

2003

The Omar Torrijos regime: Implications for the democratization process in Panama

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The Omar Torrijos Regime:
Implications for the Democratization Process in Panama

by

Emma Scribner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Government and International Affairs
College of Arts and Sciences
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Date of Approval:
November 20, 2003

Keywords: democracy, latin america, populism, military, social movement

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere and heartfelt appreciation to the members of the thesis committee: Dr. Harry Vanden, Dr. Festus Ohaegbulam, and Dr. Kofi Glover. Dr. Vanden encouraged me to write about Panama and his courses contributed to my enthusiasm for Latin American studies. Dr. Ohaegbulam reviewed the paper in its initial draft and was kind enough to offer suggestions. Throughout my time at USF, I had the privilege of working with several other professors at USF who provided an excellent model for scholarship: Dr. Steven Tauber, Dr. Dajin Peng, and Dr. Abdelwahab Hechiche. Dolores Bryant and Doris Kearney in the Government and International Affairs office offered great moral support and encouragement.

In addition, I am indebted to several authorities in Panama for their contributions. Dr. Miguel Antonio Bernal, who guided me in selecting resources for the paper, Francisco Porras at the Fundación Omar Torrijos who assisted me during my research at that facility, and Professor Guillermo Castro, who was extremely generous with his time and expertise, which proved invaluable, as did the books and articles he provided. I would also like to thank my family for their encouragement and support.

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ABSTRACT

Since gaining independence from Colombia in 1903, Panama has witnessed both elitist democratic governments and authoritarian populist governments. The oligarchic system in place throughout much of Panama's history was a significant hindrance to real democracy taking hold within the country. Democracy was further set back by the inordinate power exerted by the US presence on the isthmus throughout the twentieth century. Omar Torrijos's time as head of the Panamanian government from 1969 to 1981 exhibited populist, paternalistic and personalistic characteristics. His government marked an attempt to establish a form of government based on popular democracy. While a number of social programs were implemented and the social welfare of a greater percentage of the population was generally improved during the years Torrijos was in power, his military regime did not ultimately institutionalize a model for democratic participation.

This study argues that some form of popular democracy should replace the status quo in Panama. This would allow for genuine representation of a greater number of the population and in turn broaden the base of decision-making, something that has not been fully accomplished under previous authoritarian or democratic forms of government. The

Torrijos regime was the first and only government in Panama to have attempted this move toward popular democracy. As such it is seen as a useful case study in examining its contributions to the political landscape and the political culture that makes up contemporary Panama. Deductions are made from it for the political future of the country in terms of the democratization process.

INTRODUCTION

Research Question and Hypothesis

This study examines the regime of Omar Torrijos in the Republic of Panama and the movement that grew up around him - Torrijismo. While the Torrijos era introduced a number of social reforms in an attempt to improve the lives of a greater percentage of the Panamanian population, it also exhibited a number of authoritarian, or nondemocratic, qualities. As part of a military junta that overthrew the government in October of 1968, Omar Torrijos emerged as head of state by early 1969 and remained in that position until his death in 1981. Initially, the rationale for this study was a desire to examine the true character of the Torrijos regime in an attempt to understand its significance. By some accounts, Torrijos led a reformist government that espoused, at least in principle, a participatory model for Panamanian politics. Other accounts see this era in terms of an opportunistic, corrupt and often violent regime that regularly violated civil liberties and human rights. These conflicting accounts were the impetus for this study, which seeks to examine the particularities of the Torrijos regime and their significance in the ongoing democratization process in the country.

The expectation at the outset is not only to obtain a deeper understanding of this particular period in Panamanian history, but also to ultimately allow for some generalizations concerning the concept of democracy, specifically the democratization process in Latin America. A long history of vast disparities of wealth and power in the region is one of the major obstacles to the establishment of fully realized democracies in many countries. Populist and authoritarian regimes in the region set the precedent early

on for forms of government, as did dominance by the military. Each of these elements existed during the Torrijos regime, and as such, the implications are that an examination of this era in Panama's history can be viewed as a microcosm of the region and is helpful in understanding some of the power relationships that are still in evidence.

As a popular figure who was often looked upon as a modern-day caudillo, Omar Torrijos was a charismatic and convincing leader to many. His policies were often aimed at attaining input from members of the Panamanian population that had been largely ignored up to that point in history. Also contributing to his popularity was the fact that his regime saw the issue of Panamanian sovereignty over the Panama Canal and its surrounding area resolved with the signing of the Torrijos-Carter treaties in 1977. By contrast, detractors of Torrijos reason that his regime was simply a military dictatorship with all the negative connotations that are usually associated with such regimes. Acts carried out during his time as head of the Panamanian government included, at least initially, dissolving the national legislature, outlawing political parties, controlling the mass media, and rewriting the country's Constitution. These examples represent somewhat typical actions taken by authoritarian regimes in recent history and as a result run counter to the ideals held up by proponents of democracy.

As stated before, the motivation for this study comes from the questions that arise when considering such conflicting accounts of the same era in Panamanian politics. Which version is most accurate? It is probably true that elements of each existed in reality. If this is the case, what conclusions, if any, can be drawn from this particular period in history? For a variety of reasons, the significance of Omar Torrijos in terms of

Panamanian history and politics is considerable even to this day and as such the subject is deemed relevant and worthy of analysis.

This case study is an attempt to add to a greater understanding of Panamanian politics today as well as to arrive at generalizations that may apply to Latin America as a whole. The conflicting trend within the region, particularly since the period of military rule during the 1970s and 1980s, has been the oscillation between authoritarian types of government and fledgling democracies. In the case of the Omar Torrijos regime, both of these tendencies existed simultaneously, and so the case is made for an in depth study.

Despite its social reformist and inclusionary policies, it could be argued that the Torrijos regime may have ultimately proved a hindrance to the development of democracy in Panama, at least in the short run. The ostensible reason for this is that Omar Torrijos was the central figure in the government, the National Guard, the Torrijismo movement, and the Partido Revolucionario Democrático. In addition, he proved to be a unifying force for the country in his successful quest to gain control of the Panama Canal and the Canal Zone. When Torrijos died unexpectedly, there was no effective system in place to carry out his social and political agenda, as witnessed by subsequent events in Panama. On the surface, this would seem to point to the fact that despite having established a participatory model for governing, the regime was heavily dependent on Torrijos's personality and was largely under his personal directorship. Conversely, arguments in defense of the Torrijos regime point to its populist and progressive principles as well its nationalistic bent. Such aspects are seen as a vast improvement on previous elected governments in terms of social justice. It will be the

analysis of these conflicting arguments that will inform the research of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Aside from relying on historical and bibliographical information relating to the regime and the figure of Omar Torrijos, this study is rooted in several theories derived from literature on democratization, populism, authoritarianism, and social movements. The analysis will primarily utilize democratic theory, and more specifically, theories relating to the democratization process in Latin America. There are varying interpretations of the concept of democracy throughout recent literature. Much of the debate focuses on the establishment of necessary components that make up a democratic state, while there are also conflicting conceptions as to types of democracy, or the aspects that are stressed as being most important to the system. The dilemma inherent in democratic theory, namely that of different interpretations of its precise meaning, particularly as it relates to democratization studies in Latin America, will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

A basic conception of democracy usually includes the establishment of universal adult suffrage in fair and frequent elections. This is seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of a democratic system. Formal, or procedural, conceptions of democracy stress elections and other such procedural indicators when labeling a country a democracy. Further reflection and analysis shows this criteria alone often proves insufficient when measuring some of the “democratic” systems in existence in the developing world, and Latin America in particular. Representative conceptions of democracy are typified primarily by Western democracies, including the United States.

The establishment of functioning governmental institutions, checks and balances between the different branches of government, and guarantees to personal freedoms are just several of the components that constitute representative democratic states in existence today. A final conception, referred to as popular democracy, conceives of a system whereby a majority of the population has access to the political process and some form of equality of opportunity, both economic and political, is achieved.

As democracy seems to have become the uncontested, and seemingly preferred, system of government in most parts of the world today, it is a model toward which many developing nations have gravitated in recent history. Whether this system will prove to be viable or successful and in what form is debatable. However, for the purposes of this study the concepts of both representative and participatory forms of democratic government will be used as models against which the Torrijos regime is evaluated.

Other theoretical constructs being employed are theories on populism and authoritarianism, as well as theories on social movements. Theories on populism are seen as relevant for this study inasmuch as Omar Torrijos is described as a populist leader throughout the literature. The views expressed in theories on populism lend much to the explanation as to why and how a charismatic leader is able to wield power for long periods of time. Populism, in the Latin American context, refers to a leader who is able to mobilize a significant amount of widespread support based on appeals to the majority of the population. Some of the platforms used to gain such support have typically included a pro-labor stance, nationalistic rhetoric, and more generally the promise of change and improvement to the lives of the masses in a given nation.

In addition to populism, which tends to be used primarily to refer to elected leaders, the concept of authoritarianism is also used in the theoretical framework of this study. Authoritarianism is looked upon as the antithesis to democracy. Rather than having authority rest with the people, as is the underlying theoretical principle in a democratic system, under authoritarian regimes, political, and usually economic, power rests in the hands of an individual, a group, or a political party in power by fiat. The reference to authoritarianism in the case of Omar Torrijos is based on the fact that he was never popularly elected but maintained direct control of the government as the head of Panama's National Guard. This military force essentially constituted an unofficial fourth branch of government, which remained the most powerful branch from the time of the coup in 1968 up until the forced removal of Torrijos's successor, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, by the United States military in late 1989.

Finally, theories on the concept of social movements will be examined by applying them to the movement known as Torrijismo. Social or political movements involve groups of citizens mobilizing to affect change in a given political system. Using literature on the subject of social movements, their criteria and their characteristics, the task is to determine how Torrijismo compares with social movements in general. Employing each of these theories throughout the research should highlight the complexity of the subject as well as address styles of government and political participation that are in evidence throughout Latin America today, in addition to providing a greater understanding of the material and determining the validity of the research. The interplay between seemingly participatory elements and authoritarian

measures existing simultaneously leads to a discussion of not only relevant democratic theory and social movement studies but also includes the notions of authoritarianism and populism. As elements of each of these theoretical concepts appear to have coexisted, it is important to employ them when analyzing the regime.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to assess whether or not the regime of Omar Torrijos achieved any aspects of what could be termed democracy, either in the formal-legal sense or in the participatory sense of the term. Because there are competing definitions of democracy and because the term has so many connotations, a set of criteria that are to be met when labeling a nation as democratic must be established. A recognized index for measuring democratic freedoms, the Freedom House survey, will be employed for the task of examining criteria established as essential for a representative or formal democracy. In addition, participatory models of government will be defined and examined in an effort to understand the Torrijos regime. Primary sources and existing literature on the subject of Omar Torrijos will be used to examine aspects of the regime that point toward the extremes of democracy and authoritarianism.

The primary sources to be used in the analysis include government documents relating to the Torrijos regime, including acknowledged attempts at political and economic reform. In addition, this study will examine the works written about Omar Torrijos, analyses of his regime, and the historical events that shaped the era written from both the Panamanian and American perspectives. The contradictory nature of viewpoints that exists within the literature is of primary interest and the attempt is made to reconcile

the competing conceptions of the regime and its impact on Panamanian politics.

While it may seem unnecessary or redundant to take on a study as to whether or not a military regime that gained power through a coup d'etat would or even should be labeled as democratic, the justification is as follows. Most would agree that a necessary condition of democracy within a given nation is the holding of free and fair elections. Though there is no assertion here that this notion should be challenged, the need to look deeper into the workings of a political system, particularly the way in which a government and the populace interact with one another is also deemed critical. The concept of democracy is complex enough to warrant this type of consideration. Take into account the comparison between a nominally democratic nation where the institutions are established such that a small minority or elite group have the primary voice and a system in which a greater percentage of the population feels enfranchised albeit through means other than electing the head of the national government. The idea of participatory democracy is reflected in part by the latter scenario.

Conceptions of democracy that emphasize the element of participation represent a significant segment of the literature on democratization in Latin America. One key point being made is that participatory forms of democracy are probably closer to the original meaning of the concept, that of rule by the people. The conclusion has not been reached that this element of participation was the case in Panama while Omar Torrijos was in power. However, the point being made is simply that further examination is warranted and that the question is worthy of study within the field of comparative politics.

Organization of Subsequent Chapters

The next chapter will serve as a literature review to include works written on Omar Torrijos and his years in power as well as those works written more generally on Panamanian politics and history that also contribute to a richer understanding of the subject. As already discussed, the other literature to be examined will deal with the theoretical concepts employed within this work, namely research dealing with aspects of democracy and democratization, populism, authoritarianism and social movements, primarily within the context of Latin America. Competing views within the literature will be examined with the intent to tie in how each of the respective fields is relevant to Torrijos and Torrijismo and how that contributes to this study.

Chapter three provides a timeline of events and is an attempt at a historical overview of Panama. Necessary to understanding the Torrijos years is an explanation of the circumstances surrounding Panama's colonization, independence, the importance of the Panama Canal, as well as the relationship between Panama and the United States. Along with the background historical information, the central events of the Torrijos era to be covered include those surrounding the initial coup in 1968 and the circumstances that would allow for Omar Torrijos's ultimate emergence as head of the National Guard and the Panamanian government. In addition, there is a short summary of the political events that took place after Torrijos's death, namely the Noriega regime and the US military invasion followed by a shift back to procedural democracy.

Chapters four and five will juxtapose the seemingly conflicting aspects of the Torrijos government. Chapter four will present the inclusionary, reformist measures that

were undertaken during the years 1968 through 1981 while chapter five will focus on some of the more nondemocratic, or authoritarian, aspects of the regime.

Chapter six provides the analysis of the regime in terms of its democratic qualities. Using the established criteria for determining various essential qualities included in both procedural and participatory models of democracy, events that took place during the Torrijos years and that have been covered in the preceding chapters will be measured against these criteria. The final chapter will offer a summary and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Panama, Omar Torrijos and Torrijismo

Along with those stated in the introduction, another reason for choosing to focus a study on Panama was what seemed a dearth of literature on Panamanian politics in general, particularly in anthologies written on the subject of democratization in Latin America. There may be several reasons as to why this is the case. First of all, the relatively small size of the country both in terms of area and population may negate its use as a case study in favor of larger countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, or Venezuela. However, even when the focus of a study shifts to a smaller scope, for example the area of Central America, Panama is not discussed as often as some of the other nations in the region. Perhaps this is because it has had a somewhat less dramatic recent history than many of its neighboring countries that witnessed long civil wars or particularly brutal dictatorships. One final reason for the lack of focus on Panamanian politics and history may be the fact that it is atypical in terms of its unique relationship with the United States, both politically and economically. The relative lack of studies dealing with the democratization process in Panama became evident during the initial research and prompted the decision to add to the literature on the subject by choosing to focus on Panama exclusively and the Omar Torrijos regime in particular.

Despite the fact that it often goes unmentioned in area studies, there are a number of works written from a US perspective that focus specifically on Panama. These include accounts of the country's history, particularly the construction and operation of the Panama Canal, along with other studies covering politics in Panama throughout the

twentieth century. There are a number of American scholars who have written on Panamanian politics from different angles during and since the Torrijos years (e.g., Ropp, Conniff). However, specific attention to the Torrijos years is largely overshadowed by the wealth of literature that deals with the Panama Canal and the events leading up to the signing of the 1977 treaties (e.g., McCullough, LaFeber, Jorden, Ryan). In addition, a fair amount of literature has also been published that focuses on the subsequent regime of Manuel Noriega and the US invasion that removed him from power, Operation Just Cause (e.g., Buckley, Dinges).

One particular work upon which this study draws is George Priestley's *Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama*, which examines several key reforms of the Torrijos regime from the years 1968 to 1975 and is based on fieldwork research conducted by the author. Using Priestley's information and analysis as a starting point, this study differs in that it is an examination of the Torrijos regime in its entirety and it widens the focus to include other aspects of the regime and examines some of the ramifications it may have had on subsequent political events in Panama, namely the democratization process.

The literature that deals directly with the personality of Omar Torrijos can generally be divided into either positive or negative depictions of the man and by extension his administration. Some personal accounts that deal with Torrijos, whether as an individual, as a military leader, or as a revolutionary head of state contain a mix of admiration, respect, and loyalty to the man and his memory (e.g., Martínez, Escobar Bethancourt, Greene). Those opposed to the regime and its authoritarian measures have

written works that speak out against the injustices carried out by the National Guard, the threat to civil liberties, and the obstacles to democratic development as a result of the military government (e.g., Janson Pérez, Koster, Guevara Mann, Bernal).

Personality aside, by most accounts Torrijos was a shrewd politician. He proved particularly adept at promoting his reformist line within Panama without unduly threatening the interests of the United States. In fact, the case has been made that, far from being ideology-bound and left wing, Torrijos was more concerned with creating a “personal, pragmatic, and authoritarian regime with which the United States profitably cooperated” (LaFeber 130). Among other things, it may have been this skill as a politician that allowed Torrijos to remain in power up until his sudden and unexpected death. One author offered his summation of the Torrijos regime and the leader himself as follows:

In its profession and conduct, the Torrijos regime appeared variously as revolutionary, reformist, populist, dictatorial, and socialist, but in the final analysis it was none of these... Basically, Torrijos was an inspired improviser with a great capacity for booze and small talk and little stomach for day-to-day administration. He was willing to shake up the country and its government, step on elite toes, bluff the gringos, and above all spend money freely. He was an old-fashioned nationalist who wanted Panama to have a bigger piece of the canal pie, but he was also a willful leader who sometimes used force and even murder to intimidate opponents and to stay in power. (Conniff, *Panama* 127)

The movement that grew up around Torrijos came to be known as Torrijismo and adherents are labeled Torrijistas. The main thrust of the movement, at least in its initial stages, was the notion of revolutionary change for Panama. The formation of Torrijismo came about soon after Torrijos’s consolidation of power, and developed through the subsequent construction of his new government, and later the establishment of an

affiliated political party, the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), or Revolutionary Democratic Party. After his death, one Torrijista listed the pillars of Torrijismo as the PRD, the Executive organ, and the Panamanian Defense Forces (Escobar Bethancourt 8).¹ Another observer sees Torrijismo as synonymous with mediation as Panama was able to simultaneously develop both its productive sector and its financial sector and at the same time co-opt labor organizations into the system (Gandásegui, “La Crisis” 5-11). One criticism of Torrijismo, particularly since 1981, is that it has ceased to be a political reality. This is due to the fact it has been significantly reworked since its inception and is now subject to varying interpretations, particularly as so many of the key players of the regime are no longer actively involved in politics (Pereira Burgos 38). Thus, the invocation of Torrijismo connotes notions of revolutionary change, anti-colonialism, and empowerment of the masses, arguably without a precise agreement as to its central tenets. Torrijos himself seemed primarily concerned with his leadership in the overarching revolutionary vision for Panama and claimed to be providing the inspiration for such changes but placing the responsibility of determining specific objectives and the manner in which to reach them on the Panamanian people (*La Línea* 11).

Social Movement Theory

A key factor that has significantly shaped Latin American politics has been the persistence of strong social and economic inequalities within the region. This remains

¹ The military in Panama was the Guardia Nacional, or National Guard, during the Torrijos regime. In 1983, the Guardia Nacional was transformed into the new Fuerzas de Defensa de Panama (FDP), or Panama Defense Forces.

one of the most stubborn obstacles to democratization to the present day. Perhaps in reaction to these persistent inequities, a current wave of popular strategies are responding and attempting to overcome these social inequalities known as social movements. The existence of these extra-institutional groups leads to the notion of a dichotomy between popular and established power and the resulting struggle between the two in contemporary Latin American politics (Lievesley 101-126, Vilas 5-8). New social and political movements are increasingly challenging the formal structures of the political system, including elites, the military and established parties. As political alternatives, these movements employ the use of assembly, popular consent and responsible leadership (Petras 1999).

New social movements involve groups engaged in collective action to affect change within the political, economic, or social system. More succinctly, a social movement is described as contentious collective action (Tarrow 3). In the process of seeking change, these movements often have the side effect of opening up political space. The views and demands expressed ultimately pave the way for increased political debate and subsequent struggles and movements have more space as a result. Social movements reflect a way for particular segments of civil society to express dissatisfaction with the current system and announce demands to the state and sometimes even to the world.

The idea of participatory democracy is a central element in many of these new social movements. This is expressed in the way in which the movements themselves have tended to organize at the grass roots level and involve direct participation of members within the given community. The model for organization is bottom-up rather

than top-down and hierarchical as has been the primary historical example for political organization in Latin America. New social movements reflect a growing discontent with elitist forms of democracy and the established party system that may not adequately represent the sectors of society from which these movements spring.

New social movements tend to rally around gender, ethnicity, or social concerns. Often these groups work together and form networks that serve to strengthen and broaden the base of support. Appealing to a broader base is important in maintaining the strength and viability of the movement, particularly its ability to effect the changes sought. While solidarity within a particular group is important, if the group is relatively small and does not appeal to a wider segment of the population, power remains relatively weak and a sense of legitimacy is harder to gain.

Unlike revolutions, new social movements are more willing to work within the system to affect change and typically do not call for a complete overthrow of the government. Foweraker identifies two major camps in contemporary social movement theory: New Social Movement Theory, which is an identity based approach, and Resource Mobilization Theory, which tends to focus more on the strategy employed by these movements (13-16). The notion of identity becomes important as a basis for solidarity within a certain group that mobilizes individuals to act collectively based on some shared sense of belonging, whether it is to an ethnic group or a social class. Once mobilized, strategy becomes important in a social movement as it determines the effectiveness of the organization in broadcasting its message and achieving its ultimate goals. Leadership, internal organizational structure, relationships within the group, and

networks with other groups are all factors that can ultimately determine the effectiveness of a social movement.

The Torrijos regime claimed to be revolutionary in its orientation and Torrijismo was promoted as a social movement. The ideas behind Torrijismo involve aspects of equal distribution and social justice. Although the Torrijos government sought to empower those groups in society that had been disenfranchised historically, it was largely a matter of the Torrijos regime facilitating this process. The aims of the movement were progressive in an ideological sense, however the way in which the movement was initiated and carried out differs considerably from the more open, non-hierarchical, collective, grassroots movements that have typified new social and political movements since their emergence in the 1960s. While the final goal of greater social equality espoused by Torrijos can be compared to other social movements, the initial collective element is missing. There were mass mobilizations in support of the regime, which caused one observer to argue that the movement was in fact affecting change from the top as well as from the bottom (González, “Democracia” 18). However, while Torrijismo contains elements of a social movement, as a whole it is seen as fundamentally top down in nature. That is, the masses are empowered to a certain extent but that power is granted from above in the form of a military leader and facilitator.

Populism

Another political term that has been used in the literature to describe Torrijos and Torrijismo is the notion of populism. The concept of populism has differing meanings and some would even argue as to its having been stretched to fit different and conflicting

forms of government. It has been noted that some of its heuristic utility has been lost and the term has generally been used as a “convenient label to designate unfamiliar or unusual forms of political mobilization” (Meny and Surel 2). Despite these difficulties, the notion of populism is seen as a useful lens with which to view certain aspects of the Torrijos regime. The populist label is used quite often in the literature to describe the regime. However, one scholar considers Torrijos not a populist figure but a charismatic one and argues that a populist “must gain office through elections or at least validate office-holding through free elections” (Conniff, *Populism* 193). Despite the fact that Torrijos did not gain office through elections, his regime does fit other populist criteria in its appeals to the working classes, nationalistic rhetoric, and the generally held idea that under his leadership the lives of a majority of the population in Panama would be improved. Another aspect that the Torrijos regime exhibited was the borrowing from different sociopolitical models, also a characteristic of Latin American populism (Conniff, *Populism* 5). While primarily following a socialist agenda, Torrijos did allow for the flourishing of capitalism in his promotion of Panama City as a banking and financial center.²

Another scholar defines Latin American populism as involving mass political movements that challenge oligarchic or imperialist powers while assembling a distinct social foundation that is often made up of different interest groups and even classes (Soler, *Nación* 39). By this definition, the Torrijos government takes on the

² As early as 1969, Torrijos actively sought to attract investment in Panama’s financial sector by speaking to groups of US businessmen while highlighting such aspects of Panama’s economy as the existence of a stable government, the US dollar, and the significant American military presence (Priestley 29).

characteristics of a populist regime. In terms of addressing the country's past history, which had been largely dominated by elites, Torrijos was able to garner support from disenfranchised groups which were eager to have a greater say under the new government. In addition, by confronting the issue of Panamanian sovereignty and the prospect of gaining control of the Panama Canal, Torrijos was able to unite diverse sectors of the Panamanian population behind this particular nationalistic cause.

Although Torrijos himself never faced a national election, the character of much of the regime seems consistent with the notion of populism. Even if he was not a populist in this strictest definition of the term, the theoretical construct is still applicable, as Torrijos seems to have molded himself after many of the elected populist leaders of Latin America throughout the twentieth century. Both the idea of a social movement and populist leadership tend to imply the notion of a focus on the wider population as opposed to elitism and rule by the oligarchy. In this respect, there was a marked shift in Panama between past governments and the Torrijos administration with regard to an attempt to incorporate the masses into the system and, as a consequence, to use these citizens as a political resource in maintaining popularity and establishing legitimacy for the regime.

Democratic Theory

As is the case with many concepts in the study of politics, the notion of democracy is complex and can accommodate different interpretations and connotations. In addition, the term is used alternately to describe a system of government, a set of procedures, or a normative ideal. Democracy as a political concept can be traced back to Ancient Greece and translates literally into "rule of the people" (Diamond 3). Modern

conceptions of democracy largely stem from the ideals and systems established by Western liberal democracies. Fully emerging in the twentieth century, democracies as they are understood today typically involve the characteristics of universal adult suffrage, representative governments, and guarantees of civil liberties and basic human rights. In attempts to theorize on the concept of democracy, an important component is an assessment of who wields actual power within the system. Distinctions have been made between elitist and pluralist conceptions of democracy. Though by no means the only lenses through which to view modern democracies, a majority of the literature on democracy written by Western, and particularly American, scholars for much of the latter part of the twentieth century fell within one of these two camps.

Pluralism describes democracy as a system in which competing groups vie for power and by virtue of this competition, no one group is able to fully control the political agenda. This view holds that society is broken into numerous interests such that individual or minority rights will not be threatened because there is no overwhelming majority with which to contend (Birch 76-77). The theory of pluralism perhaps got its biggest push this century with the work of Robert Dahl. Dahl developed the concept of polyarchy, or rule by the many, to describe a modern representative democracy with universal suffrage (Dahl 90). By contrast, elitist theories of democracy contend that small and limited groups of people exercise power in any democracy. It is this distinction between rulers and ruled and the assumed inevitability that a few always govern the many that provides the central force behind elitist theory.

A third conception of democracy, labeled participatory democracy, takes its cue from the original conception of democracy, namely that power should ultimately rest with the people. Pluralist and elitist notions have been criticized as adoptions of democracy adulterated and legitimized to fit observed experience (Bachrach 8-9, 93). Just because a nation labeled as democratic exhibits a certain characteristic, whether it is the existence of interest groups or the dominance of a minority class within society, does not mean that it is necessarily endemic to democracy. Participatory democracy takes its cue from classical or full democracy and considers participation essential to any truly democratic system (Vanden and Prevost, *Democracy* 9).

Global developments during the last several decades of the twentieth century, including the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the marked increase in the number of democracies throughout the world, have culminated with the apparent general acceptance of democracy as the favored system of national governance. In theoretical approaches on the subject, competing conceptions of who wields actual power in a democracy are complicated by ideas of who should. In addition, recent developments in more popular forms of social and political empowerment have met with mixed reviews. The outlined conflicting foundations inherent in pluralist, elitist, and participatory conceptions of democracy influence the identification of the weaknesses of modern democracy and play an essential part in resulting policy prescriptions. A brief look at the complexity of democratic theory begins to reveal why the subject has garnered so much critical reflection and inspired such varied analysis.

In the case of Torrijismo, the inherent personalistic and authoritarian components have been seen by some as unfavorable to the consolidation of participatory democracy in Panama. One author notes that Panama has faced the problem of shaking off its authoritarian legacy during its “continuous transition” to democracy since 1991 (Ropp, “Tailoring”, 56). Therefore, the dominance of the National Guard in politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s can be seen as contributing to this difficulty of democratic consolidation. While democratic reforms, particularly along the lines of a participatory model, were attempted during the Torrijos era, such as the establishment of a popular form of assembly and the emphasis placed on local forums for citizens, a number of authoritarian elements stand in contrast. It is the nature of these democratic elements during the Torrijos era and how they may have affected the move toward democratization that will be examined in greater detail.

Democratization in Latin America

The amount of scholarly literature written on the subject of democracy, or more specifically the democratization of Latin America, has expanded considerably in recent decades. At one point or another throughout much of the twentieth century, authoritarian regimes or military dictatorships controlled most governments in Latin America. Today, there has been a shift toward democratic forms of government and the holding of relatively free and fair elections in all of Central and South America, which is seen as a dramatic reversal of historical precedence and as such has inspired numerous studies. Some scholars see this trend as evidence that the area has truly been democratized and highlight future prospects for further democratic consolidation within the region. On the

other hand, more skeptical observers dismiss the notion that the region has become irreversibly democratized and instead focus on the obstacles still faced within much of the region, namely vestiges of authoritarianism, gross social inequality, and the general ineffectiveness of the political system. Based upon a shared history and culture, the region of Latin America is grouped together as one entity in much of the literature. This is done primarily in order to draw broad generalities as to political models and current trends. However, it has been noted that the “processes of democratization cannot be properly understood without attention to nation specific political development” (Walker and Armony xv). In this study, the impact of the Torrijos regime on Panama’s democratization process is being examined.

Evidence of a marked trend toward democratization within Latin America relies on the conception of democracy that is employed in the study. Procedural, or electoral, conceptions of democracy can more readily justify the claim that democracy has spread throughout the region in recent years. This idea stems from liberal democratic theory and views the holding of elections, the establishment of civil guarantees, and the existence of democratic political institutions as key in labeling a given nation as a democracy. Opponents to this limited conception of democracy argue that it relies too heavily on the importance of formal laws and institutions and, among other things, ignores the existence of power relations within a given system (Vilas 9-11). In other words, the ideas of elite dominance, disproportionate power within the executive branch, and broader social welfare concerns do not enter into the equation when considering how well a nation functions as a democracy under the “liberal pacted” model (Lievesley 195-99).

In contrast to procedural conceptions of democracy are those that attempt to gauge a deeper understanding of power relations and effective participation within a given political system. In Latin America today it would seem that more substantive, participatory forms of democracy remain elusive despite the existence of formal democratic institutions and practices. Evidence of this includes continued influence and control by elites within both the government and business sectors. While this is to some extent a factor throughout much of the world today, the socioeconomic gaps remain substantially wider in Latin America than in industrialized democracies. One clear example of this is the fact that the middle class remains relatively small throughout a large number of countries within Latin America, Panama being no exception.

In addition to continued dominance by elites in both society and politics, there remain considerable remnants of authoritarian, and sometimes militaristic, aspects in Latin American politics today, which persist despite the holding of free and fair elections in a given country. The disproportionate power that the executive branch, namely the President, typically wields is a contributing factor to the authoritarian mandates that can be handed down from the position with virtually no opposition or check from either the other branches of government or the population. Examples of this type of behavior include rule by decree or privatization without public consent (Petras 1999). In some instances, the continued reliance on the military to resolve national crises or intimidate the opposition undermines the government and places considerable constraints on the development of substantive forms of democracy. These and other elements at work in contemporary Latin American politics prompted one scholar to label countries

undergoing democratization that exhibit these qualities as “delegative, semi-authoritarian, election-based regimes” (Vilas 27).

The problems facing many of the countries in Latin America today in terms of achieving real democratic systems can be applied to the case study of Panama. The democratization process is ongoing with setbacks such as the ones mentioned above that are seen as endemic to Latin America in general as well as some that are more specific to Panama. One key factor that inhibited Panama’s moves toward democratization in the past was the status of the country as a virtual protectorate of the United States for much of its history as an independent nation. The unique dependent relationship this fostered is seen as complicating substantive moves toward real democracy (Castro, “Transitismo” 4). The role of the United States is significant in understanding Panama’s history in terms of sociopolitical development. The consequences of this relationship will be explored at greater length throughout this study.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Pre-independence History

Panama's geographic location is unique and it has figured prominently in its economic development. Spanish explorers first discovered the isthmus in 1501. In 1513 Vasco Nuñez de Balboa was the first European to set eyes on the Pacific Ocean from Panama. The isthmus would soon become a trade route for the Spanish due to its narrow overland passage from ocean to ocean. Although fairly treacherous due to the hardships of the jungle, the route was used to transport treasure from the western shores of South America back to Spain. The port cities of Portobelo on the Atlantic side and Panama City on the Pacific side were established and soon flourished. Unlike other Latin American regions where Spanish settlers accumulated vast tracts of land, in Panama most of the members of elite society were prosperous merchants save for a few cattle ranchers (Biesanz 26).

Prior to Spanish colonization, thousands of Indians inhabited the isthmus. There were a number of distinct tribes, each with its own language, and communal ownership of land was the custom (Biesanz 10-11). The leadership displayed by Balboa early on was relatively enlightened as he attempted to befriend the native population. However, subsequent Spanish rule on the isthmus often led to the enslavement and slaughter of many of the Indians. This was particularly true under the governorship of Pedro Arias de Avila, commonly referred to as Pedrarias. By the late 1500s, Panama City was fairly cosmopolitan for its time and was populated by a small minority of some five to eight

hundred Spaniards, with Indian and Black slaves performing the heavy labor of the colony.

The Spanish colonies in Latin America were gaining their independence in the early 1800s. In November of 1821, Panama declared its independence and upon doing so swore allegiance to the republic of Colombia. Several reasons have been put forth in explaining the decision to align with Colombia rather than establish an independent state. These include the decay of the isthmian economy, its small population, and perhaps even its demographic makeup, whereby the country's white elite was a minority to an Afro-mestizo majority (Szok 17-19).³ The Panamanian oligarchy soon came to regret this decision and it was pointed out that Panama had historically been a separate colony and there were geographic barriers between the two, making the case for separating from Colombia. In addition, the common interests of the Panamanian people regarding the development of its distinct geographic location were subordinated to Colombian authority (Biesanz 42). Thus Panamanian nationalism predated independence from Colombia as Panama declared itself independent at least three times during the 1800s and launched numerous rebellions.

By the 1800s, Panama's importance as a transit route had declined, as had the splendor of its principal cities on either coast. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought a resurgence of traffic to the isthmus and focused US attention more sharply on the possibilities of the short route between the oceans. The gold rush brought renewed prosperity to the region as prospectors flocked to cross the isthmus and board

³ In 1800 the Isthmus had only 72,000 inhabitants, with only 8,000 in the capital city (Biesanz 33).

ships bound for California. The US was granted the concession to build a railroad across the isthmus in 1850. Due to Panama's small population and limited resources, labor and materials had to be imported for the task. Laborers from the West Indies were brought to the isthmus to work on the construction of the railroad. This process would essentially be repeated during US construction of the Canal.

The political culture taking shape in Panama was one in which a small minority, primarily engaged in merchant and transit activities and connected with international capital, exerted control over the majority black, mestizo, and indigenous population. Thus Panamanian nationalism, while it predated independence from Colombia, should be understood as "a product of [the] oligarchical faction, which was increasingly international in composition and which was concerned about its relative weakness in the face of the native masses" (Szok 32). The tendency of the oligarchy in Panama to seek stability abroad and to actively court international influence and capital also contributes to the political culture of Panama. This may explain part of the reason why the US was able to exert such a strong presence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Birth of a Nation

Panama became an independent nation on November 3, 1903 with tacit US backing of its separation from Colombia.⁴ The independence movement, however, should not be seen as a forced creation of a state by Teddy Roosevelt and company to suit their own ends and aspirations for a transoceanic canal as some scholars and historians

⁴ The USS Wisconsin was strategically anchored in the Bay of Panama during the revolt for independence. The Colombian legislature had recently rejected the US proposal to build a canal on the Isthmus of Panama; it was generally thought that an independent Panama would be amenable to working with US interests in the region. US involvement led to a successful, quick, and bloodless declaration of independence.

have argued (LaFeber xi). Panamanian nationalism and the call for the establishment of an independent state existed prior to US involvement and would in fact continue throughout much of the twentieth century as Panama was relegated to occupying a subordinate role in its relationship with the United States. Despite continued US presence and influence there remained a strong sense of Panamanian identity and nationalism throughout (Gandásegui, *Clases* 116). US involvement in the construction, operation, and protection of the Panama Canal dating from Panama's independence forward would link the two countries economically and politically.

The roles played by the two countries were characterized by the United States acting as protector, often unwanted and resented, and the burgeoning country of Panama attempting to establish its political culture and struggling to define and reconcile its relationship with the large and powerful neighbor to the north that occupied so much of its prime real estate. This uneasy connection would develop and be shaped by world events, individual leaders, and international and domestic factors, as will be discussed in this overview, albeit brief, of the history of Panama.

Shortly after Panama's independence from Colombia, US plans for the construction of a canal across the isthmus were resumed. The Hay-Bunau Varilla treaty marked the official agreement between the two countries and the terms for the undertaking. Ironically, this initial treaty was not actually signed by a Panamanian. The authorized signatory on Panama's behalf was a Frenchman who had been involved in the first attempt to construct a canal in the late nineteenth century and was already familiar with the process and the political actors in Washington, D.C. Philippe Bunau-Varilla was

the chief engineer on the failed French attempt headed by Ferdinand de Lesseps to build a canal that would link the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through Panama. Through a series of circumstances, Bunau-Varilla signed the treaty as a representative of Panama before any Panamanian had actually had a chance to review its contents.⁵

The basic concessions of the treaty included an initial payment of \$10 million to Panama plus an annual payment of \$250,000; it allowed for the construction of the canal and stipulated the establishment of military bases as well as the Panama Canal Zone, a ten-mile wide strip of land that ran the length of the proposed canal, which would be leased from Panama in perpetuity. While representatives from Panama were unhappy with this relinquishment of sovereignty so early in their independence, the alternatives to rejecting the treaty after it had been signed may have been seen as even less desirable, including the United States taking the canal without paying for it. In addition, Roosevelt could also conceivably have gone back to the original plan of constructing a canal through Nicaragua, or ended its protective role on the isthmus and allowed the Colombian army to try and take back its former territory by force (LaFeber 30).

Along with the Canal Zone, the United States established fourteen military bases in Panama, some of which were on territory outside the Zone. Articles set forth in the first treaty between the two countries included the right of the US to occupy and control any lands outside the Zone which they needed at a cost which would be determined by a joint US-Panamanian commission as well as the right to use any bodies of water for any purpose relating to the canal. These and other articles gave the United States

⁵ For a concise account of events leading to this first treaty between the two countries see LaFeber, Chapter 2. For a detailed historical account on events surrounding the construction of the Canal, see McCullough.

considerable diplomatic flexibility in all aspects relating to the Canal, which contributed to the establishment of an almost colonial relationship with Panama. The small Panamanian army that had been ready to defend their independence against Colombia was essentially dismissed soon after construction of the canal and Panamanian arms and ammunition were placed in the Canal Zone under US control. What would remain would be a police force consisting of less than a thousand members and a reliance on the United States military for its internal security (LaFeber 39).

Panama's liberal democratic constitution was drawn up and ratified in 1904. Due to pressure from the United States, there was included in the new constitution the provision that the US government could intervene to restore public peace and constitutional order if they were ever threatened. This provision would result in post-independence US military interventions on separate occasions in 1904, 1918, 1921, and 1925 to quell domestic unrest, not including those interventions prior to and during Panama's independence from Colombia (Lindsay-Poland 16-17). During the same year, 1904, Panama's currency was tied to the US dollar, which remains the case to this day. These actions further intertwined the two countries, particularly economically and militarily. The domestic political culture of the country of the new republic had been shaped by the colonial experience and its years as part of Colombia. As has been noted, many of the trends and practices established during the colonial era would continue in Panamanian politics for years to come, including the importance of charismatic leaders, the social, political, and economic influence of wealthy landowning elites in the major cities, the central importance of geography and the transit zone to the economy of the

isthmus, and the burgeoning and strengthening of nationalistic movements.

The Panama Canal was opened in August 1914. The self contained enclave that went up around it known as the Canal Zone would remain a direct challenge to Panamanian sovereignty and a rallying cry for nationalistic and anti-imperialist factions within Panamanian society. This movement gained momentum in January 1964 when Panamanian students from the Instituto Nacional (National Institute) attempted to raise the Panamanian flag outside Balboa High School in the Canal Zone and met with resistance from American students. The action by the Panamanian students was prompted by a 1963 accord between Panama and the United States, which allowed the Panamanian and American flags to be flown jointly in public areas of the Canal Zone. Once the events were reported, Panamanian demonstrators gathered in protest at the Canal Zone border where they encountered the US military. The ensuing riots and looting lasted for several days, resulting in the death of twenty-three Panamanians and four US military personnel (Guevara Mann 87). This is seen as a turning point in US/Panamanian relations insofar as the status quo was seriously threatened and negotiations on the future of the Panama Canal and the US role on the isthmus became an increasing political reality.

Political Organization, Social Classes and Prospects for a Democratic Nation

Political movements formed fairly early on in Panama's history. The first workers party was formed in 1921 and by 1924 a General Syndicate had been formed in the country, using labor strikes as a means of protest. The Federación de Estudiantes de Panama (FEP), or Federation of Panamanian Students, organized in 1943 around popular

and anti-imperialist aims. Ironically, when these popular movements took to the streets in protest, it was the National Police, and later the National Guard, that were called in to quell the student protests, labor strikes, and other public demonstrations, sometimes by violent means. Omar Torrijos was involved in these repressions of political expression during the 1960s as commander of the National Guard in Chiriqui province. In a letter to Senator Edward Kennedy, written in 1970, Torrijos lamented the injustices he was asked to perform as a soldier and pointed to the reorientation of the armed forces under his leadership (Reprinted in Pineda 402-405).

Beginning in 1923, Acción Comunal (Communal Action) became the first organization that presented itself as a clear alternative to the established elite political organizations, barely distinguishable in the form of Liberal and Conservative parties. This organization was nationalist in character and was made up of professionals and intellectuals from the upper middle classes (Janson Pérez 17). In 1931, Acción Comunal organized Panama's first coup d'état. Arnulfo Arias, a founding member of the organization, would go on to have a controversial and illustrious political career and eventually found his own political party along the nationalist lines of Acción Comunal. Student organizations, the labor movement, and university intellectuals also symbolized the growing discontent with the status quo during this period. However, it was not until the Torrijos regime co-opted them that members of these three groups would become a significant force within the government structure.

At the time of independence, Panama's population consisted of five major groups including: the white residents of the capital, mestizo peasants on the Pacific slope, a

merchant class in the provinces, poor black and mulattos primarily in Panama City, Colón, and on the United Fruit Company plantations in Chiriqui province, and indigenous people (Lindsay-Poland 12). As has been the case in most Latin American countries, the existence of a dominant social class was evident in Panama throughout its history, and controlled most of the political and economic power on the isthmus. This class could be differentiated in terms of skin color, to this day referred to as “rabiblancos” or white tails. Often descendants of Spanish colonization, this elite group controlled much of the valuable land in the transit zone and therefore was able to establish businesses, gain political power, and enjoy a mutually beneficial economic relationship with the United States. One observer notes that a small network of people has largely dominated the political history of Panama and that many of these men even shared the same or similar names, as the children grew to take the place of the fathers in the most influential positions, both politically and economically (Janson Pérez 5).

Several seminal works by Panamanian social scientists throughout the twentieth century examined the concept of social classes in Panama and what the implications were for the future of the country, the prospects for democracy, and the impact that the US presence and the geographical location of Panama had on the state of affairs. Writing in 1949, Georgina de López’s “The Middle Class in Panama” theorized that Panamanian society was essentially semi feudal and lagged behind in large part because there was effectively an absence of a middle class. Furthermore, it was argued that there were structural barriers in place that were limiting the emergence of such a competitive and entrepreneurial class. López concluded that the middle class at that time was a fairly

recent formation and could be observed primarily in the urban centers or the two major cities, Panama City and Colón. It was thought that the growth in numbers of the middle class would ultimately allow for an effectively functioning democratic government (López 38).

Conventional wisdom in democratic theory suggests the importance of a middle class for the establishment and consolidation of a sustained and successful democratic society. As such, limits to the development of democracy in developing countries are often attributed, at least in part, to this lack of a strong middle class. In her study, López concluded that foremost among the project of strengthening Panama's middle class was education, including a national literacy campaign, mandatory secondary education throughout the country, an increase in the number of technical schools, and increased interaction and exchange with other countries, particularly those with a defined middle class and a firmly established democratic form of government (38). Torrijos and the Torrijistas that were inspired by him would echo these sentiments some twenty years after López's work was first published. Attempts to elevate the level of education and educational opportunities throughout the country were one of the social programs of Torrijismo.

Another influential Panamanian scholar, Hernán Porras, writing in 1953 took an anthropological approach in examining "The Human Groups in Panama". His study concluded that the geographical position of the Isthmus of Panama constituted the basis upon which to understand the social dynamic of the country. In other words, those that dominate the geographical position, dominate the country (Gandásegui, *Clases* 19).

While the United States would probably top the list in terms of domination, the Panamanian urban elite class was a close second and therefore was able to effectively control much of the economic and political, not to mention social, spheres of the country throughout much of the twentieth century. Porras used the term “trauma” to signify an impact from an exterior source that penetrates society with such great force that it disturbs the preexisting balances and causes a new internal equilibrium (43).

Ricaurte Soler wrote from a Marxist perspective and therefore stressed the historical forces he saw as shaping the history of the social classes in Panama. In his work entitled *Panama: Nation and Oligarchy*, Soler points to significant forces that have shaped Panamanian society, leading up to and including the Torrijos regime. The imperial forces of the United States along with Panama’s oligarchy and their mutually compatible economic relationship fomented much of the opposition movements beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, including the increasing mass support for socialism, particularly in the rural areas of Panama’s interior provinces (Soler 34; 37-39). Populism became a factor that existed alongside the burgeoning nationalism of these opposition movements, exemplified by Arnulfo Arias in 1931 and Omar Torrijos in 1968 (Soler 37-39). These three Panamanian social scientists offered different methodological approaches but each made a significant contribution to the literature on the importance of social classes in explaining the historical realities of Panama as well as in prescribing ways in which these realities could be transformed.

Writing just prior to the coup that would bring Omar Torrijos into power in Panama, Marco Gandásegui examined the concentration of economic power in Panama

during the mid to late 1960s. Similar conditions existed in other Central American countries, perhaps most notably the oligarchy of fourteen families who reigned in El Salvador that were able to maintain a virtual monopoly on wealth and power in the country (Vanden and Prevost, *Politics* 63). Gandásegui's work examined the inequities inherent in the fact that a select few Panamanian families had effectively controlled the economic and political spheres of the country since independence. One of the more startling figures to emerge from his study was that at the time it was written 36 of the 120 most influential and powerful companies operating in the country were controlled or influenced by only three prominent Panamanian families (Gandásegui, *Clases* 114). Not surprisingly perhaps, the author foresaw the toppling of the status quo if a more equitable redistribution of national wealth were not to take effect in a fairly short amount of time. It is interesting to note that a year later the military, under the leadership of Omar Torrijos, attempted to do just that and announced plans for a new system of governance in Panama. While it is debatable as to how successful this system ultimately was in delivering on its promises, it marked a considerable shift from what had been the status quo prior to the military coup. The political establishment up until that time had not made any significant moves toward lessening the social inequities that existed in the country, which could then foster the development of a larger and more robust middle class.

Conditions leading up to the 1968 Coup

The 1968 coup in Panama was seen, among other things, as a reaction to the years of elitist politics that had dominated not just Panama throughout the twentieth century but

much of Latin America since the colonial era. Economic and business elites held a disproportionate amount of power in both the political and economic spheres of the country. From the time of independence up to the military overthrow of the government in 1968, minimal effort had been made to incorporate marginalized populations into the political and economic system in the country. The great majority of political activity occurred in the capital city, while citizens in the more rural areas of the country and in the other provincial capitals did not exert a significant amount of influence on the national political scene. Thus, members of the urban elite class were able to dictate political and economic policy virtually unchecked. In addition, these elites had historically gained substantial benefits from dealings with the United States, particularly where the Panama Canal was concerned, thus ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

One notable exception to the trend of elite dominance prior to 1968 was the presidency of José Antonio Remón Cantera, who was elected in 1952. A member of the Panamanian National Police, Remón rose up through the ranks and was able to gain enough support to become President of the Republic. It was under his supervision and directorship that the police force was transformed into the National Guard in 1953, which resulted in the professionalization and the militarization of the force. This transformation was facilitated by Cold War politics, with the United States providing significant aid and training to the Panamanian forces (Ropp, *Panamanian Politics* 43). Parallels have been drawn between Remón and Torrijos in terms of their personal backgrounds and it has been argued that Remón set precedents that would be followed by Torrijos some twenty years later, in terms of his rise to power through the National Guard and the resulting

effects of weakening the oligarchy's power (LaFeber 89). Remón's term as President was to be short lived, however. He was assassinated after only two and a half years in office, but his presidency marked an important turning point in history and showed that the oligarchy could be seriously challenged as the military in Panama began to exert increasing political power and influence.

Control of the Panamanian government shifted on October 11, 1968 when a military junta overthrew the newly elected populist president Arnulfo Arias just days after having taken office. A charismatic and often uncompromising politician, Arias had been elected president twice before in 1940 and 1949 and had been forcibly removed from office by the national police each time as a result of his heavy-handed and unilateral tactics. After the 1968 elections, the Panamanian National Guard sensed a threat to their position with Arias back in office and decided to take matters into their own hands. The coup was supported by a majority of the officer corps and was prompted by Arias's actions leading up to his taking office that interfered with the power structure of the National Guard. As such, the coup, at least initially, appeared to be motivated more by an effort to preserve institutional privileges than as an attempt to affect social reforms (Ropp, "Military Reformism" 60).

The Military Coup and the Torrijos Regime

In the wake of the military takeover, deposed President Arnulfo Arias sought asylum in the Canal Zone and many of the legislators in Panama's National Assembly fled to the United States. The military initially offered to hand power over to one of Arias's vice-presidents who promptly refused out of loyalty to the ousted leader. The

solution to the dilemma of who would take the lead in the new government came with the establishment of a junta comprised of two military officers and one civilian. In its initial manifesto, this provisional junta announced its plans to return the government to civilian rule once order had been restored (See Appendix C). During this period of time, two up and coming officers emerged to take the lead in the new government; they were Omar Torrijos and Borís Martínez.

By December of 1968, Colonel Torrijos had been appointed commander-in-chief of the National Guard and Lieutenant Colonel Martínez had been promoted to chief-of-staff. By February of the following year, the power struggle between the two men came to a head. When Martínez went on television to announce plans for agrarian reform and other social programs, he effectively alienated both the United States and the more moderate faction within the National Guard, with which Torrijos was associated. Martínez was exiled to Miami shortly after this incident and Omar Torrijos emerged as not only the head of the National Guard but also as the de facto head of state. Once firmly in control, Torrijos began laying the foundation for a new era in Panamanian politics and a movement which would come to bear his name - Torrijismo. There was only one significant attempt to usurp Torrijos's power during his regime. In December of 1969 a counter-coup was launched to remove him from power while he was vacationing in Mexico. The attempt would prove unsuccessful largely due to the officers within the National Guard who remained loyal to Torrijos. After this event, Omar Torrijos's political authority would remain virtually unchecked up until his death some twelve years later.

Once he had established himself as head of the National Guard, Torrijos began to form his policies and his progressive agenda began to take shape with the help of his inner circle of advisors. The reformist policies enacted reflected the growing social discontent that was in evidence not only in Panama but also in much of the region of Latin America during this time period. Omar Torrijos was able to build a broad base of support among a wide range of urban and rural racial and ethnic groups on the domestic front as well as external support from both the US government and international banking and financial interests. Despite the ideological differences, the US did not perceive the Torrijos regime as a distinct threat. The global political climate during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s was significantly different from what it is today. The Cold War was still the primary guiding force in US foreign policy. As such, Latin American dictators were tolerated, and in some cases supported, by the United States. In the case of the exceptional position of Panama with regard to the interests of the United States, this attitude was largely adopted toward Torrijos, despite the fact that he was a leader who espoused leftist politics.

Panamanian nationalism, including the notion of achieving complete sovereignty of the isthmus, had provided the impetus for a number of political platforms prior to the Torrijos era. Arnulfo Arias had campaigned on an ultra-nationalistic platform throughout each of his ill-fated political campaigns. As history would show, Torrijos was able to oversee the dialogue that would result in Panama gaining control of the canal and its surrounding areas. His signing of the Panama Canal Treaties with Jimmy Carter in 1977 brought about the full withdrawal of the United States government and turned ownership

of the Canal over to Panama in a phased process. At the time, the event was hailed by many as a major accomplishment and perhaps one of the most salient episodes of the Torrijos era, which would forever establish Omar Torrijos as a beloved national hero in some circles and would contribute to the popularity of his regime.

Manuel Noriega and Operation Just Cause

In 1981 Omar Torrijos died unexpectedly in an airplane crash, which some claimed was not an accident.⁶ The passing of Torrijos led to a power struggle within the National Guard to gain control of the military structure. The political system in place vested authority in the head of the military and allowed for the legitimacy of whoever took control, regardless of credentials or even popularity. The subsequent emergence of General Manuel Antonio Noriega as the dominant figure within the National Guard and the consequences of his rise to power culminated in the US military invasion, Operation Just Cause, which ousted him from power in late 1989. Noriega presided over the most brutal, corrupt and opportunistic regime that the country had ever seen. Although there were still officially Presidents of the Republic after Torrijos's death, the real power remained with Noriega and the National Guard, which was transformed into the Fuerzas de Defensa de Panama (Panama Defense Forces) in 1983. Despite having been associated with Torrijos and affiliated with his party, the social program envisioned in Torrijismo was largely abandoned once Noriega gained control of the military government. The Panamanian people had been left with a dictatorship in which political opposition was repressed thus closing off the opportunity for public space and stifling

⁶ There have been unsubstantiated claims made that Torrijos was assassinated as a result of a plot in which Noriega was directly involved, along with the CIA (Dinges 264).

any social movements that may have arisen to carry on with some of the progressive measures initiated during the Torrijos era.

There have been a number of books devoted to an examination of the figure of Manuel Antonio Noriega and his rise to power within the ranks of the National Guard, culminating with his role as head of state of the country, as well as the circumstances and events that led to the US invasion that would remove him from power and land him in jail in Miami. Also documented is his role as a sometime CIA informant dating back to the 1970s as well as his links to drug trafficking and political corruption. Perhaps one of the most chilling episodes in the Noriega story involves the murder of one of his most outspoken critics, Dr. Hugo Spadafora. Spadafora was a Panamanian medical doctor and leftist revolutionary; he worked as a doctor with the Guinea-Bissau liberation movement during the mid-1960s and later formed the Victoriano Lorenzo Brigade that fought alongside the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the late 1970s (Riding 3). Despite having initially opposed the Torrijos regime, Spadafora eventually came to support it and was appointed Deputy Minister of Health in 1976. Spadafora became one of Noriega's most verbal and outspoken critics, something that very few members of the Panamanian public had been willing to do openly before. He disappeared after crossing the border from Costa Rica into Panama in early 1985 and the last time any witnesses saw him, PDF guards were taking him away. His body was found several weeks later, which ignited a public outcry against Noriega and the PDF. Mass mobilizations, general strikes and street demonstrations ensued. While disappearances and military brutality had been witnessed on a massive scale in other Central American countries during the 1970s and

1980s, particularly in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the Spadafora murder seemed to galvanize the opposition in Panama and marked the beginning of the Cruzada Civilista and more open acts of defiance and civil disobedience directed at the Noriega regime (Dinges 264).⁷

In June of 1987, then second in command of the PDF, and Omar Torrijos's first cousin, Roberto Díaz Herrera became Noriega's next target for forced retirement. Díaz Herrera spoke out against the regime and recounted details of political corruption and charges of outright fraud by the PDF during the 1984 elections. He also claimed that officers of the PDF in the western province of Chiriqui had in fact carried out Spadafora's murder, under Noriega's orders. In denouncing Noriega, Díaz Herrera called for a revival of the ideals of Torrijismo. These claims sparked renewed public demonstrations and riots in the streets of Panama City.

While prosecutors in Miami worked on an indictment for General Noriega on drug trafficking charges, the conflict between Panama and Washington was mounting. The May 1989 elections saw the opposition candidates of Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón and Guillermo "Billy" Ford able to capitalize on the discontent that had been building against the Noriega regime. When it appeared the opposition was going to win the vote, the government simply stopped the count and annulled the election. To make matters worse, members of Noriega's "Dignity Battalion" were seen on television

⁷ The Cruzada Civilista, or National Civic Crusade, was the major force for opposition to Noriega's regime and consisted initially of middle class businessmen involved in the Chamber of Commerce and other civic clubs in Panama City (Buckley 83).

beating the opposition candidates during a protest.⁸ The ensuing series of events culminated in the invasion of Panama on December 19, 1989. It was the largest troop operation at that time since Vietnam and resulted in the deaths of an untold number of Panamanian civilians, around 300 PDF, about twenty-four US soldiers and several US civilians (Dinges 309).⁹ After several days of fighting and Noriega's surrender and extradition to the United States to stand trial, the rule of the military begun by Omar Torrijos had ended.

The Democratization Process since 1989

After the removal of General Noriega by US military force, the United States installed the candidates that were thought to have won the 1989 elections in office. With the blessing and military backing of the United States, President Endara and Vice Presidents Ford and Arias Calderón attempted to get the country back on track both economically and politically. Despite questions of legitimacy raised by the fact that the administration was bolstered by United States military might, the new government soldiered on. A coup attempt by the military in December of 1990 was promptly squelched when US troops were called in to ensure the Endara government stayed in office. The dismantling of the military bureaucracy was seen as one of the key issues following the return to civilian rule. As a result of the invasion and its aftermath, the Panamanian Defense Forces were dissolved and replaced by a public force consisting of

⁸ The Dignity Battalions were groups of young men and women armed by and loyal to the Noriega regime.

⁹ Shortly after the invasion, the US Southern Command announced that 314 PDF and 202 civilians had died. Panamanians who claimed the number of dead to be in the thousands immediately challenged these figures. An Independent Commission of Inquiry composed of US citizens found that as many as four to seven thousand may have been killed (Weeks 6).

three services: the National Police, the National Air Service, and the National Maritime Service. Many of the civilian leaders that had supported the military regime were imprisoned, while others left the country (Pérez 135).

The economic austerity programs that were adopted by many of the emerging democratic nations in Latin America during the 1990s marked a shift from the import substitution and national models of development that were put forth by leaders such as Torrijos. Many of these policies, which continue to this day, are seen as a reaction to the failures of the state-centered model and an inevitable consequence of the processes of globalization that are shaping the world in the twenty first century. Backed by the so called “Washington Consensus”, and based on a neoliberal economic model, many governments in Latin America have struggled with attempts to shrink bloated government agencies, expand exports, and fall in line behind free trade policies. One observer notes that since the US military invasion, Panama has been subjected to economic and political shock treatments as a result of the ascendancy of political neoliberalism and the push for privatization and free market economies (Candanedo 21).

There are conflicting views as to the future of the democratization process in Panama. There are reasons to be optimistic, as there have been two peaceful elections since the return to civilian rule, discounting the Endara administration. The National Electoral Tribunal, which enjoys the status of an independent branch of government under the constitution, seems to have been effective and credible in overseeing these elections (Pérez 138). The PRD continues to be a dominant political party, holding a majority in Panama’s legislature. In 1994, the PRD candidate Ernesto Pérez Balladares

won the presidency and the leader in the polls for the upcoming elections in May 2004 is Martín Torrijos, son of the late general.

Less positive signs include high unemployment, persistent poverty, and charges of government corruption leading to a growing disillusionment and discontent with elected officials. The current president, Mireya Moscoso, who is the widow of former populist president Arnulfo Arias, has been accused of corruption and some of the actions of her administration have very recently prompted a large general union strike in the country. In a recent survey she had only a 15% approval rating (Latinnews.com “Moscoso” 10/14/03). Official corruption is still very much a reality in Panamanian politics. A recent survey in World Competitiveness Yearbook found that in only five other countries in the world is bribery more commonplace (Latinnews.com “Panama” 10/14/03).

These and other factors are seen as threats to the democratization process as the legitimacy of those in power and the system of government itself are increasingly called into question. A shift back to authoritarianism remains a possibility, although probably not by the military at this point, considering the diminished state of the Panamanian police force. Future prospects for the deepening of democratization in Panama, following a participatory model and based on popular movements, remains a laudable goal. However, the legacy of authoritarianism and the weaknesses in democratic governance throughout its history mean that Panama’s future as a stable and prosperous democracy is a goal towards which it is still working.

GREATER INCLUSION AND EFFORTS TOWARD A PARTICIPATORY MODEL OF GOVERNMENT

Overview of the Torrijos Regime

In *Panamanian Politics*, Steve Ropp outlines three distinct periods of the Torrijos regime (41-42). The first period lasted from the time of the initial coup in 1968 until the drafting of the 1972 Constitution, during which time rule was essentially by decree. The national assembly and political parties were abolished and once Omar Torrijos established himself as firmly in control of the National Guard after the initial power struggles within the military structure, he was able to dominate the political landscape. With a new Constitution and a new legislative assembly, the ANCR, to elect the President of the Republic, the years from 1972 to 1976 marked an attempt to develop a more formal institutional system.¹⁰ Although the true seat of power would remain with the National Guard and Omar Torrijos, the government structure was moving toward a more democratic form, even if only superficially.

The final stage of the Torrijos regime, from 1976 until his death in 1981, was marked by the economic stagnation that was prevalent in most of Latin America during those years. The failures of the import substitution model and increasing national debt contributed to this economic crisis. The establishment of a new political party, the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), and assurances that Torrijos was stepping down from power and that the country would return to popular elections by 1984 seemed

¹⁰ Torrijos appointed a civilian, Demetrio Lakas, to the office of President in 1969. The president was essentially a figurehead as real authority rested with the National Guard and Omar Torrijos. The National Assembly was given the task of electing the President with the adoption of the 1972 Constitution, although it is generally thought that the process was more of a rubber-stamping of the military's preferred candidate.

to signal a transition from military dictatorship to democratic governance after having implemented a variety of social reforms and a progressive agenda. The manifesto issued by the short-lived military junta in 1968 had included a promise of a return to civilian authority within fairly short order. By the late 1970's the Torrijos regime began to move more seriously toward the restoration of civilian democratic rule. This may or may not have become a reality had Torrijos remained in power up until the 1984 elections. As history would have it, however, there was no opportunity to see if this promise would have been fulfilled had he lived. Noriega's subsequent turn as head of the military saw the blatant disregard for the proposed democratic reforms as two Presidents were required to step down from the office as a result of clashes with the National Guard power structure between the 1984 and 1989 elections.

The Torrijos regime was unique as it opened up channels of mass participation rather than squelching them as some of the other military regimes in Latin America had done (Priestley 2). Torrijismo incorporated aspects of social reform and populism and as a result Torrijos has been described as displaying a Bonapartist leadership style. The central element of Bonapartism is the ability of the government to operate relatively autonomously from social classes and political movements and to maintain the ability to arbitrate social conflict. Both populism and Bonapartism are seen as inseparable phenomena emerging from Latin America in the twentieth century and made possible by the class system (Soler, *Nación* 45,56). Torrijos has also been compared to other left leaning and progressive military figures and has been described as Nasserite in his style of governing, which refers to the adoption of social reforms and emphasizes the

strengthening of national identity in development (Ropp, “Cycles” 58). One of Torrijos’s contemporaries, General Juan Velasco Alvarado in Peru, has also been described as Nasserite and both Torrijos and Velasco appear to have had similar personal leadership styles (Vanden “Globalization” 5, Vargas Llosa 331). These observations and comparisons contribute to the notion that Panama under Omar Torrijos was a somewhat unique case in Latin America during this time, particularly as the 1970s saw a number of repressive right-wing military dictatorships throughout Latin America.

Torrijismo

While Panama City and the second largest city in the country, Colón, were fairly cosmopolitan cities at the time of the military coup, much of the rural areas remained undeveloped and lagged behind the urban areas in terms of social services, education, and infrastructure. Omar Torrijos was from an outlying province, Santiago de Veraguas, and perhaps in part because of this, he saw the need for an increased focus on the rural areas of the country that had not been reached by the government and social services in the past. Several of Torrijos’s social programs reflected this attempt to reach out to not only the citizens of the more rural areas of Panama but also those that had been marginalized in its major cities. The idea of “patrullaje domestico” allowed Torrijos to implement the concept of the “yunta pueblo gobierno”; both of which contained paternalist elements (Calzadilla 177).

The concept of the yunta pueblo-gobierno, roughly translated as the union between people and government, was promoted by the Torrijos regime and referred to the National Guard being in touch with the needs of the people and responsive to them. It

has been described as a way in which the National Guard could support Panama's economic and social development (Vargas 80). In June of 1969 a new bureaucratic office was created as a mechanism to assist in the implementation of the *yunta pueblo-gobierno* concept, which was DIGIDECOM (General Directorate for Community Development), whose purpose it was to supervise and direct the community development programs of the national government (Priestley 41).

The style of consultation Torrijos and his government employed was referred to as *patrullaje domestico*, or domestic patrolling, and it marked the other significant feature of the Torrijos regime and highlighted his personalistic style of governing. It refers to the term used for consulting with the population. This often consisted of official tours of the countryside during which Torrijos would “personally cater to the needs of the local population and order improvements for their benefit, including immediate cash handouts – a hybrid of the Alliance for Progress’ civic action program and the Iberic-American paternalist tradition” (Guevara Mann 117). Throughout Torrijos’s self-styled *proceso revolucionario* (revolutionary process) as it was referred to, another observer noted the personal interest exhibited by the General as he spent the “majority of his weekends in the small villages that dot rural Panama [exhibiting] a highly personalistic field style [as] he tours the countryside, talking with *campesinos* and attempting to expedite solutions of local problems” (Ropp, “Military Reformism” 56).

The informal town meetings over which Torrijos presided were the expression of the ideals of a responsive military government, which in turn enforced the view of the leader as folksy and in touch with the needs of the most marginalized of Panama’s

citizens. While this system can be lauded on the one hand as an attempt by the Torrijos regime to address the needs of a segment of the population that had gone virtually unheard of during much of the country's history, there are definite paternalistic implications inherent in such a system. The notion that Omar Torrijos was listening and would do his best to address a citizen's grievance contributed to his popularity but seems to indicate the fostering of a patron – client type relationship. As the campesinos and the urban poor received resolutions from the government that addressed immediate problems and concerns, it has been noted that the general feeling was one of gratitude, which resulted in the squelching of criticism towards the regime from these sectors of society and the formation of an unbalanced relationship based on obligation (Janson Pérez 41).

In addition to reaching out to rural peasants and the urban poor, the Torrijos regime co-opted various political and interest groups. Leftist groups, including the Communist Partido del Pueblo (People's Party), student groups, progressive intellectuals, and certain willing and prominent businessmen were given roles within the new regime. The FEP (Federation of Panamanian Students) was co-opted into the regime fairly shortly after Torrijos's consolidation of power. This was achieved by granting the student organization control of the National University and by awarding some of its key members important ministerial and sub ministerial positions. It was the combination of these groups along with urban and rural workers that allowed the regime to encounter fairly low levels of resistance and opposition, particularly when compared with other more repressive regimes in Latin America.

Economic Program

Like many progressive leaders during this era, Torrijos pursued economic policies associated with the United Nations' Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA) and the Alliance for Progress, which included the policy of import substitution industrialization, a pro-union labor code, agrarian reform, and rural development in general, as well as attempts to improve the nation's housing, public health, and education system (Conniff, *Panama* 129). Panama under Torrijos followed its own distinctive course in these policy prescriptions, however. The agrarian reform, for example, was not as extensive as it was in other Latin American countries. As a result, it was also not as controversial within the country. Much of the land that was redistributed was government owned and therefore the agrarian reform program was not seen as a significant threat to the wealthy landowning class in the country.

The military regime chose a combination of economic policies including the adoption of protectionist measures, expanding the financial and transit centers, and stimulating agricultural exports, which in turn provided some of the financing for the social programs implemented by the new government. The 1970 Banking Reform allowed unrestricted movement of money in and out of the country and provided for secrecy in maintaining accounts and processing transactions (Conniff *Panama*, 129). By 1976 the number of banks with branches in Panama increased to seventy-six from only five in 1960 and their deposits totaled \$11.3 billion compared to \$341 million in foreign bank deposits in 1968 (Priestley 29). Speaking before a group of American business leaders in New York City, Torrijos highlighted the positive aspects of the new military

regime in an effort to attract foreign investment. During his speech, he emphasized Panama's expanding markets and the ample resources that would benefit any international investor, while highlighting the new government that was "strengthening Panamanian democracy and creating more stable institutions that were better representing the people and enforcing equal treatment before the law with respect to contracts between businesses and individuals" (Torrijos, *Batalla* 29).

While encouraging international investment, the regime nationalized a number of enterprises, including the foreign owned utility company, Compañía Panameña de Fuerza y Luz, which was separated by the state into the IRHE (Instituto e Recursos Hidráulicos y Electrificación) and INTEL (Instituto Nacional de Telecomunicaciones), providing electrical and telephone services respectively. With the nationalization of such enterprises, the Torrijos regime expanded its bureaucratic base along with its power as it assumed control of the basic infrastructure services in the country (Janson Pérez 69).

Establishing a Model for Participatory Government 1972-1981

From the time of the military takeover until 1972, government rule was by decree and appointment. This period was marked by the authoritarian measures of abolishing the legislature, banning political parties, and gaining control of the media outlets. What marks 1972 as a turning point, or the start of a new period in the regime, was the establishment of a new Constitution and the attempt to institutionalize the regime. That year a Commission was set up, primarily made up of professional and middle class citizens, and given the task of replacing the 1946 constitution. The new legislative body created by the document ratified it later that same year. This Constitution granted Torrijos

power for six years and designated him as the Maximum Leader of the Revolution, with the power to appoint government ministers, National Guard members, Supreme Court members, and members of the Electoral Tribunal, among others. The National Assembly that had been abolished after the military coup was replaced by the Asamblea Nacional de Representantes de Corregimientos (ANCR), or National Assembly of Community Representatives, which was composed of 505 members each representing one of the small sub districts in the country, the *corregimiento*.¹¹

The new legislative body was described as an exhibition of *El Poder Popular*, or The People's Power, and local systems of representation were also introduced such as *Consejos Provinciales de Coordinación*, *Juntas Comunales* and *Juntas Locales*, (provincial coordinating councils and local community councils) (Calzadilla 178-9). This alteration in the system of representation marked an effort to bring politics and power to the grassroots level with the intent to incorporate those previously excluded from the government structure.¹² The first group of representatives to be elected under the new Constitution represented diverse socioeconomic groups and included peasants, middle-level farmers, and members of the urban working class. Over 70 percent of the national assembly – 350 representatives – were either nationalist or pro-Torrijos; sixty delegates were members of the Party of the People; fifty were former members of the traditional political parties; forty-four were independents; and one was a Christian Democrat

¹¹ The *corregimiento* was a unit that had survived from the time of Spanish colonization. The *corregimientos* were aggregated into sixty-four districts, which formed nine provinces plus the autonomous San Blas islands.

¹² The abolished National Assembly had consisted of representatives elected at the provincial level, where they were not required to permanently reside to run for the office.

(Priestley 77). Torrijos likened the adoption of these reforms and the emphasis on representation of rural and remote constituencies to a family situation in which the father dedicates more time to the sickest child or the child that lags furthest behind in school (Torrijos, *Batalla* 107). This rhetoric shows how Torrijos and his government sought to align themselves with the poor. The choice of words also suggests the fostering of a paternalistic relationship and the notion of empowerment from above.

The new legislature was to meet in October of each year and one of the powers it maintained was that of electing the president and the vice-president of the Republic. The question of how much influence this new legislative body would be able to exert within the Torrijos government seemed to be answered almost as soon as the task of electing the new President of the Republic was undertaken. Someone in the government decided to challenge Torrijos's candidate Basilio Lakas, who had served as President by appointment since 1969. However, when the final ballot was presented to the ANRC, only Lakas's name was on it (Priestley 80). The creation of a new Constitution and a revamped legislative body that was ostensibly better able to represent a wider cross-section of the Panamanian people marked a step toward institutionalizing the regime and the political program of Torrijismo and marked a move toward a more democratic system of government for the regime.

In addition to setting up a national legislative body, the 1972 Constitution provided for *juntas comunales* (community boards) to be set up in every *corregimiento*. The function of the community boards was essentially to implement government policies at the local level while simultaneously channeling all demands from *juntas locales* (local

community groups) to the top. One author who studied the new political structures created by the Torrijos administration summarized his view as to the effectiveness of this new local form of popular government:

The community boards were not adequately structured or financed to bring about either extensive rural growth or meaningful local and regional economic development. The boards were primarily political bodies assigned certain economic responsibilities without the skills, financial resources, and/or labor to perform the tasks set. Moreover, the boards were impeded – politically and bureaucratically – from taking creative steps to obtain the resources to carry out their obligation. Local vested interests and entrenched attitudes compounded the difficulties (Priestley 111).

Popular Reforms in Labor, Health Care, Government, and Infrastructure

Speaking before a group of Panamanian laborers, Torrijos identified the major groups that were most affected by the October 11th Revolution, namely the young, the campesinos (rural peasants), and the workers of the republic (Torrijos, *Batalla* 46). In fact, the populist program put forth by the Torrijos regime relied quite heavily on these groups for support and maintaining political legitimacy. In the same speech, Torrijos also exhibited some of his more pragmatic tendencies by declaring that the notion that labor and industry are natural enemies was false and had historically contributed to more problems than it had solved (Torrijos, *Batalla* 47). New labor legislation enacted during the Torrijos regime set out to protect the unions, establish a minimum wage, provide for collective bargaining and adjust the severance pay and working conditions of workers and domestics (Rouquié, *Military* 325). A new labor code was introduced in 1972, some of the features which included protection against arbitrary dismissal, decentralization of labor justice, emphasis on collective bargaining, an additional month's bonus payment

for all workers, and an obligatory discount of union dues (Guevara Mann 116). In his own words, Torrijos spoke of the new labor code as one that would “humanize working conditions and effectively protect the workingman” (Torrijos, *Batalla* 86).

On the health care front, the government created comités de salud, or local community health groups, organized by the Ministry of Health, which set out to involve both urban and rural communities in establishing a more effective health care system and one that could reach out to the communities in the country that needed it most. Created in 1970, by 1974 there were at least 800 health committees in more than 500 corregimientos, and the program was seen as one of the most democratic participatory structures within the regime during the time, encouraging “full, active, and aggressive participation in the local communities” (Priestley 101).

Before the Torrijos administration officially adopted its model for community based government structures with the ratification of the 1972 constitution, it conducted one notable experiment from which it would base some of its policies in the coming years. The citizens of the town of San Miguelito, just northeast of Panama City, were particularly vocal in their initial opposition to the military government after the coup. True to form, the Torrijos administration sought a way in which to co-opt the influential members of the community in an effort to gain support for the new regime. The solution was the creation of a special district, which granted San Miguelito the status of an autonomous municipality, meaning that it was no longer subordinated to the municipality of Panama City. The experiment would prove short lived, however, as conflicts between the government and those in the San Miguelito district arose. The experiment came to an

end in 1972 when the regime introduced the new national assembly structure.

Under the Torrijos administration, an aggressive road construction program was initiated, primarily feeder roads to link rural communities to regional or major arterial roads and markets. The program was centralized in the Ministry of Public Works and was financed largely by the Inter-American Development Bank (Priestley 108). In addition to these more tangible reforms throughout the country, Torrijos's rhetoric included the call to improve the "social infrastructure" through the agrarian reform programs as well as through community development programs, one task of which was finding community based leaders to assist in the implementation of these programs as, in his words, a project is only as great or as effective as the quality and the greatness of those that lead it (Torrijos, *Batalla* 22).

Efforts at Land Reform

In 1969 the Torrijos regime initiated a gradual and nonradical agrarian reform program. For the most part the land that was taken over was that of unproductive latifundia, foreign landholdings, and government owned land (Rouquié, *Military* 325). Torrijos's agrarian reform program offered technical and financial assistance for agricultural production; promoted peasant organization, and involved the Panamanian state, for the first time, in agro-industrial projects. The initial idea for peasant settlements was developed by the IICA (Interamerican Institute of Agricultural Sciences) whereby the asentamiento (settlement), which consisted of around fifty families, was conceived as a socioeconomic enterprise where land was held on an individual basis but farming and other work was done on a collective basis (Priestley 61). In 1970, the National Peasant

Confederation (CNC) was established and an agreement was made between Torrijos and the People's Party whereby the regime handed leadership of the confederation over to the Marxist party. By 1972, 200,000 hectares of land had been distributed to about 6,000 heads of families and about fifty peasant cooperatives had been established along with programs for supplying credit, agricultural instruction, and technical assistance (Ropp, "Military Reformism" 56). Despite communist involvement in the regime's agrarian policy, Torrijos successfully avoided making revolutionary reforms that might antagonize Panama's landowners and other important constituents such as local business and international capital.

The economic problems that befell Panama in the mid-1970s took their toll on the regime's reformist leanings and the agrarian reform program was no exception. As costs associated with agricultural production climbed, many of the settlers went into debt. This factor combined with others such as production-oriented government policies that tended to work against the peasant settlements meant that over time many of the peasants left the asentamientos and sought work on latifundias or with large industrial agricultural companies (Priestley 68). In conclusion, the agrarian reform program under the Torrijos regime was ultimately of limited success. The political and economic realities of the era, along with the fact that the reform program was not particularly aggressive or far reaching in comparison to other redistribution policies in Latin America meant that there were both internal and external limitations placed on it. In addition, there are paternalistic implications inherent in the administration of the agrarian reform program as noted by one scholar:

The relationship of the settlements with the Torrijos regime thus had all the features of political clientelism. Torrijos, the charismatic leader, was the patron who set the boundaries of the relationship. At the bottom were the clients, the settlements. Through the semiautonomous CRA, Torrijos provided them with land, credit, and a political identity in return for their political support. CONAC served the role of intermediary, gaining national political power for itself in the process as long as it did not push agrarian reform beyond the limits that suited Torrijos (Priestley 65).

Establishment of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD)

Political parties were abolished by official decree in 1969. It was not until 1978 that an official political party for the regime was established. This runs contrary to most historical revolutions in which the party, or at least a cohesive ideology, is in place prior to ascendancy to power (Materno Vasquez 206). Up until this time the legitimacy of the regime lay in the personal charisma and populist rhetoric of the head of the National Guard and with the military itself. The PRD was created as the party of the Torrijos government and marked the period when political parties were reintroduced into the political arena.

The ideology of the PRD in its inception included elements of nationalism, anticolonialism, Latin American solidarity, cultural identity, and anti-imperialism, with an emphasis on international relations and reaching out to all provinces and social classes (Smith 226). It was formed from the seat of power as a way of incorporating the regime's program, which was essentially to continue the revolutionary process and to develop Panama as an independent and sovereign nation (CELA 8). The PRD was organized around and espoused the teachings of Torrijos. Upon adoption of the new political party, the first circular to be submitted and around which the new party was to organize consisted of quotations from speeches that Torrijos had given around the

country, which was meant to relate the principles upon which the PRD was founded (See Appendix D).

The Panama Canal

Perhaps one of the most salient characteristics of the Torrijos regime was its nationalistic bent. The military government demonstrated a very pronounced nationalism, which found its expression in such acts as the expulsion of the Peace Corps in 1971, siding with Panamanian labor in disputes with foreign owned companies, and nationalizing the gas and electric companies in 1972 (Rouquié, *Military* 321). These initial nationalistic expressions by the regime set the stage for the most significant demonstration of the era, which centered on the issue of sovereignty over the Panama Canal. This matter had historically been contentious and had caused tension between the two nations. Talks between the two sides had been attempted throughout the 1960s but had usually broken down or resulted in smaller concessions on the part of the United States. One notable change that occurred during the 1970s was that Torrijos was able to successfully shift the issue of Panama's gaining control of the Canal from a bilateral issue into an international one.

In 1973, Panama occupied a temporary seat on the UN Security Council. Through the lobbying efforts of Torrijos, Foreign Minister Juan Antonio Tack and UN Ambassador Aquilino Boyd, a Security Council meeting was held in Panama in March of that year. Torrijos addressed the council with a call for renewed negotiations on the question of the rights to control the Canal. In a speech given on March 15, 1973, Torrijos described the relationship between the US and Panama as one of neocolonialism,

whereby “political, cultural and economic forces were being imposed on Panama and were motivated not by a desire to promote development but rather to control it” (Torrijos, *Batalla* 118). He further called upon moral support from the world as the only way in which a weaker nation could gain support, adding that the Panamanian people were running out of patience with the situation (Torrijos, *Batalla* 121). There was only one veto of the motion and one abstention, by the US and Great Britain respectively. It had become clear that world public opinion was increasingly on the side of Panama. The shift in the official Panamanian stance from previous talks with the United States proved successful as it presented the problem as one of global concern and not just a bilateral negotiation.

Jimmy Carter won the presidency in 1976 and talks between both sides continued. By 1977, a draft that was acceptable to both parties had been agreed upon by the heads of state. In mid-October of that same year, Carter and Torrijos issued a statement of understanding to address the more controversial issues on either side. Panama wanted assurances that the treaty would not permit US intervention in domestic affairs, however the Senate had insisted on maintaining the US right to defend the canal and to transit its warships ahead of all other vessels (Conniff, *Panama* 135). The signing of the Panama Canal Treaties on September 7, 1977 by the two heads of state in Washington, D.C. seemed the culmination of the nationalistic and anti-colonial movement that had existed since the 1903 Hay-Bunau Varilla treaty was passed. Upon his return to Panama, Torrijos was greeted by some 200,000 supporters as left-wing demonstrations denounced the treaty for failing to bring about an immediate US withdrawal and “hundreds of

Americans living in the Canal Zone conducted a solemn procession garbed in black and carrying symbolic coffins, to mourn the imminent passing of their privileged way of life” (Deming et. al. 46).

The most significant terms of the treaty included a phased turnover process of the military bases and US controlled areas to Panama, the Panama Canal Commission to be run by a Panamanian administrator beginning in 1990, and the surrender of control of the waterway at noon on December 31, 1999. While deliberation continued in the Senate, Torrijos conducted a national plebiscite on the ratification of the treaty in October of 1977, which won by a two-thirds majority. In March 1978, the Senate approved the treaty, 68 to 32, and on the 1st of October of 1979 the treaties went into effect. The final proviso that emerged from the statement of understanding and which was essential to its passing in the senate stated that the US could in fact intervene unilaterally to protect the Canal (Conniff, *Panama* 136).

AUTHORITARIANISM AND “PERSONALISMO”: LIMITS TO DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The Military as the Fourth Branch of Government

Panama's military has not enjoyed an especially long history particularly when viewed against some of the other forces in Latin America. Shortly after the 1903 treaties were signed, the United States assumed control of the defense of the young nation. Panama became a protectorate of the US and the limited fighting force that existed on the isthmus was promptly disbanded and disarmed by the United States and relegated to a small police force. Although the US effectively dismantled the Panamanian military, such as it was, shortly after independence from Colombia, there remained significant military intervention in domestic politics throughout its history. However, instead of a national military institution intervening in civil and political matters, the US army took on the role and stepped in a number of times to quell unrest (Ritter 55).

It was not until the 1950s under Remón that attempts were made to professionalize the police force and the transition from police to National Guard was begun. The officers in the new National Guard received their training in the military academies in Latin America. Included in this first generation of Panama's professional soldiers were Omar Torrijos and Manuel Noriega. For these men, as for Remón before them, the military provided a way to elevate one's social status, which had historically been a somewhat difficult task for lower and middle class Panamanians. The route through military school and a chance to gain prominence as an officer in the National Guard was a way to gain power and respect. In this regard, the military was effective in

creating a new social and professional class that would ultimately control its government for over twenty years.

One author noted that the rise of the military force in Panama, among other things, was a direct result of the needs of the United States during the particular time period in which the National Guard flourished (Guevara Mann 86). The policy of containment that was in effect during the height of the Cold War set the framework for US assistance in professionalizing the National Guard. This assistance came in the form of money and training, perhaps most notably at the US Army School of the Americas. Established in 1946, the institution trained military officers and enlisted men in a variety of skills and doctrine. Initially, most of the students were US soldiers, but after 1954 a majority of students were Latin American; between 1950 and 1986 the School of the Americas had trained 57,000 Latin American military, policemen, and civilians, including 3,554 members of the Panamanian National Guard (Lindsay-Poland 106). Between 1960 and 1968 Panama received a total of \$3.1 million through the Military Assistance Program (MAP), with most of the funds being used for military training in counterinsurgency and civic action (Guevara Mann 86). US policy effectively reinforced the National Guard as an ally against Communism and any other reactionary forces that may have been lurking in the domestic sphere. The stage was set for a military takeover as the National Guard gained increasing power throughout the 1960s as a result of domestic political realities and US involvement.

La Acción Cívica, or civic action, was a program established by the Torrijos regime that involved military assistance in community projects. Soldiers were dispatched

to remote areas of the country to help with construction of new government projects, as well as community-centered activities. The main function of the program was grassroots community assistance, particularly in rural Panama (De la Rosa and Villar 65). Thus the military was involved not only in national politics but also in the daily life of the citizenry as the National Guard played an institutionalized role in the local political system through the Acción Cívica program and in essence the military became a fourth branch of government, as the other branches were actually constitutionally required to act in “harmonic collaboration” with it (Ropp, “Cycles” 512).

The relative distance that the National Guard had maintained from the political arena, save for the Remón years, is seen as one reason why it was able to garner legitimacy within a fairly short amount of time and with a significant number of the population. The fact that there was no clear ideological agenda within the National Guard prior to Torrijos’s consolidation of power allowed him to be able to devote the regime to a progressive agenda while at the same time largely maintaining the status quo. By this logic, the National Guard was “an alternate power center, unbound by past commitments of either a social or ideological sort” (Priestley 118).

Violations of Civil Liberties

After the military coup brought the junta to power in 1968, the national assembly fled, political parties were banned, and limitations were placed on freedom of speech. In addition, the new government took over control of the media. The military coup violated a number of central democratic tenets in establishing the new government and the steps it took in doing so, namely that of annulling the 1946 Constitution, placing the political

system subordinate to the National Guard, and annulling the principles of separation of powers and individual rights (Bernal 46-50).

In terms of targeted repression of the opposition, the Torrijos regime was not as brutal as other infamous Latin American dictatorships. However, there are several well-documented and often cited cases, including the disappearance of Hector Gallegos and the death of Floyd Britton. Father Hector Gallegos, a Columbian priest, ministered to the poor in a rural part of the interior of Panama in the province of Veraguas and espoused the progressive ideals of liberation theology to his congregants. It seems his attempts at mobilizing the peasants in his parish were not sanctioned by the government and in addition were causing problems for one of Torrijos's relatives who lived in the region. He disappeared in June 1971 and was last seen with several members of the National Guard who had picked him up for questioning. This "disappearance" placed a great strain on church-state relations early on in the Torrijos regime and prompted the first major organized opposition since the earliest days following the coup (Priestley 46). As the Catholic clergy and other Panamanians who opposed the regime seemed to be preparing for battle, the Torrijos regime stood firm and invoked the importance of national interest and unity over the case. The Archbishop of Panama, Monsignor Marcos McGrath, was faced with a dilemma and in the end, the church backed down. Torrijos had been able to successfully diffuse the situation.

Opposition from ultra-left wing groups was also suppressed, at times violently, during the initial stages of the military government (LaFeber 128). One leftist intellectual and activist, Floyd Britton, was detained the day after the military coup but was still able

to direct protests from jail. As a consequence he was moved to the remote penal colony island of Coiba where he was killed at the hands of National Guardsmen in November 1969 (Janson Pérez 52). In addition to dissenting leftist groups who were singled out and dealt with violently by the regime, there was organized opposition consisting of ousted President Arnulfo Arias's supporters. This group formed a small, armed guerrilla movement that was active in the mountains of Chiriqui province. Led by then Captain Manuel Antonio Noriega, the National Guard dealt with the guerillas with arms as well as by burning, looting, or confiscating the farms and property of the known members of the movement (Janson Pérez 49).

While these examples illustrate the most violent documented cases of military repression, there were also dissenting citizens who went into political exile during the Torrijos years. Business and civic organizations in Panama City and in the province of Chiriqui denounced the Torrijos regime as communist and formed organized protests, which were put down by the military. Strong dissent against the government was not permitted. There was a move by the Torrijos regime toward more democratic provisions, including Constitutional amendments, during the late 1970s. Notably lacking from this new wave of reforms, however, were provisions for the full protection of human rights and freedom of expression (Ropp, "Cycles" 512). A law passed in February 1978 limited press activity and threatened fines and the closing of any media outlet that was in violation of these new restrictions; something that clearly ran counter to principles set forth in the 1972 Constitution regarding freedoms of speech (Pineda 110-111).

Government Corruption and Increasing Foreign Debt

Panama has a relatively small population and an elite group of society has typically controlled most of the political and economic power. As a result, a highly personalistic form of social relations has evolved, which in turn fosters nepotism, favoritism, and corruption, in addition to provoking resentment from those not in the positions of wealth and power (Janson Pérez 5). Writing after the first three years of the Torrijos regime, one observer noted that corruption seemed to have been lessened when compared to previous elected governments, but that the practice of giving relatives lucrative government jobs had continued and was even carried on by Torrijos himself (Ropp, "Military Reformism" 57). Another observer argued that during the Torrijos regime, "economic mismanagement and widespread graft, financed by foreign capital, brought alarming indebtedness and, as a consequence, an actual deepening of dependence" (Guevara Mann 150). The general consensus seems to be that government corruption was a factor throughout Panama's political history and it continued under the Torrijos regime.

During the years of military rule, the state bureaucracy swelled to over 150,000 employees, many inefficient state corporations were created, and the labor code had effectively increased domestic wages, which kept prices of locally produced goods too high to compete in regional and global markets (Ropp, "Things Fall Apart" 104). While the reforms of 1972 prompted increased hopes for a new method of governing for Panama, by the late 1970s economic stagnation had taken its toll on the country:

Economic restraints, precipitated by increased public debt, the failure of state enterprise, and the failure of agrarian reform; unfulfilled expectations raised by the Torrijos-Carter Canal Treaty; and the 1978 elections brought to the surface the personalism, corruption, and political incapacity of the National Assembly (Smith 221).

While Torrijos espoused populist programs in the rural areas of the country, much of the economic life in and around the capital city remained intact insofar as the banking and financial sector. A liberal banking law enacted in 1970 allowed for the establishment of numerous international financial institutions, which made Panama a significant financial center in Latin America. The influx of foreign capital as a result provided money with which the regime was able to finance some of its reform programs. As a consequence of this increased state spending, Panama's foreign debt rose from \$286 million in 1970 to \$2.1 billion in 1980 (current figures), which represented the highest per capita indebtedness in Latin America in 1980 (Guevara Mann 121). Another substantial cost to the state was the nationalization of the US-owned Compañía Panameña de Fuerza y Luz, which provided electric power to Panama City and Colón (Koster 138). The Torrijos regime also involved the government in productive, export-oriented activities as the state acquired banana plantations, sugar mills, a citrus fruit processing plant, a cement factory, several large hydroelectric projects and set up a national radio network; in addition to these state-run projects, military expenditures increased during the Torrijos years as National Guard membership grew from approximately 4,000 in 1968 to approximately 8,000 in 1979 with military expenditure increasing from approximately \$9 million in 1970 to \$42 million in 1979 (Guevara Mann 126-7).

Ideology of Torrijos

While most would characterize Omar Torrijos as left-leaning ideologically, he often exhibited a great deal of pragmatism with regard to his policies. An oft-repeated quote of his was “ni la derecha ni la izquierda” (neither to the right nor the left). As a consequence, his political ideology is somewhat muddled. A propensity to waver on ideological points has been acknowledged by those closest to him, as was his tendency to swing to opposite ends of the political spectrum depending on the given situation (Materno Vasquez 204). While he espoused certain populist principles and put them into practice through the policies outlined in the previous chapter, he did not shy away from attracting capital and political support from both foreign and Panamanian business leaders. The establishment of the bureaucratic state sector was accompanied by the official promotion of transnational and multinational investment in the economy (Soler, *Historia* 94). An apparent example of ideological conflict was the establishment of diplomatic ties with Cuba in 1974 and Torrijos’s official visit to the island in January 1976 along with his anticolonial stance in joining the nonaligned movement for developing nations, contrasted to the sheltering of the exiled Shah of Iran in Panama at then President Jimmy Carter’s request shortly after the Iranian Revolution.

One analyst noted that Torrijos was the unifying force of the PRD, made up of diverse groups including businessmen and Marxist intellectuals, such that after his death the future of the regime was once again in the hands of the officers (Rouquié, *Military* 326). The personalism that seems largely inherent in Torrijismo places the focus on personality rather than political institutions. This would seem to point at least in part to

the appeal of the caudillo, or military strongman, an image that continues to hold an appeal in Latin America.¹³ In what would prove to be the final interview given by Torrijos, noted Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa compared him to Fidel Castro and General Velasco Alvarado of Peru, and described him as, among other things, charismatic and a force of nature and noted that a force of nature is not bound by ideology but rather is characterized as chaotic, pragmatic, and uncomfortable with the abstract (Vargas Llosa 331-333).

In addition to this display of pragmatic leadership, one scholar noted several non-ideological reasons Torrijos may have had for following a reformist course after taking control of the government. One of these was the necessity to reach out to marginal socioeconomic groups since he came to power essentially isolated from urban elites and the US; the other was that there was a fairly low cost associated with appealing to these social classes, which was illustrated by the implementation of the agricultural reform program in the parceling out of readily available state land (Ropp, *Panamanian Politics* 48).

Political pragmatism was very much a reflection of Omar Torrijos's personal politics and may explain the difficulties of Torrijismo continuing as a significant social movement some twenty years after the death of its founder. As Torrijos signified different things to different people, and sometimes was accused of sending conflicting messages or playing to completely different ideologies, the personalistic character of the movement is in evidence. While it is not being argued that there were not positive

¹³Caudillismo has a long history in Panamanian politics, and is defined by the ability to manipulate the emotions of the electorate in its reliance on paternalist, and sometimes messianic, overtones (CELA 2).

aspects to the regime in terms of greater social inclusion, it does bear reflection as to how cohesive an ideology Torrijos was able to establish and why the institutionalization of his regime was not able to successfully survive his death. The ideological pragmatism he displayed may be one of the reasons why there tends to be such a disparity of opinion when reviewing the literature on Torrijos and his political agenda.

A member of the Torrijos government described Torrijos as ideologically unsure in his political orientation initially but ultimately saw him emerging as a social democrat (Materno Vasquez 203). However, control of the military, along with the employment of historical stereotypes in furthering his public image, provided for a particular type of social democrat, one that fell in line with Latin American political culture. The combination of pragmatic and ideological motivations exhibited by Torrijos is specific to the era and makes labels particularly difficult.

DEMOCRACY IN PANAMA

A Historical Perspective

While Panama became a constitutional democracy upon gaining its independence, there were a number of contested political events prior to 1968. These political and institutional crises, which at times turned violent, brought about the removal of the President of the Republic in 1931, 1941, 1949, 1951, and 1955 (Pereira 63). In all of those instances, however, the particular crisis was resolved through constitutional provisions. Panama, unlike many of its Latin American neighbors, did not have a continual history of military intervention in the political sphere from the time of independence. The only military head of state in Panama prior to Torrijos was José Antonio Remón, who was elected to the office of President.

From the drafting of the initial democratic constitution in 1904, the president, vice-president, legislators, councilmen, and mayors were popularly elected every four years. The President of the Republic was initially elected through an Electoral College system, then from 1920 until 1968 by popular vote (Gandásegui, *Democracia* 11). The National Assembly of Community Representatives voted for President in 1972 and 1978. The drafting of the 1972 constitution was not the first time that the document had been replaced. In 1941 and again in 1946 there were successive versions drawn up, each with the introduction of more socially inclusive tenets, designed to protect workers and the popular masses. Despite these updated versions, the social and economic realities of the country were not to be transformed by these new documents (Gandásegui, *Democracia* 13). Attempts to institutionalize a government structure were frustrated by such frequent

alterations to the political system.

Proponents of participatory democracy argue that Panama was historically a democracy only in the formal sense of the term as the majority of the country was excluded from real participation (Candenado 27). This was a result of the fact that a small minority of the population wielded control of the political sphere throughout much of Panama's history. In addition, with the support of the United States and the lack of a domestic military force, the political elites of the country had no significant challenge to their power, as was the case in other Latin American countries. Among other factors, this situation contributed to minimal efforts to overhaul the limited democratic system of governance in place. These circumstances in turn led to the declining legitimacy of political actors and institutions in Panama as charges of corruption, electoral fraud, and the lack of a broad representation of interests and social classes among the existing political parties served to undermine the political system. It was these conditions that would allow for the National Guard to take control of the government structure. One scholar views Panama's history as characterized by struggles in the conceptions of democracy favored by the conflicting classes in Panamanian society; specifically that the oligarchy favors delegative representative democracy with a strong executive, while the subordinate classes are more inclined to favor a parliamentary, community-based system (Castro, "Escribir" 90).

National Identity

The idea of a cohesive national identity is considered a prerequisite for democratic states. While differences exist within any given society, it is the notion of an

overriding set of principles or characteristics to set a country and its citizens apart that perpetuates a sense of a shared destiny or uniqueness. One author characterizes Panama as being constituted by two conflicting groups, the urban whites in the transit sector tied to the global system, and those marginalized groups in the interior of the country that lack access to the economic benefits of the canal area (Ropp, "Militarism" 116-118).

Therefore, problems with democratization in Panama may have stemmed, at least in part, from the lack of a clearly defined national identity. The marked social divisions between the oligarchy and the majority of the population have existed throughout Panama's history from the time of Spanish colonization and have affected the political culture of the country as a result. This phenomenon is decidedly not unique to Panama, as the gap between rich and poor in Latin America is typically very pronounced.

The years Torrijos was in power have been characterized as the most democratic period in Panama's history in terms of mass participation and the sense of national unity, particularly when contrasted with the political ambiguity that preceded it (Smith 221). One observer of Panamanian politics noted that while Panama was not democratic during this period of military rule, the military did establish a variety of new political institutions that had the effect of generating some of the preconditions for the establishment of procedural democracy, including a more universally held sense of citizenship (Ropp, "Militarism" 123). The ideas of citizenship and national identity are important when considering the impact that the Torrijos regime had on Panama's political history. In a speech given in the province of Chiriqui, Torrijos claimed the National Guard and its civilian counterparts in the revolutionary government were dedicated to those who had

been overlooked by previous governments, namely “the Indian, the campesino, and the poor; those groups who had not had any genuine contact with any public servant in the past” (Torrijos, *Batalla* 54). This type of rhetoric furthered the notion that the government established during the Torrijos regime was inclusive and sought to incorporate a majority of its citizens.

System of Government

Under the Torrijos regime, the power of the executive was considerable, as was evidenced by Article 277 of the 1972 Constitution, which granted Torrijos the role of Maximum Leader. On the other hand, Torrijos spoke of resisting a top-down model of organization for the government. Thus the idea of representation at the level of the *corregimiento* was conceived, with the notion that the political organ would start at the level of the *corregimiento*, move up through the various government ministries, and finally on to the capital (Torrijos, *Batalla* 65). The establishment of the Asamblea Nacional de Representantes de Corregimientos (ANRC), or National Assembly of Community Representatives, was presented as a step toward greater representation of the nation’s populace. The fact that representatives were required to reside in the local region they represented was meant to ensure that the community would elect one of its own and was also meant to eliminate the opportunities for would-be politicians from the urban areas of the country from winning rural seats as a result of money or political influence.

During a speech before the ANRC, Torrijos downplayed the significance of the Supreme Court and emphasized the importance of the *corregidores* in promoting social

harmony in the country as most citizens were not likely to come into contact with the Supreme Court and thus it remained a system that was available exclusively to the wealthy: “Our people don’t know of judicial power, of public ministers or of Circuit Judges...for our people the 500 corregidores are justices of the peace” (Torrijos, Batalla 73-74). This suggests the empowering of local organs of government. However, this quote illustrates the relative weakness of the judicial system in the country as the commander in chief challenges its legitimacy before the assembled legislators, and calls into question its effectiveness in the democratic process. This has often been the case throughout Latin America, as the judicial branch of government is typically subordinate to the other two, particularly the executive.

Role of the United States

The United States played no small role in the development, or lack thereof, of democracy before, during, and after the Torrijos regime. While extolling the virtues of liberal democracy on a global scale, US foreign policy frequently followed a more pragmatic course throughout Latin America. Relations with Panama were no exception. The invasions to restore order or quell unrest, the support of coups at different times in Panama’s history, and the general promotion of US interests in the region regardless of democratic procedures and principles illustrate this point. Dependency theory has been employed to describe the relationship between the United States and Panama whereby Panama, as a younger country, is more fragile in its political and economic development and thus the inequalities between the two countries are amplified and deepened as Panama takes on a subordinate, or dependent, role. The result is the subsequent

exploitation of Panama's most valuable resource, the transit zone (Castro, "Escribir" 88).

The United States role as a colonial type power for much of the twentieth century inhibited the democratization process in Panama. Military interventions to quell unrest, interference in domestic politics, and the establishment of the Canal Zone occupying the transit zone meant that the Panamanian government at times took on a subordinate role to the powerful US presence. The oligarchy was firmly established in terms of political power on the isthmus and was backed by the United States, a factor that limited opportunities for participatory forms of democracy or at least the inclusion of historically marginalized groups. The reorganization of the police force into the National Guard occurred in large part as a result of US military aid and training, ostensibly in the fight against communism. Prior to its reorientation under Torrijos's leadership, The National Guard was called in to put down political protests, at times violently.

The signing of the Canal treaties of 1977 marked the beginning of a new era in terms of Panamanian sovereignty. While this victory may have been largely symbolic at the time, as official US presence would remain on the isthmus for over twenty years, the nationalist movement was empowered. However, Operation Just Cause once again brought back feelings of resentment, as a foreign power was able to effectively decide the fate of the political system in a sovereign nation. It should be acknowledged that there were large segments of the population who were in favor of Noriega's removal from power. Nevertheless, the intervention once again called the legitimacy of the Panamanian government into question particularly with the orchestrated backing by the US of the Endara administration. The return to formal democracy and the reconstruction

of the government as a consequence had the effect of minimizing the role of popular involvement and participation.

While the role of the US and the relationship between the two countries must be addressed in any study of the democratization process in Panama, it is important to note that domestic historical and political forces also shaped the process. In particular, this refers to the persistent dominance of the urban elite class and the division between those in the transit zone and those in the rural interior provinces who were effectively excluded from political participation for much of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the economic contributions made by the United States to Panama are significant, and there was a positive side to US presence in terms of the creation of jobs and the lasting economic benefits provided by the Panama Canal.

Democratization Theory and the Torrijos Regime

Beginning with the modern study of political science, there have been competing schools of thought within the field of democratic theory. Various aspects of democracy have been emphasized as inherent to the concept and consequently scholarship has evolved to address each of these, including the theories of pluralism, elitism, and popular democracy. In addition to competing conceptions as to how democracy does (or should) work one finds conflicting conceptions as to what constitutes a modern democracy. In this vein lie the distinctions between procedural democracies and more fully realized democracies along the lines of popular democratic theory. While many non-industrialized countries today have established procedural democratic governments, significant political and economic instability remains along with persistent

socioeconomic inequalities and the marginalization of the masses from the democratic project. This points to the fact that many of these nations are democracies in name only, and lack more substantive measures in order to adequately address the needs of its citizens. One author describes these variations in definition as follows:

...there is a narrowly legalist approach, sometimes associated with the State Department, which equates 'democracy' with the formal procedures of electoral consultation apparently without regard to the broader political and social context that gives the process its meaning. A second shade of meaning underlays the thinking of the Socialist International about the promotion of democracy, with more emphasis on the political and organizational freedoms available to the lower classes. A third variant is implicit in much conservative thinking about democracy both in Europe and in the USA. Here, emphasis on the freedom of the (abstractly conceived) 'individual' and his/her protection from collectivism can legitimize a restrictive form of 'democracy' weighted in favor of the dominant classes, recognizing few social rights and classifying many forms of mass politics as unconstitutional (Whitehead 45).

While few would claim the first of these definitions describes a fully realized democratic state, the debate between the remaining two definitions exists and is the point of departure for much of the literature in the field. Those who supported the Torrijos regime and defend its democratic ideals subscribe to the belief in promoting political freedom, expression and effective participation among the lower classes, while the opposition to Torrijos would in part subscribe to the more conservative definition. In addition, one could add a fourth conception of democracy based on effective participation. Popular, or participatory, democracy is the model upon which the Torrijos regime aligned itself. Factors that are attributed to the concept of popular democracy, as opposed to merely a procedural definition, include effective participation for a majority of the population,

competing political parties, a plurality of different groups represented in the government, and respect for minority rights as manifest in a real way in the decision making process. In addition, this type of democracy brings in economic elements such as equal access to opportunity and social elements such as the existence of adequate educational and health care systems. As opposed to procedural conceptions of democracy, participatory democracy deals with power and the ability for individuals and groups to exercise it.

In addition to questions of what constitutes a democratic state, another oft-discussed topic in democratization literature is the tendency in many Latin American nations to oscillate between authoritarian and democratic governments; one of the reasons given for this relates to the historical patterns of economic and political growth that have hindered development in Latin America (Ropp, "Militarism" 111-113). For non industrial, or developing, countries authoritarian regimes have been viewed as necessary in order to catch up to the industrialized nations. This is because democratic governments are often seen as particularly weak and ineffectual in encouraging development, particularly in a rapid fashion (Whitehead 8). The assertion that democracies are not necessarily more efficient economically or administratively and are not likely to appear "more orderly, consensual, stable, or governable than the autocracies they replace" points to some of the shortfalls of the democratic model for developing nations (Schmitter and Karl 49). Thus, this reasoning often concludes that democracies are not necessarily the most effective system in promoting development. Thus the case for alternative models for developing countries is made, namely a kind of centralized

system that would foster development. However, this approach leaves out the question of development for whom – the elite or the masses.

The limits of political development for developing nations adopting democratic principles and procedures leads to a challenge of the assumption that liberal democracy is the endpoint for all nation states. This reasoning, which is often assumed in the literature, implies that the nations in question are being evaluated against a Western European or Anglo-American model. A consequence of this assumption is that military regimes in Latin America tend to be viewed as anomalies in the advance toward democratization. Rather than seeing those military regimes as aberrations, it is conceivable that in some instances they emerged as a necessary reaction to a crisis of legitimacy of the political parties in power, which were historically and at times notoriously, corrupt (Rouquié, “Demilitarization” 108). Thus it is unwise to view the Torrijos regime and political dominance by the National Guard in Panama between 1968 and 1989 as an inconsistency that was corrected by the US intervention and the reestablishment of procedural democracy. Instead, the causes that brought about the Torrijos era and the Panamanian social and political structure from which it emerged need to be examined. While the Torrijos regime failed to institutionalize a model of government based on popular participation, it did illustrate an alternative to past elitist forms of government and showed Panamanians that there were other ways in which power could be distributed and exercised.

It is arguable as to how successfully actual power was distributed as Torrijos was the uncontested leader of Panama and its head of state throughout the period under study.

Speculation as to whether the transition to civilian government would have become a reality by 1984 is moot. His unexpected death led to the subsequent power struggle that would keep the military firmly in power until it was forcibly removed and dismantled by the United States military. During the late 1970s and 1980s, military officers willingly and peacefully turned power over to civilians in Peru, Ecuador, Honduras and Guatemala and were scheduled to do the same in Panama by the 1984 elections. The critical point is that in each of these instances, the democratization process required the use of military force at a key juncture (Dominguez 38). Ultimately, however, the government model sought by Torrijos and those progressive factions of his government was not institutionalized as a result of the changes that were made to the system both during the Noriega regime and particularly after the dismantling of the National Guard and many mechanisms of popular participation following Operation Just Cause.

Democracy in Panama – 1968-1981

It has been noted that mainstream democratization studies tend to emphasize democratic procedures and principles rather than more substantive measures. This is in part due to the fact that it is easier to quantify rules and procedures than more abstract concepts such as power relationships within a political system. Throughout democratic theory and democratization research are a number of definitions, indexes, and models with which to evaluate existing political systems. The use of an established index for quantifying democracy in this study reflects an attempt to view the Torrijos regime against a definition of democracy that is widely recognized. Since 1972, Freedom House, a non-profit and nonpartisan human rights organization founded in the United States has

published an annual assessment of state freedom. This is done with the use of established criteria upon which each country is then rated and designated as free, partly free, or not free, with varying degrees possible within each category. One of the uses of such a tool is to track democratization in developing countries by measuring the progression, or lack thereof, of a particular country in its path toward procedural democratization. This rating system proves useful when examining the conflicting aspects of the regime, however, the Freedom House survey is viewed as biased because it employs Western democratic principles and emphasizes procedural rather than participatory elements. It has been noted that “converting democratic liberalism into a mere set of procedural rules governing collective decisions tends to obscure the fact that no set of rules suffices to define concrete practices, that is, the activities in which specific actors interpret, negotiate, and apply those rules” (Nun 9). For this reason the use of surveys such as Freedom House, or other similar indices, often lack substantive explanatory power as an attempt at quantifying a complex and multidimensional concept such as democracy. The Freedom House survey, therefore, represents what has been referred to as formal democracy, or a set of rules and criteria used when establishing a country as democratic. As stated previously, the point of departure in democratization studies lies primarily in competing conceptions of democracy. As such, when examining the Torrijos regime and any democratic qualities it exhibited, the definition of democracy being employed will largely affect the research.

Freedom House uses two “checklists” when measuring democracy in a given state, one for political rights and one for civil liberties (www.freedomhouse.org).

Political rights encompass elections, representation, and the organization of political parties and other competitive groups (See Table 1). This category is meant to gauge how effectively a citizen is able to engage in political activity. The majority of these criteria cannot be answered in the affirmative for Panama during the period under study. First of all, Torrijos was never popularly elected although he served as head of state, both

TABLE 1	
POLITICAL RIGHTS CHECKLIST	
1.	Is the head of state and/or head of government or other chief authority elected through free and fair elections?
2.	Are the legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
3.	Are there fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, and honest tabulation of ballots?
4.	Are the voters able to endow their freely elected representatives with real power?
5.	Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
6.	Is there a significant opposition vote, de facto opposition power, and a realistic possibility for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
7.	Are the people free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
8.	Do cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have reasonable self-determination, self-government, autonomy, or participation through informal consensus in their decision-making process?

Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/methodology2.htm>

officially and unofficially, from 1968 through 1981. Elected representatives were not introduced into the system until 1972 with the adoption of the new legislative system. It is reasonable to assert that the election system itself was honest, however, it has been noted that the ANCR did not exert a significant amount of power within the formal government structure, as it was subordinate to the executive and the National Guard. Political parties were not permitted during the first ten years of the regime. As such, there was no way in which opposition candidates or parties could effectively challenge

the National Guard's supremacy, at least under conditions throughout most of the years that Torrijos was in power. It is only on the last point that the Torrijos regime can be said to have exhibited one of the characteristics that Freedom House deems necessary for the expression of political rights in a democracy and that is with the status of minority groups. The Torrijos government was the most diverse in Panama up until that point, ethnically speaking. In addition, the Torrijos regime's official program sought to celebrate Panama's ethnic and racial diversity through the populist rhetoric that was meant to encompass all groups within the country. While most of these political rights criteria were not met by the Torrijos regime, it should be noted that the concept of power is abstract and representative and organizational elements take precedence over individual citizen participation or the ability for a citizen to exercise power.

The next checklist examines civil liberties in determining the level of freedom in a country (See Table 2). The first of these deals with freedoms of expression and belief. The Torrijos government controlled the mass media and political expression was limited as a result. However, there was no systematic attempt to hinder cultural or religious expression. On the issue of associational and organizational rights, considerably more freedom was granted to those groups that were co-opted or sympathetic to the regime: namely trade unions, student groups, and peasant organizations. In terms of the rule of law, the limited role of the judiciary has been established. Unfortunately, human rights violations were not uncommon during the era under study. Again, if measuring political repression against other Latin American regimes during the same time, the Torrijos years

TABLE 2	
CIVIL LIBERTIES CHECKLIST	
A. Freedom of Expression and Belief	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? (Note: in cases where the media are state-controlled but offer pluralistic points of view, the Survey gives the system credit.) 2. Are there free religious institutions and is there free private and public religious expression?
B. Association and Organizational Rights	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion? 2. Is there freedom of political or quasi-political organization? (Note: this includes political parties, civic organizations, ad hoc issue groups, etc.) 3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?
C. Rule of Law and Human Rights	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there an independent judiciary? 2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Is the population treated equally under the law? Are police under direct civilian control? 3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies? (Note: freedom from war and insurgencies enhances the liberties in a free society, but the absence of wars and insurgencies does not in and of itself make a not free society free.) 4. Is there freedom from extreme government indifference and corruption?
D. Personal Autonomy and Economic Rights	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there open and free private discussion? 2. Is there personal autonomy? Does the state control travel, choice of residence, or choice of employment? Is there freedom from indoctrination and excessive dependency on the state? 3. Are property rights secure? Do citizens have the right to establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, or organized crime? 4. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family? 5. Is there equality of opportunity, including freedom from exploitation by or dependency on landlords, employers, union leaders, bureaucrats, or other types of obstacles to a share of legitimate economic gains?

Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/methodology3.htm>

were less violent. However, this does not alter the fact that political exile, imprisonment, and even torture occurred at the hands of the National Guard.

With regard to economic rights, the regime in some respects adopted a hands off

approach, particularly where the banking and financial sector was concerned. While there was a limited land reform program and a number of enterprises were nationalized; the economic system of the country was not radically altered. Finally, equality of opportunity was an ideal that was stressed by the regime through its adoption of a variety of new social programs and was emphasized by Torrijos's populist rhetoric. These elements were stressed by the Torrijos regime and should be taken into account. The distinction between abstract individual freedoms and social concerns for the wider population must be considered when determining the definition of democracy being employed. The survey emphasizes personal economic freedoms and thus the welfare of the masses is seen as minimized.

Under the Freedom House rankings from 1972 to 1978, Panama received a designation of not free, with a score of 7 and 6 for the two checklists, respectively (1 being most free and 7 least). By 1978, the rating had been upgraded to partly free with a score of 5 and 5. This more than likely reflects Torrijos's official step down from power and the reintroduction of political competition. The partly free ranking was upgraded to free in 1994 where it remains today.

While the Freedom house checklists serve to measure procedural, or formal, democracy there are other types of democracy to consider. One study that attempts to delineate different types of democracy finds that formal democracy consists of four components: regular free and fair elections, universal suffrage, accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives and effective guarantees for freedom of expression and association as well as protection against arbitrary state action

whereby participatory democracy adds an additional element, which involves high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories (Huber et al. 323-4). Social democracy refers to a system in which all five of the aforementioned criteria are present as is “increasing equality in social and economic outcomes” (324). These distinctions become important when evaluating the Torrijos regime as the participatory and social elements come to the forefront while some of the formal criteria are lacking. The notion of high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories represents perhaps the most central characteristic of the Torrijos regime with regard to any type of democratic development.

Along with distinctions between classifications of democracy, there are observed actions that serve to define the type of democracy in any given system. Where Freedom House uses political rights and civil liberties as its expressions of democracy, the participatory model has its own set of characteristics. Some of these participatory approaches are listed in Table 3. These elements are seen as having been increasingly incorporated into capitalist systems under democratic governance in recent years; as opposed to the revolutionary movements they have typically been associated with (Chilcote 157-8).

The notion of a national system of participatory democratic governance in Latin America remains largely theoretical. However, the resurgence of new political movements in response to some of the persistent injustices and inequalities in the region can be viewed as exhibiting forms of participatory democracy, which may ultimately provide the model for governments to follow. The Torrijos government sought to include

socially and economically marginalized groups, student groups, labor, and ethnic minorities. Student and labor leaders occupied government posts and were consulted on policies and programs. There was ethnic diversity within the National Guard, the government ministries, and the ANRC. The experiment with self-government in San Miguelito was an attempt at local self-autonomy along the participatory model.

Table 3 Participatory Approaches	
Mass Political Involvement	Town Meeting Civil Rights Marches Citizen Initiatives Popular Protests Local Self-Autonomy
New Social Movements	Feminist and Gender Organizations Ecology Movements Peace Groups Neighborhood Associations Landless Peasant Movements
Economic Decentralization	Market Socialism Self-Management Workers Management Post Liberalism

Source: Chilcote, Ronald H. *Comparative Inquiry in Politics and Political Economy: Theories and Issues*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000. p. 158.

Torrijos's Patrullaje Domestico, which involved his frequent visits to the countryside where he presided over town meetings, also falls in line with the participatory model. These efforts provide examples as to the type of actions the regime was making toward a more participatory system of government and the ways in which the historically limited political arena was expanded to include a broader segment of society.

Revisionist democratic theory claims the establishment of the rules, norms and procedures of democracy are essential as a first step and will lead to the eventual consolidation, or deepening, of democracy. In Latin America in particular this does not

seem to have been the case up to this point. The establishment of formal democracy in many countries has not meant an end to corruption, heavy-handed tactics by the executive branch, or in some cases the suspension of individual freedoms. Nor has it lessened social and economic disparities in the region. In fact, a recent report published by the World Bank found that in Latin America and the Caribbean the richest one tenth of the population earn 48% of total income while the poorest tenth earns only 1.6%. In Panama, the ratio of the top to the bottom tenth of the population declined from 71.6 in 1991 to 53.5 in 2000 (Perry et. al 1). Neoliberal economic policies and the processes of globalization are often cited as primary reasons for this persistent and seemingly increasing marginalization and the inability of the systems to realize a functioning democracy for all. A reaction to this has been the resurgence of political and social movements in the region that are challenging the status quo, and in particular the inherent weaknesses in the political system that allow for these inequalities to deepen.

CONCLUSION: EFFECTS OF THE OMAR TORRIJOS REGIME ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN PANAMA

The task of this paper was to weigh the conflicting accounts of the Torrijos regime in Panama and come to a conclusion as to its nature and what implications it may have had on the democratization process in the country. The Torrijos regime was not a democracy in the formal-legal sense of the term. However, the introduction of new forms of political organization and expression called for an examination of the aspects of the regime that exhibited popular democratic tendencies. While Torrijos and his supporters sought the promotion of a more equitable social and political system for the country by establishing progressive reforms, the necessary institutionalization of a popular form of democracy was not ultimately achieved. Some of the factors that contributed to this were the personalism and paternalism exhibited by the leader of the revolutionary movement and the dominance of the National Guard in politics. It seems unlikely that the National Guard would have supported a challenge to its autonomy within the political system, particularly without the leadership of Torrijos. The fact that Torrijos remained in control of the government despite stepping down from his official position as Maximum Leader in 1978 points to the continued importance of his person and the National Guard in the political sphere under his leadership. Had Torrijos lived to run for president in 1984, the transition from military dictatorship to popular democracy may have been achieved.

Another conclusion drawn from this study is the inadequacy of prescribing liberal democracy as a model for Latin American states to follow. There are serious limitations when relying on procedural indicators to measure democracy in a country. Participatory

democracy incorporates a majority of the population into the political system and addresses power relationships in such a way that captures a more substantive representation of the democratic process. Therefore, democratization in Latin America should be viewed in light of popular democratic principles and opportunities for increased political participation and equality of opportunity. Forms of popular democracy are lacking in Latin America and recent attempts by new social and political movements in the region, which are challenging the established power structure, highlight the need for change. Historically, large segments of the population have been left out of the political process. Foremost among the reasons for this are the large disparities of wealth and the centralization of power, whether by the Spanish king, a military strongman, or the more recent incarnation of a disproportionately powerful executive branch.

The populist government established by Torrijos depended very much on his personality, his charisma, and his agenda for change. While the regime did positively affect the welfare of historically marginalized classes and incorporated them in the decision-making process, there were paternalistic overtones in the execution of its social programs, which were heavily dependent on populist rhetoric and a favorable image of the military leader. Latin American populism is a phenomenon with a long history in the region and one that was exemplified by the Torrijos regime in Panama. One might conclude rather than perpetuating a populist model or relying on democratic procedures, the solution for social change and wider access to political and economic opportunity in Panama lies in real popular democracy.

During the Torrijos regime elements of popular democracy were introduced. While the implementation may have been flawed, it marked an attempt at a model of government in which a majority of the citizens could participate, and actually begin to influence policy. In attempting this new system of government, the Torrijos regime provided an alternative to governments dominated by the oligarchy, which had largely preserved the status quo up until 1968. As formal, or procedural, conceptions of democracy are deemed increasingly inadequate at addressing the needs of the general population in Latin America, the policies and programs introduced by Torrijos may prove invaluable for this generation of Panamanians as they struggle with the processes of democratization.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Timeline of Important Twentieth Century Events in Panama

- 1903** **November 3** - Panama declares independence from Colombia
- 1904** **October** - Panamanian army is disbanded
Panama's currency is tied to the US dollar
- 1914** **August** - Panama Canal completed
- 1923** Acción Comunal founded
- 1929** **February 13** – Omar Torrijos is born in Santiago de Veraguas
- 1936** Hull-Alfaro treaty ends Panama's protectorate status
- 1943** Federation of Panamanian Students founded
- 1946** US Army School of the Americas established in the Canal Zone
- 1955** Remón-Eisenhower Treaty signed increasing the amount the US pays Panama for rights to the Canal; Omar Torrijos recruited as a spy by US Military Intelligence
- 1964** **January** - Riots erupt after a confrontation between Zonians and Panamanian students
Torrijos picks Noriega as his military officer in Chiriquí
- 1968** **October 11** - Military coup overthrows Arnulfo Arias
November 13 - US officially recognizes the military junta
December - Colonel Omar Torrijos appointed commander-in-chief of the National Guard, Lt. Col. Boris Martínez becomes chief-of-staff; National Guard shuts down University of Panama and the National Institute

APPENDIX A (CONTINUED)

- 1969** **February** - Martínez goes into exile in Miami
March - Torrijos promotes himself to General; Rómulo Escobar Bethancourt, a progressive leftist intellectual is appointed labor minister; political parties are suspended.
May - Governor Nelson Rockefeller visits Panama and is enthusiastic about the military regime and its populist leanings
December - Counter-coup launched against Torrijos proves unsuccessful; Torrijos promotes himself to Brigadier General
- 1970** Manuel Antonio Noriega becomes Chief of Intelligence of the National Guard
- 1972** New Constitution replaces the 1946 version; new labor code introduced; Electric, gas, and phone systems are nationalized.
- 1973** **March** – UN Security Council meets in Panama and Torrijos calls for renewed Canal negotiations.
- 1977** **September 7** - Torrijos-Carter treaties signed in Washington, D.C.
October 23 – National plebiscite conducted in Panama approves the new treaties
- 1978** **March** – US Senate approves the treaty by a vote of 68 to 32
- 1979** **October 1** – Treaties officially implemented
- 1981** **July 31** - Torrijos killed in a plane crash
- 1983** National Guard officially becomes an army and is renamed the Panamanian Defense Forces; Noriega becomes its commander-in-chief
- 1989** **December 19** – Operation Just Cause is launched
- 1990** **January 1** –Panamanian citizen named as Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission for the first time in accordance with the treaties.
- 1994** Ernesto Pérez Balladares elected President of Republic
- 1999** Mireya Moscoso elected President of Republic
December 31 – Control of the Panama Canal goes to Panama

APPENDIX B

Heads of State: The National Guard Command and Presidents of Panama 1968-1981

Dr. Arnulfo Arias Madrid	President *	Oct. 1, 1968 – Oct. 11, 1968
Col. José María Pinilla and Col. Bolívar Urrutia	Provisional Junta	Oct. 11, 1968 – Dec. 1969
Col Omar Torrijos Herrera and Col. Boris Martínez	Commanders of the National Guard	Oct. 11, 1968 - Feb. 24, 1969
Brig. General Omar Torrijos Herrera	Commander in Chief of the National Guard	Feb. 24, 1969 – Sept. 12, 1972
Brig. Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera	Maximum Leader of the Panamanian Revolution	Sept. 12, 1972 – Oct. 11, 1978
Demetrio Basilio Lakas	President **	Dec. 19, 1969 – Oct. 11, 1978
Aristides Royo Sánchez	President***	Oct. 11, 1978 – July 30, 1982
Brig. Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera	Commander in Chief of the National Guard	Oct. 11, 1978 – July 31, 1981

*Popularly Elected

**Appointed by Torrijos until 1972 when he was elected by the new National Assembly of Community Representatives

***Elected by the National Assembly of Community Representatives

Source: Adapted from Brittmarie Janson Pérez, *En Nuestras Propias Voces: Panama Protestas, 1968-1989*. Tercera Edición. Panamá: Instituto de Estudios Políticos e Internacionales, 1998, pp. 67,105.

APPENDIX C

Manifesto of the Provisional Military Junta

October 11, 1968

1. Effective and immediate cleansing of the government bureaucracy and the absolute repudiation of Communism and any other extremist ideology.
2. Eradication of corruption and the application of extreme sanctions for those convicted, regardless of social, economic, or political position.
3. Eradication of nepotism as a manner of obtaining official positions.
4. Formation of a new scale of human values in which ability and honor will be the ultimate credentials.
5. Limitation of the size of the bureaucracy based on a scientific study of state needs.
6. Improvement of the judicial organs to guarantee fair application of the law without privilege.
7. Use of the resources of the state for the benefit of the many rather than the few.
8. Removal of the National Guard from politics through legislation that will prevent direct participation of members in politics and that will convert the Guard into an organization that can guarantee order and electoral rights.
9. Full identification of the ideals and action of the Provisional Junta with the National Guard
10. When general elections are called, three members should be selected for the Electoral Tribunal whose careers inspire confidence among all sectors of opinion and who will contribute a clear guarantee of free elections.

Source: Steve Ropp, Panamanian Politics: From Guarded Nation to National Guard.
New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982, p. 38.

APPENDIX D

Tenets of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático

Excerpts from the Memorandum Circulated upon the Establishment of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD)

During his tour of the nation from June 27 to August 2 of 1978, our Head of State, Brigadier General Omar Torrijos H. made a series of political designations which are summarized in this document as most of these cases deal with established political views and known positions on issues, thus:

Political Organization of the revolutionary process – the Revolutionary Democratic Party

The regulation of political parties will allow the revolutionary process to create its own political organization that will allow all of those active citizens that have been willing to follow without subscribing to any organization to register. It will allow more efficient action, cooperation, and participation. (Santiago, Friday August 30, 1978.)

The process requires an institutional framework within the party of progress, the Revolutionary Democratic Party. (Las Tablas, Sunday July 26, 1978.)

The Party will consolidate the Revolution into a political organization that will respond to the will of those masses that have supported me during my journey through their presence, asking me not to fail. (Las Tablas, Sunday July 16, 1978.)

The Revolutionary Democratic Party will not be class based but will be shaped by what we have been doing these past ten years. The Revolutionary Democratic Party will have programs that are fundamentally directed to giving answers to existing problems. It is a party that is structured to serve the people and not to be served by them. (David, Friday July 21, 1978.)

We are going to organize this Party, and I hope the base for this party consists of the humble masses, marginalized groups, the labor sector, the rural peasants, and the students. A party organized with this popular base will be a party with a great sense of permanence. (San Ignacio de Tupile, Thursday July 27, 1978.)

Regulation of Political Parties

If the people decide that political parties that are well organized and reflect the opinion of large sectors of the population should exist, they will be established.

APPENDIX D (CONTINUED)

The political platform of the new parties must be consistent with the way of thinking in a country that was politically awakened ten years ago to a much greater degree than was predicted. (Chitre, Friday July 14, 1978.)

Separation of the Executive and Legislative Organs

The union of Executive and Legislative Power these past ten years allowed progress to work at the necessary speed. It will not continue that way indefinitely, but neither will they be separated as before. Unity should exist at the administrative level. (Colón, Wednesday July 5, 1978.)

When I speak of separation of certain powers I am thinking of the structure of a system that responds with flexibility and a great capacity for consultation; a system whereby laws emerge once all the levels of decision have been consulted. (Chitre, Friday July 14, 1978.)

Direct Presidential Elections

The people like to vote for President; the Government is not opposed that this will happen in 1984 if the people want it and the High Commission recommends it. (Colón, Wednesday July 5, 1978)

The National Assembly of Community Representatives

At the start of the Revolution, during my travels to the communities I found in each of them there was a natural leader, which allowed me to glimpse the political system of the Government. The only thing I did was to make it legal through elections. From that came the 505 [member]. It was well designed. (Progreso, Saturday July 22, 1978.)

National Unity

We are prepared to consult with all those that are capable of incorporating themselves into the new structure of the country.

We should not condemn prematurely. There are many political sectors from 1968 that were victims of the system. We should not engage in the class struggle. We should not revisit past hatreds; the future closes itself off. Now is when we must be united. (Santiago, Friday June 30, 1978.)

-Compiled by Fernando Manfredo Jr., Presidential Minister. Panama, August 9, 1978.

Source: Juan Materno Vasquez, *Omar Torrijos*. Costa Rica: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1987, pp. 208 217. *Trans:* Emma Scribner