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The Politics of Grenada

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Introduction

Grenada, a small yet vibrant island nation in the eastern Caribbean, possesses a political system both complex and steeped in a legacy of British parliamentary traditions. As an independent Commonwealth realm since 1974, Grenada exemplifies the convergence of colonial legacies and indigenous political development. Navigating the intricacies of monarchy, parliament, and evolving civic engagement, the country has fostered a resilient democracy even in the face of historical upheavals and contemporary challenges. This book, *The Politics of Grenada: A Guide to Politics and the Political System in Grenada*, aims to offer readers a comprehensive guide to understanding the constitutional framework, political actors, institutions, and issues shaping Grenadian public life.

At the heart of Grenada's political system lies a constitutional monarchy, with the British monarch as head of state, formally represented by a Governor General. The head of government—the Prime Minister—leads an executive shaped by the shifting tides of parliamentary majorities. Together with a bicameral legislature and an independent judiciary, these branches form the core of a state designed to balance authority, representation, and justice. With a written constitution as the supreme law, Grenada's governmental structures are both familiar to those accustomed to the Westminster model and uniquely adapted to the country's circumstances and aspirations.

The story of Grenadian politics cannot be separated from the island's moments of transformation: from its colonial past, through independence, revolutionary upheaval, foreign intervention, and eventual return to parliamentary democracy. The revolution of 1979, the establishment and tragic collapse of the People's Revolutionary Government, and the consequential events of 1983 with U.S.-led intervention remain pivotal episodes. These events have deeply influenced not only the nation's political trajectory but also its collective memory and identity.

Yet, Grenada's politics are not solely defined by high drama and constitutional milestones. The day-to-day functioning of parties, elections, ministries, and grassroots movements plays a critical role in the lives of citizens. The multi-party environment, although dominated by two principal parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New National Party (NNP)—reflects ongoing debates about policy, governance, and representation. This political dynamic intersects with pressing issues like economic development, social justice, anti-corruption efforts, and safeguarding rights for marginalized groups.

This book is designed as a guide for students, researchers, policy observers, diaspora

members, and all readers seeking to understand the mechanics and meaning of politics in Grenada. Each chapter not only details the formal structures—executive offices, parliamentary procedures, and judicial mechanisms—but also examines the evolving nature of party competition, electoral systems, local governance, and the lived realities of Grenadian democracy.

In exploring political life in Grenada, from the national parliament to the unique context of Carriacou and Petite Martinique, the text aims to illuminate both the challenges and achievements of this dynamic Caribbean democracy. Through this lens, *The Politics of Grenada* aspires to deepen appreciation for the complexity, resilience, and promise of Grenadian political life—past, present, and future.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Foundations of Grenada's Political System

Grenada's political system, like that of many former British colonies in the Caribbean, is built upon the Westminster model. This means it shares fundamental characteristics with the political system of the United Kingdom, including a parliamentary structure and a constitutional monarchy. The island nation officially gained its independence from the United Kingdom on February 7, 1974, a pivotal moment that established its sovereignty and laid the groundwork for its own governance.

Before achieving full independence, Grenada underwent a period of associated statehood with the United Kingdom, beginning in 1967. This arrangement granted Grenada full autonomy over its internal affairs while Britain retained responsibility for defense and external relations. This was a significant step towards self-determination and allowed Grenadian leaders to gain experience in governing before assuming full control.

The transition to independence in 1974 was not without its challenges, marked by some political controversy and unrest. Despite these initial difficulties, independence formalized Grenada's status as a sovereign state and a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The country adopted a constitution that established the framework for its new government.

The Constitution of Grenada is the supreme law of the land. It outlines the structure of government, the distribution of powers among different branches, and the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. This written constitution serves as the bedrock upon which all other laws and political actions are based. Any law that is inconsistent with the constitution is considered void to the extent of the inconsistency.

The Grenadian constitution, enacted in December 1973 and effective from Independence Day in February 1974, was the result of negotiations involving various political factions in Grenada at the time. This participatory process in its creation aimed to ensure a sense of ownership and broad acceptance among the Grenadian people. While the constitution has been in effect since independence, there have been discussions and proposals for reform over the years, reflecting a desire to potentially adapt the foundational document to contemporary needs and challenges.

Central to the constitutional framework is the principle of the separation of powers, dividing governmental authority among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This division is intended to prevent the concentration of power in any one

entity and to provide a system of checks and balances. Each branch has its distinct roles and responsibilities, as defined by the constitution.

The executive branch is responsible for implementing laws and governing the country. At its head is the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the political party with the majority of seats in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor General. The Cabinet, composed of ministers chosen by the Prime Minister, forms the core of the executive and is collectively responsible to Parliament.

The legislative branch, or Parliament, is responsible for making laws. Grenada has a bicameral Parliament, meaning it consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The composition and powers of each chamber are set out in the constitution, outlining how laws are debated and enacted.

The judicial branch is independent of the executive and legislature, responsible for interpreting the law and administering justice. Grenada's legal system is based on English common law, a legacy of its British colonial past. The court system, from the lower Magistrates' Courts to the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, and with the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London as the final court of appeal, ensures a structured approach to legal matters.

The independence of the judiciary is a crucial element of Grenada's political system, safeguarded by the constitution. This independence is intended to ensure that justice is administered fairly and impartially, without undue influence from the other branches of government. Judges are appointed through a process designed to uphold their impartiality and expertise.

The electoral system is another fundamental component of Grenada's political foundations. It provides the mechanism by which citizens can choose their representatives in the House of Representatives through periodic elections. The principle of universal adult suffrage, granting voting rights to citizens aged 18 and over, is a cornerstone of this system. The country is divided into constituencies, with representatives elected based on the number of votes they receive.

While the electoral system is designed to be free and fair, discussions about potential improvements, such as addressing the balance of constituency sizes, have been part of the political discourse. Despite these ongoing conversations, the electoral process is generally considered a credible mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power.

The political landscape of Grenada is characterized by a multi-party system, although it has historically been dominated by two main parties. The existence of multiple parties allows for a range of political views and platforms to be represented, offering voters choices during elections.

The interaction and competition between political parties are integral to the functioning of Grenada's democracy. These parties serve as the primary vehicles for organizing political activity, contesting elections, and forming governments. Their platforms and policies shape the direction of the country's governance.

The historical development of Grenada's political system is marked by periods of significant change and adaptation. From its colonial origins and the gradual introduction of representative government to the attainment of independence and the challenges that followed, the country's political foundations have been shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external forces.

The Grenadian constitution includes safeguards for fundamental rights and freedoms, reflecting a commitment to protecting individual liberties. These rights, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and religion, are essential components of a democratic society and are intended to ensure that citizens can participate freely in the political process and express their views.

While the formal structures of government and the constitutional framework provide a clear outline of Grenada's political system, the actual practice of politics is also influenced by the country's social and economic context. Issues such as economic development, social equity, and the well-being of citizens are often at the forefront of political debate and policy-making.

The relationship between the central government and the dependencies of Carriacou and Petite Martinique is also a notable aspect of Grenada's political structure. The constitution makes provision for a degree of local governance in these islands, recognizing their unique circumstances and the importance of addressing their specific needs. While the full implementation of this local government structure has been a topic of discussion, it highlights a recognition of the diversity within the Grenadian state.

In essence, the foundations of Grenada's political system are a blend of inherited traditions and adaptations made in the pursuit of self-governance and democracy. The constitution, the separation of powers, the parliamentary structure, and the electoral system all contribute to a framework intended to provide stable and representative government. However, like any political system, it continues to evolve in response to the dynamic needs and aspirations of the Grenadian people.

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