. In small countries you don't have a backbench, so every elected member is a member of cabinet. And so there is not any buffer there, there is no call to account, because every elected member is looking after his own interests. So the government is really secured."

⁵⁶ In this regard, Peters points out that "the other members of the party executive perform a mere symbolic and clerical role" (1992: 108).

⁵⁷ The current Governor-General, who is an active member of the Labour Party, mentioned to me that in the sixteen years that he is in office now he has never refused to sign a law proposal.

Since ministers are highly unlikely to reject their own policy proposals or bring down their own government, and since the speaker of parliament is also perceived to be acting in the Prime Minister's interests, with one exception my respondents agreed that government controls and dominates parliament. As one of the academics I interviewed asserted:

"The truth is that the government controls parliament at the end of the day. The speaker, who is the person who is in charge of parliament, ultimately cannot be elected speaker without the support of the members of the government benches, and invariably is someone who the government has sort of hand-picked. And so the government has a disproportionate amount of influence; I have in my own experience never seen a bill brought by the government which has been defeated."

This obviously also has an impact on the role and functioning of the political opposition, as virtually all my respondents agreed that its role in the Kittitian-Nevisian system is marginal. One of the journalists pointed out that:

"The opposition can make noise and kick up whoever they want, but they have basically no input in terms of changing any laws or anything. They sit there and make noise and wait until hopefully their time comes."

And this view was shared by politicians affiliated with the opposition;

"In some countries the opposition might not be very powerful, but at least it has influence, it has a voice. When the government is as powerful as it is here (...) then whatever the opposition says can be totally ignored."

Since the current opposition consists of three parties that do not exactly maintain cordial relations, it is divided and therefore further weakened.⁵⁸ The powerless and docile position of parliament and especially the opposition in relation to government was confirmed to me by supporters of both the government and the opposition parties.

As one of the few institutions, most of my interviewees asserted that the judiciary of St. Kitts and Nevis is free from government influence, even though it is sometimes under formidable pressure. Since high court judges are foreigners who are appointed by the executive organs of the ECSC, both in terms of perception and with concern to their actual court rulings they have increased opportunities to be impartial and free from political interference.⁵⁹ Magistrate-court judges are appointed by the public service commission, which in turn is

⁵⁸ Whereas the Kittitian opposition party can at least hope to be able to form a government after the next elections, the Nevisian parties know that they can only be a junior coalition partner (and that there will therefore never be a Nevisian Prime Minister) and that their only chance to govern arises if no Kittitian party acquires a majority in parliament (Nisbett 2004: 11).

⁵⁹ However, according to one of my respondents the Prime Ministers of the OECS-member states have a strong say in the appointment of ECSC-judges, and will generally not appoint a judge against which one of the Prime Ministers has strong objections.

appointed by the Governor-General, who does so “in accordance with the Prime Minister” (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 77, 83). This can obviously lead to problems with regard to (the perception of) their neutrality, according to one of the journalists I interviewed:

“There are problems in terms of perception, because of course if one party nominates somebody to be a magistrate, then the perception is that because this party nominated this individual, that person favors this party.”

Regardless of these problems, and despite the pressures that the judiciary may experience on the part of politicians, most of my respondents argued that the judiciary is actually one of the very few politically impartial institutions in the country. This is confirmed by Freedom House, which asserts that “[t]he judiciary is largely independent” (Freedom House 2012). In light of the pervasiveness of government vis-à-vis other institutions that other scholars have observed in small states (cf. Sutton 2007a: 210), the hiring of foreign judges appears to contribute significantly to the autonomy and independence of the judiciary.

Since the ombudsman, the electoral commission, and civil servants are all either directly appointed by the Governor-General or appointed by the public service commission, all these appointments are in the end open to pressure and influence from the Prime Minister. In the politically polarized and charged society of St. Kitts and Nevis, this inevitably creates accusations of partiality. Furthermore, interviews revealed that a free and impartial media landscape also does not really exist in the federation. Whereas St. Kitts and Nevis acquires a Freedom of the Press-score of 20 on a 100-point scale in which 100 stands for ‘least free’ (Freedom House 2012), my interview data and other secondary sources point to a somewhat different conclusion. The only television station of the country, ZIZ National Broadcasting Corporation, is government-owned and is broadly believed to be exclusively articulating government views (cf. Griffin 1994: 240). According to members of the opposition;

“The government is the owner of the television station, ZIZ. And you find that nobody in the opposition can get any airtime on the station. ZIZ is basically a mouthpiece for the government and the governing party.”

The limited access of the opposition to ZIZ is confirmed by both Commonwealth election reports and Freedom House, which, referring to ZIZ, argues that “[t]here are some restrictions on opposition access to the medium” (Freedom House 2012). However, Freedom House also asserts that “foreign media are available”, which means that the condition of alternative sources of information is definitely at hand.

In addition to ZIZ, several private radio stations like Winn FM, Kiss FM, and Voice of Nevis (VON-) Radio are broadcasting in the federation, but these have to apply for a broadcasting license from the government, which can be withdrawn. Four newspapers constitute the written press of the federation, of which two operate on St. Kitts and two on Nevis, and each of these is associated with one of the four political parties.⁶⁰ Finally, several internet-based weblogs and newspapers are available, among which SKNVibes.com and SKNList.com. Whether correctly so or not, due to the polarized environment that results from the small size of the federation, all these media sources are routinely branded as being supportive of a certain party or certain politicians, and journalists complained that this puts pressures on their capacity to deliver the news objectively and impartially.

When discussing the effectiveness and neutrality of the media in the federation, the journalists that I interviewed referred to media financing as a major obstacle to objective reporting. Due to the population size and ensuing limited revenues from publishing a newspaper, newspapers are largely dependent on sponsors and other donors. As a consequence, newspapers will be very cautious not to publish stories that might offend their financiers, which mostly are private sector organizations (which in turn are often managed by people with extensive political connections). These restrictions can impede on journalistic freedom:

“We have an independent media, but this is such a small community that media houses are even reluctant to critique the financial records of major companies, because they don’t want to lose the corporate sponsorship for the radio programming. So media houses here operate with some degree of apprehension with regard to possible consequences from the government or from some bigger private sector organizations.”

Another problem with the media of St. Kitts and Nevis, which is also related to smallness, is that newspapers and radio stations lack journalistic professionalism and quality. This problem is amplified by the lack of resources, which means that newspapers cannot afford to hire competent journalists. Just like in San Marino, it primarily leads to frustration on the part of politicians;

“I find the media here very irresponsible if you ask me. (...) I think the media is not mature and not professional; that is my personal view. The media have to play a

⁶⁰ *The Labour Spokesman* is openly affiliated with the Labour Party, *the Democrat* is aligned to PAM, *the Leeward Times* is mostly seen as supportive of the NRP, and *the Saint Kitts and Nevis Observer* is usually seen as leaning towards the CCM. There are no figures on the reach of newspapers, but both respondents and my own observations indicate that almost all citizens read one or more newspapers.

better role in terms of information; I think the media is really biased (...) and could do a much better job.”

Since the government of St. Kitts and Nevis is thus able to dominate or overrule institutions that are supposed to function as a check on its power, a scholar that I interviewed pointed to a lack of transparency with regard to the actions of the executive:

“What is lacking in St. Kitts and Nevis is transparency and accountability. (...) There are no sunshine laws to keep the politicians’ fingers to the fire. And so what you find is that people are in the dark in terms of how government is really functioning.”

In terms of the effect of size on the balance between both elected and non-elected institutions in St. Kitts and Nevis, it can be concluded that the position of neutral, independent institutions that ought to function as a check on governmental power is undermined by the smallness of the country. Due to a lack of professionalism and resources that follow from size, especially the role of the media is undermined. Now that the characteristics of political competition and the balance between institutions for the case of St. Kitts and Nevis have been analyzed, the following sections will pay attention to the nature and degree of inclusiveness in the federation.

5.3. Inclusiveness: The Consequences of Closeness and Direct Contact

Like in San Marino, the relations between citizens and politicians of St. Kitts and Nevis are marked by proximity, direct contact, and multiple-role relationships. Politicians and citizens can and do communicate directly with each other, and they continuously meet each other in bars and restaurants, the supermarket, on the beach, or in a sports club. In addition, they know each other through multiple societal roles, since it is common for politicians to be active in various organizations in addition to their political office, and because the proximity increases the chances that there are politicians in people’s families, friend groups, or neighborhood. According to many people I discussed the matter with, this closeness between citizens and politicians is a positive characteristic of the country’s politics, because it is much easier for citizens to express their demands and concerns to their political representatives. As one journalist explains;

“It [closeness, WV] makes you feel that you could reach your representative. You know you could touch them; you could call them on the phone. In most cases we have their cell number. The home numbers are listed in the phone book, so we are able to call and reach them.”

As a consequence of direct contact and communication, politicians are deemed to be more aware of the political preferences of their constituents, which offers

them enhanced opportunities for political responsiveness. Politicians in St. Kitts and Nevis claimed to spend a great deal of time on relationships with their supporters, which means that they basically know every individual in their district;

“When I was campaigning and representing a constituency here, I went into just about every home in my district, many times over. And everybody knew me personally.”

Whereas the frequent contact between citizens and politicians may obviously benefit democratic representation and responsiveness, it also means that politicians have less time to actually govern and run the country. According to one of the politicians in the federation;

“The country is a small country, but it’s nonetheless a country which has to be run and has all the important issues of crime, health, education, and the economy, that bigger countries have. And so it can be difficult at times when so much time is consumed by having to continually interact on a one-on-one basis.”⁶¹

In addition to this drawback, to an even greater extent than in San Marino politics in St. Kitts and Nevis appears to be characterized by the prevalence of patron-client relationships. Although no data on voter attitudes are available, the primacy of personalistic competition over programmatic contestation seems to entail that Kittitian-Nevisian voters are generally not very interested in policies or the public good, but primarily support politicians because they can provide them with personal favors. Because of the small size, particularistic relations between citizens and politicians can become very intense, as one politician clarifies:

“People feel that as their representative you become their friend, you become in many respects a figure that they can turn to if they have difficulties, and it’s not always money. Oftentimes if they are having a problem of some kind, you become the priest, you become the doctor, you become the lawyer, you become the brother, you become the confidant, you become someone in the community that people look to. And that obviously can be difficult, because it creates immense pressure.”

Since, as Donald Peters accurately summarizes (1992: 9), the goal of a party in office is to 1) reward its own supporters and 2) demolish and victimize the opposition, clientelism in St. Kitts and Nevis essentially entails boosting one’s own political tribe at the expense of the other(s). Since respondents assert that voters expect their party leaders to provide them with benefits, and would most likely cease voting for them if they stopped doing this, politicians can only

⁶¹ In this respect Peters says that, “[p]olitical leaders normally spend such a disproportionate amount of their time campaigning and improving their image that they neglect major national issues (Peters 1992: 184).

survive politically if they abide by these expectations. Even though the citizens I talked to were extraordinarily cynical about the intentions of their political leaders, and incessantly accused them of corruption, self-enrichment, and other forms of misbehavior,⁶² conversations with ordinary voters reveal that their own political demands are also basically individualistic, as they demand and expect politicians to circumvent the law and the institutions in their favor.

In St. Kitts and Nevis and the Eastern Caribbean in general, clientelism is also broadly seen as a redistributive mechanism of social welfare (Duncan and Woods 2007: 211). This means that many citizens are economically and financially dependent on government, and that a change in office can also bring about dramatic personal consequences. In terms of inclusiveness, one former politician emphasizes that this dependence on government also impedes on the ability of people to freely and consciously express themselves;⁶³

“What is different between St. Kitts and a number of other countries is that government controls the majority of the resources. (...) So people tend to toe the line when it comes to criticism of government; very few people can criticize and be able to withstand the backlash of being too critical of government.”

This dependency on government can also explain why people, despite all the criticism of their politicians, continue to vote for the same parties and their leaders. Due to the fact that parties in power primarily transfer resources to their own supporters and constituents, and due to the fact that governments are mostly formed by one of the Kittitian parties, the Nevisian perception that federal governments tend to disregard their island financially is further strengthened by particularism.

In addition to clientelism, a wide majority of my interviewees asserted that political patronage in the public sector of the federation is rampant. According to an interest-group representative, this has major negative consequences for the functioning of the civil service:

“The civil service has really become an extension of whichever party is there. It is routine that people are transferred and humiliated; it is customary that the government would take people who are supporters and fit them into positions for which they don’t qualify. (...) It’s all patronage, it’s all an attempt to farm out and say “well, you supported me so here is a job”, which means a few thousand dollars every month, even though you don’t have anything to do.”

⁶² People in the federation commonly refer to this as ‘politricks’ – hence the title of this chapter.

⁶³ One of the academics I interviewed claimed that this dependence on government was also harmful for democracy in the country; “[t]his sense of entanglement in government (...) muzzles people’s willingness to express themselves. In other words: it impinges on the freedom of speech, and as you and I very well know, once you impinge on the freedom of speech, you actually impinge on one of the principles of democracy”.

Government is by far the largest employer in St. Kitts and Nevis, and jobs in the civil service are commonly distributed to reward supporters.⁶⁴ After elections bring a new party to power, the civil service is usually completely turned over, which means that the institutional memory and experience is drained (cf. Baker 1992: 14, 18; Sutton 2007b: 220). Furthermore, as a consequence of patronage the civil service cannot function impartially, and also does not aspire to do so. As one private sector-spokesperson declared;

“Many of the activists of both parties are well-known civil servants, and it is a badge of honor in their view. It is a badge of honor for them to be known to be supporting this party because of course the party will reward them.”

In addition to diminishing the quality, efficiency, and neutrality of the public administration, patronage also leads to an oversized and therefore highly costly public sector. Since both clientelism and patronage are primarily financed with state resources, St. Kitts and Nevis has an immense national debt of three billion US dollars, which equals to 198% of its gross domestic product.⁶⁵ Seeing that the country is largely dependent on foreign investments, external actors are indirectly financing domestic particularism in the federation.

The size and influence of the public sector of St. Kitts and Nevis has a number of consequences for the country's private sector. As in San Marino, the separation between the sectors is often somewhat fuzzy, since part-time public officials often are concurrently active in a company or business, as a result of which conflicts of interest can and do arise.⁶⁶ In addition, the independence of the private sector is compromised by the fact that patronage and clientelism also play their part here. Because of the authority and control of government, the success of Kittitian and Nevisian businesses largely depends on their relationship with the politicians and party in power. As one representative from the private sector emphasizes;

“A number of businesses, they get concessions from government, from various taxes. For example for investment, when they try to invest in a property, government may give them a special incentive (...), duty-free concessions. So even the private sector has to sort of have a harmonious relationship with government, for them to also benefit.”

⁶⁴ According to World Bank statistics, 41.6 percent of the labour force in the federation works in the public sector (Carrizosa 2007: 4). However, according to Sir Probyn Inniss, in the beginning of the 1980s at least ninety percent of jobs in the country are either directly or indirectly controlled by government (1983: 80).

⁶⁵ After Japan, St. Kitts and Nevis has the highest public debt as percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world (CIA World Factbook 2011).

⁶⁶ Most of the MPs in the National Assembly have secondary professions, and among the MPs are attorneys, physicians, businessmen, and bankers (source: www.gov.kn).

Whereas clientelism and patronage are common features of politics in larger Caribbean states as well, the smallness of St. Kitts and Nevis unquestionably increases the likelihood of particularistic relations, and also provides these with specific dynamics. In the small-scale Kittitian-Nevisian society where everyone knows each other and each other's political affiliations, particularistic relations are established on a one-on-one basis, and augment the personalistic nature of politics (Griffin 1994: 233). Furthermore, Griffin points out that particularism and personalism in St. Kitts and Nevis lead to the undermining of formal structures.⁶⁷ Since elected officials are able to assemble detailed information on all their constituents, their control on the fulfillment of obligations that follow from the clientelistic bonds is enhanced. Correspondingly, because of the availability of direct contact, voters have increased opportunities to pressure their representatives to present them with favors of all kind. On both sides of the particularistic linkage, the smallness of St. Kitts and Nevis therefore creates a greater inducement to establish patron-client relationships.

5.4. Inclusiveness: Participation of Citizens

Whereas the academic literature lists increased political participation of citizens as one of the major advantages of smallness, in St. Kitts and Nevis and the Eastern Caribbean island states in general, political participation is essentially limited to expressing a vote once in four or five years. According to Peters "[d]emocracy means to the Eastern Caribbean people the freedom to elect their leaders, but immediately after the elections their political participation ceases. They withdraw from the political process completely and assume their status as subjects of the leaders" (Peters 1992: 133). In terms of inclusiveness, the opportunities for citizens to participate in Kittitian-Nevisian politics appear to be rather restricted, but my own observations demonstrate that both politicians and citizens seem to be satisfied with this situation. Since there are no data on indicators like party membership or participation in demonstrations and rallies in the federation, this conclusion is primarily derived from my interviews and the secondary literature.

Apart from ubiquitous face-to-face contacts between citizens and politicians, political participation in St. Kitts and Nevis seems largely confined to the electoral process. When it comes to election campaigns, the involvement of

⁶⁷ Griffin argues that "[t]he intrinsic relationship between structure and function that is clearly discernible in larger, more developed, majoritarian systems, however, is not as clear-cut in small, developing countries. While the political structures do exist, personality often preponderates over structure, and, consequently, function devolves more from personal loyalty and patronage than from the roles that the structures should perform" (Griffin 1994: 232).

citizens is overwhelming; all parties organize mass rallies in which their leaders hold strident and vociferous speeches, and famous Caribbean musicians are invited to energize the crowds.⁶⁸ Virtually the entire electorate seems to eagerly participate in the carnival-like election campaigns. Whereas citizens are keen to display their partisan affiliation and political preferences during campaigns, their willingness and capacity to actually have an influence on politics appears very much restricted. Since election manifestos are shallow and voting behavior is essentially personalistic, by casting their ballot voters also do not really have the opportunity to voice their substantial political attitudes. In the absence of ideological representation, most respondents I interviewed explained that citizens typically vote for a person they know personally, or for the candidate who they expect to provide them with the most personal benefits.

Elections in St. Kitts and Nevis are held under the rules of the first-past-the-post plurality system, with the country being carved up in eleven single-member constituencies. Since the entire electorate consists of around 35,000 people, this means that there are on average around 3,000 voters per constituency, although this number varies strongly between districts. Since turnout however generally reaches between sixty and eighty percent, in each district between 2,000 and 3,500 votes are normally expressed. Because the electoral commission also publishes the expressed votes per polling station, and each district consists of between six and thirteen polling stations, politicians can to a large extent estimate who voted for them and who did not, and therefore also which voters or families kept their promise and fulfilled their clientelistic obligations. The size of electoral districts therefore enables politicians to directly sense the benefits of patron-client links, and stimulates them to create such relations.

Since most politicians try to visit all voters in their electoral district in advance to the election, they can with a great degree of accuracy estimate and calculate the size of their support, and hence how many votes they need to win their district. This leads to a number of electoral 'tricks' that parties use to increase their chances, such as the registration of voters in districts where they should not legally be voting, as one of the academics I talked to pointed out;

"There is what we call "constituency-shopping". So for example in the Prime Minister's constituency he wins with enormous margins. When a voter turns eighteen, they don't let him register there where he is supposed to be, but they took him to an area where the margins are smaller."

⁶⁸ In the 2010-elections, the Labour Party for example succeeded in attracting Haitian superstar Wyclef Jean to participate in its election rallies.

As can be seen in table 6.3, in the most recent election the support of the Labour Party in three districts (Basseterre West, Newton Ground - Harris, and Belle Vue - Ottley's) was so overwhelming that the party could indeed encourage its supporters here to vote in a different district. On Nevis, this was in one district the case for the CCM.

Table 6.3: Vote Differences between Parties on the District Level in 2010 Elections

District St. Kitts	Labour Party	PAM	Difference
# 1 (Basseterre East)	1.777	1.536	241 (7.2 %)
# 2 (Basseterre Central)	1.907	1.476	431 (12.7%)
# 3 (Basseterre West)	1.306	545	761 (41.2%)
# 4 (Challengers – Half Way Tree)	1.185	1.156	29 (1.2%)
# 5 (St. Anne Parish)	985	1.128	143 (6.8%)
# 6 (Newton Ground - Harris)	1.905	179	1.728 (82.8%)
# 7 (Belle Vue - Ottley's)	1.635	570	1.065 (48.1%)
# 8 (Ottley's - St. Peter's)	1.527	1.803	276 (8.2%)
Total St. Kitts	12.686	8.607	4.079 (19.2%)

District Nevis	NRP	CCM	Difference
# 9 (St. John's and St. Paul's)	1.335	1.481	146 (5.2%)
# 10 (St. George's)	225	665	440 (49.4%)
# 11 (St. Thomas's and St. James's)	979	714	265 (15.6%)
Total Nevis	2.805	3.128	323 (5.4%)

In addition to constituency-shopping, just like in San Marino political parties try to use the votes of expatriate citizens to win elections, and several scandals about the importation of emigrant voters from the UK and the US have surfaced. Since over 30.000 Kittitians and Nevisians live abroad, the potential electoral influence of this group of voters is highly significant, and as one academic argued;

“One year ago on Election Day, the Labour Party brought in roughly five thousand people to vote by plane. The party paid the plane, they got a free ticket. And they were housed at hotels and left the next day. They were from England, North America, and the Virgin Islands, you name it. Some of them came in the morning, voted, and left the same day.”⁶⁹

Although it is hard to say to what extent these practices occur and have an influence, many ordinary Kittitian and Nevisian citizens at least believe that they do, which already challenges the legitimacy of the election results. Since

⁶⁹ Since the Labour Party is now in office, it may appear that this party to a larger extent engages in particularism and the domination of other institutions than the PAM, but most of my respondents asserted that this latter party would not hesitate to do the same if it were to win the next elections.

expatriate voters are however not separately registered, in contrast to San Marino the size and influence of emigrant votes in the federation cannot be estimated. In the 2004 Commonwealth election report, a number of irregularities at elections are repeatedly noticed, among which the fact that 1) a number of eligible voters are not on the electoral roll, 2) a number of overseas voters return to the federation to vote, 3) more than one person votes under the same name, and 4) a number persons vote in districts where they are legally not allowed to vote (Commonwealth Expert Team 2004).⁷⁰ The report on the most recent elections however notes improvements in this respect, even though it continues to emphasize the differences in media access between the ruling party and the opposition (Commonwealth Expert Team 2010). Despite these shortcomings, the reports conclude that elections are generally fair, and reflect the will of the people.

Table 6.4: Voter Turnout in Kittitian-Nevisian Federal Elections⁷¹

Election Year	Voter Turnout
1952	95.7 %
1957	n.a.
1961	68.8%
1966	73.4%
1971	87.9%
1975	72.1%
1980	74.5%
1984	77.7%
1989	66.8%
1993	66.4%
1995	68.4%
2000	64.2%
2004	59.0%
2010	83.5%
Average	73.7%

In terms of the participation rates, voter turnout in St. Kitts and Nevis varies strongly (between sixty and ninety percent), but the average of 73.7 percent is in line with Eastern Caribbean standards and is relatively high among the developing-world (International IDEA 2011). In table 6.4, the turnout rates of elections since the introduction of universal suffrage have been presented. It can be seen that there is not really a detectable pattern in turnout figures, and that

⁷⁰ Although the Commonwealth election team treats these irregularities as (minor) incidents, it must be emphasized that due to the smallness of electoral districts, a very small number of votes can alter the election result.

⁷¹ Data retrieved from the turnout database of International IDEA (International IDEA 2011).

turnout in the most recent elections has been markedly higher than in the five preceding ones. This is probably the result of new and stricter registration rules, as a consequence of which the number of registered voters has decreased by more than fifteen percent in relation to the 2004-elections.⁷² In table 6.5, turnout levels and averages of the independent OECS-countries have been presented, and it can be seen that turnout figures in St. Kitts and Nevis are comparable to the rest of the region.

Table 6.5: Voter Turnout in the OECS-Countries: the Five Most Recent Elections⁷³

	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Antigua and Barbuda	60.7%	62.3%	63.6%	91.2%	80.3%	71.6%
Dominica	66.6%	65.2%	60.1%	59.1%	54.9%	61.2%
Grenada	68.4%	61.8%	56.7%	57.4%	80.3%	64.9%
St. Kitts and Nevis	66.4%	68.4%	64.2%	59.0%	83.5%	68.3%
St. Lucia	60.7%	62.8%	66.1%	53.7%	58.5%	60.4%
St. Vincent - Grenadines	65.6%	67.4%	69.2%	63.7%	62.3%	65.6%

With regard to the fairness of elections, both the election reports and my interviews point to concerns about the appointment and composition of the electoral commission. According to the constitution, this commission is appointed by the Governor-General and consists of three members, of whom two however can be expected to side with the governing party.⁷⁴ Therefore;

“We have always had a contention that it is the persons or the political party who controls the electoral office, will control who will win elections.”

In addition to the electoral office there is a Supervisor of elections, who is appointed by the Governor-General and commonly is a high-ranking public official; since 2004 it is a pastor who has become rather controversial, and the opposition parties have recurrently demanded his resignation. The two most recent Commonwealth election reports have pointed to changes in the appointment of the Supervisor and the electoral commission as primary

⁷² In 2004, 22.922 out of 38.865 registered voters cast a ballot, whereas in 2010, 27.364 out of 32.766 registered voters did so (International IDEA 2011). Among the names that were removed from the list of registered voters were probably a lot of deceased people or people who had been registered twice.

⁷³ Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) website (2011).

⁷⁴ The constitution stipulates that the electoral commission “shall exist of: a) a chairperson appointed by the Governor-General, acting in his own deliberate judgment, b) one member appointed by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, and c) one member appointed by the Governor-General, acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition.” Since “any decision of the commission shall require the concurrence of a majority of all its members”, no unanimity is required and the opposition-aligned member can therefore be ignored by the other two members (Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis 1983: Art. 33).

recommendations to improve the conduct of elections. As a consequence of the fact that the incumbent party controls state resources and can influence a number of these institutions (and also to a large extent controls the news media), incumbency is a major and perhaps excessive political advantage at the polls (Peters 1992: 112). When it comes to estimating the influence of size on political participation and elections in St. Kitts and Nevis, it can be concluded that the absence of programmatic contestation leads to voting on the basis of individualistic and personalistic concerns, and that the smallness of electoral districts leads to a number of specific particularism-related electoral dynamics and problems.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In terms of the nature and quality of contestation and inclusiveness in St. Kitts and Nevis, this chapter has revealed a disparity between formal institutional structures and informal political practices. In this sense, the chapter confirms the observation of Hinds, Peters, and other scholars who have noted that Caribbean politics is a mixture between democratic institutions and a more top-down and sometimes authoritarian political reality. Whereas institutionally-oriented scholars and organizations like Freedom House continue to classify St. Kitts and Nevis as a full-fledged democracy because all the necessary conditions for political contestation and inclusiveness are present, the political reality of the federation offers an entirely different impression.

As a general conclusion, in line with the academic literature it can be remarked that the Westminster system seems unsuitable to the polarized, personalized, and particularistic socio-political environment of the federation, as it appears to exacerbate its centrifugal tendencies. Due to the absence of cleavages and the prevalence of personality-driven politics that results from size, in St. Kitts and Nevis the likelihood of personalistic conflicts and interpersonal polarization is higher than in larger states. Furthermore, as this chapter also underlines, due to smallness microstate-governments control the majority of their countries' available resources, which goes at the cost of the autonomy and impartiality of other societal and political institutions. If the winner-takes-all elements of the Westminster system are applied to such a political environment, the functioning of these institutions and the political opposition are further undermined, and the negative consequences of smallness are further enhanced (Ryan 1999; Hinds 2008).

In table 6.6, a summarized overview of the scoring of St. Kitts and Nevis on the indicators of contestation and inclusiveness has been offered. On the basis

of these scores, a number of general conclusions about the effects of size on contestation and inclusiveness can be drawn. First of all, political contestation in this microstate revolves primarily around personalities, and parties are primarily used as vehicles to support individual politicians. Secondly, despite the absence of ideologies and programmatic contestation the Kittitian-Nevisian society is heavily polarized, both between and within the two islands of the federation. Thirdly, in relation to other institutions, the government and especially the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis occupy a supremely powerful position. With regard to inclusiveness, the closeness and direct contact between citizens create various forms of particularism and dependency on government, as a result of which political participation occurs due to individualistic rather than public or programmatic considerations.

These findings are in line with some of the major publications on the relation between size and democracy, whereas they contradict others. In particular, the notions that increased homogeneity leads to a culture of consensus (Anckar 1999; Congdon Fors 2007: 3-4) and the idea that citizens of small polities are more aware, interested, and willing to participate in politics (Ott 2000: 202-203; Anckar 2002b: 386-387; Srebrnik 2004: 331-332) cannot be confirmed. By contrast, studies that have emphasized the preponderance of personalistic over ideological contestation (Dahl and Tufte 1973: 92-93; Sutton 2007a: 203-204), the omnipotence of government (Sutton 1987: 12-14; Gerring and Zarecki 2011: 9), and the prevalence of particularistic relations (Srebrnik 2004: 334) in microstates are confirmed by the current analysis. With regard to the hypothesized advantages of smallness in part of the academic literature, Peters accurately notes that there is “potential for positive results”, which however essentially does not materialize in practice (1992: 185).

Although there are a number of obvious differences, the similarities between the political systems of San Marino and St. Kitts and Nevis are quite striking. In light of their entirely different political histories and contemporary political institutions, these similarities can largely be explained by the diminutive size of the countries. In both microstates, partisan competition obscures personality-driven politics, and in both countries non-elected political and societal institutions are only to a limited extent able to function as a check on governmental power. In similar fashion, in both cases closeness and direct contact between citizens and politicians lead to particularistic forms of representation, which in both countries is fostered by the smallness of the electorate and other electoral dynamics. The most remarkable similarity

between San Marino and St. Kitts and Nevis, however, is the discrepancy between formal institutional structures and the every-day political reality.

Table 6.6: St. Kitts-Nevis' Scores on the Indicators of Contestation and Inclusiveness

Dimension	Section	Indicator	Classification of St. Kitts and Nevis
Contestation	Presence of Political Alternatives and a Political Opposition	Free and Fair Elections	Present, with minor limitations
		Party System	Two-party system on each island (ENP around 2.0)
		(Frequency of) Alternation in Office	Sporadically
		Interest Articulation by Parties	Barely; parties primarily denounce the opposition
		Freedom to Support the Opposition	Has major negative consequences; victimization
	Horizontal Balance of Power between Institutions	Freedom of the Press	Press free (FotP-score 20), but weak, polarized, and unprofessional
		Status of the Legislature	Largely ineffective, not autonomous from government
		Status of the Judiciary	Impartial but sometimes pressured; mostly ECSC-judges
		Status of the Bureaucracy	Oversized, ineffective, and influence by government due to patronage
	Inclusiveness	Relations between Citizens and Politicians	Contact with and Access to Representatives
Nature of Citizen-Politician Contacts			Particularistic and personalistic
Political Awareness and Feelings of Efficacy of Citizens			No data, but appears to be high
Political Participation of Citizens		Universal Suffrage	Present
		Turnout at Elections and other Plebiscites	Mixed (between 60 and 80%)
		Party Membership	No data available
		Participation in Political Activities	No data, but appears to be high