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**DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN PARAGUAY**

Report Based on Urban and Rural Focus Groups in Paraguay

Conducted by:  
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**REPORT BASED ON URBAN AND RURAL**

**FOCUS GROUPS IN PARAGUAY**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **- Research Objectives -**

The major focus of this research was to identify people's attitudes towards the democratic process and political participation in Paraguay, as part of the programs which the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is conducting in Latin America and the Caribbean, East Europe and Africa.

The current research is part of a series of studies conducted in 1996 and during the early part of 1997 by Graciela Römer and Associates. The studies were sponsored by the NDI, to investigate the attitudes towards political parties by the population of Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina and Guatemala.

Qualitative research techniques were used in all cases, to have a better understanding of the attitudes and the degree of commitment of the people to the changes that are taking place in the political systems of the above mentioned countries. In the particular case of Paraguay the field work took place on March 5-14, 1997, and consisted of conducting fourteen (14) focus groups with people selected from the general population in rural and urban areas.

Apart from the focus groups, in-depth interviews were conducted with opinion leaders --heads of NGOs, political parties, think tanks (intellectuals, journalists, artists) and businessmen --to learn about the attitudes and views of representatives from various political and civil sectors regarding the current democratic process in Paraguay.

We want to convey our recognition to the team of professionals and other collaborators, for their valuable participation in the field work: Ms. María Inés de Marín (PRO-MUR), Ms. Lourdes Ferreira, Ms. María Eugenia Arce (CEPES), Ms. Dila Eaton (*Asociación de Mujeres Empresarias de Paraguay*), Ms. Adalina de Galeano (Red de Mujeres Políticas), Ms. Josefina Duarte de Benítez (Red de Mujeres Políticas), Mr. Favio Salcedo, Mr. Miguel Lezcano and Mr. Luciano González. And we also wish to express our appreciation in particular to the staff of the NDI's Latin American Program in Paraguay: Messrs. Gerardo Le Chevallier and Ricardo Espinoza.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODS**

The study was divided into two levels or modules, with fourteen (14) focus groups conducted in the first module (module I): four (4) of them in the city of Asunción, four (4) in the city of Caacupé, four (4) in the city of Encarnación and two (2) in a rural area. The last two were held, one in the Cordillera Department, and the other in the Caazapá Department.

The urban groups were mixed-groups --50% men and 50% women--, which included people of all different ages --young people (18-30), and adults (40-55) years old. Eight to ten people were selected to participate from each group. The selection was based on the socio-demographic characteristics required for the sample. Rural groups were distributed by sex -- one group of women and another of men--, and each group included 50% young people in the ages of 18-30, and 50% adults ranging from 40-55 years old; socio-economic level was also taken into account --landowners of less than 7 hectares.

Verbal and role-play techniques were used, together with traditional group dynamics, to enhance communication --particularly among the rural population with low education levels-- in the group sessions, which lasted about 2-1/2 hours each.

The meetings were recorded, to allow detailed analysis of the data. The group sessions were coordinated by a representative from *Estudio Graciela Römer and Associates*, who specializes in group dynamics and motivational research.

In the second module -- involving opinion leaders--, in-depth interviews were conducted with forty national and district leaders from various political parties, as well as with NGOs, think tanks/intellectuals and businessmen. The selection of the opinion leaders and the recruitment of the surveyors was the responsibility of the local support team (PRO-MUR, CEPES, *Red de Mujeres Politicas*), and the NDI office staff in Paraguay.

The local surveyors were trained and supervised by Mr. Oscar Ramírez and Ms. Lidia de la Torre, technical staff members of *Estudio Graciela Römer and Associates*, who apart from conducting the focus group sessions, pre-tested the [questionnaires] for interviewing the selected public opinion leaders.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, which were latter coded and analyzed by qualitative and quantitative means.

**2.1. GROUP COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWS WITH OPINION LEADERS**

**2.1.1. MODULE I. GROUPS OF CITIZENS**

TECHNIQUE: Focus Groups

SAMPLE: 14 groups

**- GROUP COMPOSITION -**

*URBAN AREA* (4 in Asunción, 4 in Caacupé and 4 in Encarnación)

GROUP	SEL <sup>1</sup>	AGE	SEX
1	C1/C2 <sup>2</sup>	18/30	both sexes
2	C1/C2	40/55	both sexes
3	C3/D1 <sup>3</sup>	18/30	both sexes
4	C3/D1	40/55	both sexes

**2.1.2. RURAL AREA** (Cordillera and Caazapá Departments)

GROUP	SEL	AGE	SEX
5	C3/D1	both groups	Female
6	C3/D1	both groups	Male

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<sup>1</sup> SEL: Socio-economic level, defined according to the occupation and educational level of the interviewee.

<sup>2</sup> C1: Professional/businesspersons with more than 6 employees. Corporate Executives. Completed university studies.

C2: University and high-school teachers/Pymes/hierarchical [sic] employees. Completed secondary/ tertiary studies.

<sup>3</sup> C3: Administrative assistants. Small businesspersons without employees/skilled workers. Incomplete elementary/secondary studies.

D1: Small craftsman/unskilled workers/maintenance workers. Up to elementary school.



## 2.1.2 MODULE II. OPINION LEADERS

TECHNIQUE. In-depth interviews

SAMPLE: 42 cases

**CHARACTERISTICS: Local/district opinion leaders**

	#
Political party representatives	11
NGOs representatives	8
Businesspersons	8
think tanks/intellectuals	11
Church (*)	2
Judges (*)	2

*(\*) The leaders in these two segments --Church and Judges-- showed a strong reluctance to participate in the interviews. However, their opinions helped to put into context the views of others regarding the democratization process in Paraguay.*

The in-depth interviews were conducted by a team of professionals trained in role-playing techniques and in the use of a specific protocol. The interviewers were assisted and supervised during the initial interviews, and all their field work was followed-up and checked.

### III. MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

#### 3.1. *Introduction*

Like in many other countries studied to date --in the context of the research sponsored by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, about attitudes towards political parties and the democratic process in Latin America-- the general climate observed, by means of the focus groups conducted in Paraguay, can be described as one of disappointment with, and criticism towards, the general situation in the country, and low expectations for the future.

#### 3.2. *Current Conditions in Paraguay*

Current conditions in Paraguay are described --by all the groups studied-- as chaotic in social terms and severely damaged in economic terms. The major problems as described by the population are linked to the economic crisis and the lack of guarantees for social advancement, as

a result of a high level of violence. This opinion is based on a series of factors closely related to the country's economy and the demands placed on the political system.

The climate of dissatisfaction, which runs through all the groups studied, is explained in terms of the lag that exists in satisfying social needs, and a political system which is seen as weak, dysfunctional and highly inequitable --all of which generates feelings of insecurity and instability.

People's major concerns refer to unemployment, social neglect, lack of prospects for improving the quality of life --expressed particularly by young people-- lack of security and violence. The interviewees also referred to a state of general moral decline, and the corruption of certain institutions and specific social sectors, such as the Justice System and business.

Most of the blame for this situation is basically assigned to the political class, which, according to the persons interviewed, has been unable to respond in a concrete manner to the demands and expectations of the Paraguayan people.

The experience of the rural sector, over forsaken development policies and lack of improvement in rural conditions, determines their negative attitude towards the country's political situation.

### 3.3 *The Paraguayan Concept of Democracy*

One unique aspect of the Paraguayan survey compared with studies conducted in other Latin American<sup>4</sup> countries has to do with the low level of understanding of the democratic system --and hence, the regard in which it is held--, in terms of its specific features and as a form of government.

The expectations expressed by the Paraguayan people regarding democracy are more closely tied to the capacity of a democratic, or non-democratic government, to resolve specific problems of the population, rather than with values assigned to particular characteristics of the democratic system, and the ways in which it differs from other systems. The interviewees cannot, without prompting, speak of such characteristics in a meaningful manner. Thus, democracy takes on a practical rather than conceptual meaning.

"Freedom of expression" is the most outstanding and distinguishing factor that summarizes the passage from the previous system to the current pre-democratic system. However, people's awareness of this difference is not sufficient to affect their daily lives, and does not produce the expected changes; but rather, in the minds of large segments of society, this awareness has served to emphasize their needs and the structural deficiencies of Paraguayan society.

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<sup>4</sup> *Actitudes hacia los Partidos Políticos en América Latina*, a publication of the National Democratic Institute for Foreign Affairs, 1996.

In this regard, the value of Democracy for today's Paraguayan society does not rest so much on symbolic qualities associated with civil rights and guarantees --freedom, equal opportunity, equality before the Law, freedom to choose government officials, to make political choices, to hold periodic elections, etc.--, but in the ability to improve specific living conditions.

There is a marked disregard, and even cynicism about political participation encouraged by the current democratic system

*"We can vote and speak, but who is listening?"*

The democratic quality that is valued most --"freedom of expression"-- is seen as an exchange of "empty words", since it fails to produce concrete results affecting people's lives and satisfying their expectations.

In this context, democracy is seen as a goal; but the general feeling in Paraguay is that there is still no indication that there can be a real process of democratization clearly resulting in tangible improvements in the quality of life.

### **3.4.        *The Nation's Institutions***

The general understanding of the country's institutions is weakening. The Church and the Communications Media are two of the institutions most valued and trusted by public opinion. Labor Unions, Political Parties and Congress are among the most questioned institutions. It is worth noting the low regard in which the business sector is held --which is worse than in other Latin American countries. The Armed Forces, although not seen in a favorable light, have a neutral image *vis à vis* other institutions. Compared with other studies conducted in Latin America on this subject, the Paraguayan Armed Forces are held in relatively higher esteem than their counterparts in the region.

### **3.5.        *Evaluation of the Political Class***

The way the group studied sees the "political class" shows a series of contradictory views and values. On the one hand, there is a clearly recognized and well defined dichotomy, which is the existence of two kinds of political leaders:

*"political-businessmen"*  
*(barons)*

*"and real-politicians"*  
*(traditional politicians)*

The group of "political-businessmen" --"Barons of Itaipú"-- does not command much support among the interviewees because of their "particular approach to public issues." They are described as seeking advantages for certain sectors, or trying to maximizing the effectiveness of the Administrations activities or of the economy, without taking into account the social impact of their policies on the population as a whole.

The interviewees also criticized the lack of change of the business class in the new scenario represented by the current democratic conditions in Paraguay.

The "real politicians" --traditional politicians-- although still showing traces of patronizing/authoritarian attitudes and being much criticized, are at the same time seen as the only possibility of creating a new direction and building a certain future for Democracy, as long as they serve as mediators in the solution of the concrete problems of the population. The demands placed on political leaders in this regard are considerable.

### **3.6        *How Political Parties Rank***

Political parties have a different symbolic value for urban and rural populations, in terms of the support and identification they generate from the people. In rural areas they are a kind of "extended family" --with whom one establishes strong emotional ties-- and serve to promote a sense of personal and community identity.

Thus, identification with a political party is strongly determined by family history and emotional behavior, rather than rational arguments. Conversely, the urban population interviewed shows a more independent and rational attitude. This is particularly evident in women and young people, who support the candidate --based on his personal qualities and background--, rather than the political party.

As a result, the criticism against the political system is focused more on the leaders than on party structures. This means that, contrary to the findings of other studies conducted in Latin America, political parties in Paraguay do not seem to be as strongly affected as their Latin American counterparts by the crisis in representation and intermediation affecting political parties in the hemisphere.

However, conversations with the interviewees indicate strong criticism of the factionalism of political parties. Meanwhile, the political model predominantly assimilated by Paraguayan society is that of a two party system --particularly in the case of the rural population interviewed. The presence --particularly during elections-- of different party lines within a party, and the emergence of third parties is seen as destabilizing. Such a situation is associated not so much with the rules of the game in the democratic process, and a proven mechanism for selecting leaders, but with lack of direction and disorder.

*"There are too many political parties."*

*"Each party member seems to have a different party line."  
"Parties are now sprouting everywhere."  
"We always had two parties, why do we need so many now?"*

### **3.7      *National Demands***

The view of the current situation as destabilizing creates a strong demand for order and security among the population interviewed. There are complaints of unmet expectations and lack of employment prospects. This reinforces the general feeling of insecurity and creates a certain nostalgia for a past that was able to provide the social identity which is now considered threatened.

The belief --particularly in rural areas-- that cooperation and solidarity networks in Paraguayan society are weakening generates a strong demand for the establishing moral standards in society, and reinforces the nostalgia for the past.

This "nostalgia for the past" is particularly observed in rural populations and in the elderly in urban sectors, and it seems to demand control and reinstatement of [lost] values, rather than a return to dictatorship.

It is in this context that urban security is found so uncertain, and this is blamed on both current economic policies and the lifting of repressive controls.

The demand for order and security is also associated with a view of the judicial and police systems as ineffective, and strongly linked with the belief that corruption and acts of impunity are on the rise, and that some sectors receive [special] privileges.

The subject of corruption is present in most conversations with the persons interviewed, both in rural and urban areas. Corruption is given at least three different meanings. It is, first of all, associated with the illegal accumulation of wealth while occupying public office, and the traffic of influences for personal/ private sector gain. Secondly, it is associated with the benefits resulting from arbitrary decisions and lack of law enforcement are enjoyed by some social sectors, due to an inequitable administration of justice. And thirdly, corruption is associated with the lack of commitment, on the part of public sector officials, to fulfill the campaign promises which got them elected.

The feeling of frustrated expectations and skepticism shown by the interviewees with regard to political leaders, and the generalized suspicion of corruption, results to a great extent from this "breach of contract" or rift between the interests of the electorate and those of public officials.

### **3.8      *A Fragmented Society***

The interviewees also say that democracy in Paraguay has been unable to establish a project to bring together the entire population.

There seem to be three major sources of tension in the general outlook of the population interviewed, which result from Paraguay's own political tradition, and which are reinforced by the current social and economic situation.

The first has to do with the lack of integration between the rural and urban sectors, which is responsible to a large extent for the backwardness and poverty in Paraguay.

A second source of tension is the dichotomy between *Colorados* and *Liberales* (reds and liberals), which, as will be seen later on, is used by young urban sectors to explain political backwardness and the lack of success of the democratic system in Paraguay.

And last of all, the third concern is the generational clash: the young vs. the adult population. It is in this inter-generational struggle and in the possibility of effecting changes within the traditional political parties, where young people place their expectations for improving Paraguay's institutions and strengthening the democratic system.

### **3.9            *Young People's Desire to Participate in the Democratic Process***

However, it is the youngest population sector --particularly in urban areas-- who seems to be most active and committed to take advantage of the mechanisms for political participation made available by the democratic process.

Indeed, the role which young people are taking as central protagonists of the current process of democratic consolidation is something unique.

Young people identify themselves as belonging to a severely disadvantaged social group. They see themselves as suffering from lack of opportunities, not only in labor and economic terms, but also with regard to social and political matters.

And yet, a kind of heroic idealism seems to characterize many young people, who see themselves as "guiding the birth of a new society", and who believe in the possibility of "breaking away" from traditional structures and old political practices in Paraguay.

It is for this reason that young people are more receptive to forming alliances and reaching political agreements, as compared with older groups or the rural population, who show a strong identification with a clearly bipartisan system, probably in an attempt to preserve their historical identity.

### **3.10.        *Hope: The Profile of the Ideal President***

The ideal president is described as follows:

- ☛ Free from obligations to electoral campaign backers which may restrict his actions.
- ☛ Resolute and firm in his decisions
- ☛ Directly involved in resolving problems and taking executive actions.  
In contact with the people/ in touch with reality
- ☛ Discursive method: problem → solution
- ☛ A person whose personality can make the required adjustments to handle different situations.

*“Show a conciliatory attitude/ or a firm hand.”*

- ☛ A president able to achieve a balance between traditional and modern elements.

Able to be traditional in restoring morality/loss values.

*“To preserve the respectful attitude that Paraguayans used to be known for.”*

*“To preserve our way of being.”*

*“To preserve a sense of morality.”*

and to be modern in handling management and economic issues.

*“To promote policies for the various sectors.”*

*“To help flower growers.”*

*“To help exports.”*

#### **- Mandatory qualities in a President-**

- ✓ honesty
- ✓ suitable administration
- ✓ knowledge of people’s actual problems
  - (unemployment)
  - (violence)
  - (corruption)
  - (lack of opportunities to advance)
- ✓ Implementation of concrete measures

- ⌘ Clear proposals regarding the issues to be addressed and the actions to be taken.
- ⌘ Direct communication/ability to obtain people's commitment
- ⌘ Watchful of his "surroundings" (corruption)
- ⌘ Credible and with international presence



IV. - RURAL SECTOR -

ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 *Analysis of the Current Situation in Paraguay*

The rural population describes Paraguay's current situation in a very negative light, focusing on problems that affect various areas:

- ✓ economic
- ✓ political
- ✓ family
- ✓ social

It describes a situation of extreme and generalized poverty and lack of technical and/or economic assistance programs on the part of the government, to help satisfy the needs of the population.

*"The country is idle."  
"Assistance programs are announced, but never come to be."*

The lack of development policies and lack of assistance to the rural sector places the rural population in precarious economic conditions, and is responsible for their low expectations for the future.

The interviewees talk about the inequitable distribution of wealth as a traditional problem, which reappears with each generation.

The climate of dissatisfaction seen in all the groups surveyed is associated with the lag in satisfying social demand, and with a political system seen as weak and ineffective, all of which elicits feelings of insecurity and instability in the population.

*"Everything is as was with Stroessner, but without him."  
"They do not govern, nor legislate, all they do is vegetate and get paid for it."*

In this context, the people's democratic experience has been unable to meet their initial expectations that the current transition process would bring change in the following areas:

- ✓ public safety
- ✓ education
- ✓ health care

This has generated a climate of strong opposition to, and lack of trust in, political classes in general and the current administration in particular.

*"The government is not leading the country, the power is in the hands of others (businessmen)"  
"Replace the people in power."*

A subject of vital importance, which comes up in the conversations with the people interviewed in rural areas, is the gradual migration from the countryside to the cities. This migration has an undesirable impact on the structure of rural families: the separation of its members.

Lack of job opportunities, the progressive discontinuance of single crop farming, and the search for essential elements to support one's family are seen as the major reasons for the move.

*"People leave because of lack of opportunities."*

*"Young people emigrate to the cities."*

*"There is no work and a lot of poverty."*

*"We have been left with nothing."*

*"Your children leave, and you lose them."*

From a social perspective, the people interviewed also see a weakening of the networks of cooperation and solidarity within their own communities.

*"Everyone takes care of his own business."*

*"Nobody cares about what happens to others."*

*"There is nothing we can do, because there is general mistrust."*

*"The will to help others has been lost."*

Intermediate organizations are in a weak position. An attempt is clearly being made among women organizations to create opportunities for women's social advancement in rural areas, and an awareness of the role of women. However, the incipient forms of [political] participation, particularly for women, are distorted, and there is great difficulty making progress, because of the prevalence of more urgent priorities, such as work, health, education.

The subject of education occupies a central place in the problem areas considered by the interviewees of highest priority.

The current system is inadequate to satisfy the demands of the population. It is interesting to note that rural interviewees strongly associate lack of education with having --or failing to have-- democratic values and attitudes (political participation, tolerance, freedom). And these people see education as the reason for the lack of such values among the Paraguayan population in general.

Thus, the lack of educational means is described as the major difficulty in adjusting to a democratic way of life.

*"People have not been educated to live in a democracy."*

*"To get out of this situation it is necessary to educate the population."*

The rural population also highlights the excessive centralization that exists in political decision making, and the high concentration of power in urban areas.

The situation seems to have worsened now that the rural sector is aware of its role in the production of wealth.

*"We are the source of production."  
"Everybody eats, but it is us who do the work."  
"We build the country and this is the payment we receive."  
"We are tired to always be the ones making a sacrifice."*

The urban-rural antithesis is a source of tension in the minds of the people interviewed.

*"They decide everything."  
"We are not taken into account."  
"They make the decisions that suit them."  
"We have been forsaken."*

Lack of urban-rural integration --whether economic, social or cultural-- is one of the reasons given for the backwardness and poverty in Paraguay.

The awareness of this situation is clear and results in permanent complaints from the people interviewed.

*"We will suffer, unless we unite."  
"We have to take into account the interests of all, not just those of city dwellers."  
"It is almost as if we were homeless, and they are big shots."*

The major problem areas are identified as related to:

⇒ THE ECONOMY:

*"Money is scarce."  
"There is no work, and money doesn't go far."  
"There is no possibility of buying even essentials."  
"We are in a desperate situation."  
"There is not enough money to meet children's needs, not even in schools."*

⇒ POLITICS:

The political isolation of the rural population is a structural problem, as they see it:

*"We are not taken into account."*

*“Every action is for the sake of those who live in Asunción.”*  
*“We have no [political] participation whatsoever.”*  
*“We only have one vote at the time of elections.”*  
*“We have no chance to govern.”*

Centralized decision making assigns [rural people] a “passive” role, and makes any changes in this sector impossible.

*“They even appoint our own [government] authorities.”*  
*“They decide for us what is right and wrong.”*  
*“They decide what candidates we’ll vote for.”*  
*“We are not given a choice.”*

On the other hand the prevailing political patronage reinforces people’s rejection of politics and politicians. The population feels excluded from the decision making process, and used by their leaders in satisfying their own particular interests.

*“They come to see us during the elections.”*  
*“They come with gifts at election time and then leave.”*  
*“They still regale people with food and wine, and then take them to vote.”*

⇒ THE JUSTICE SYSTEM:

The value of justice is severely questioned in practice:

*“There is no justice.”*  
*“There is only justice for those who have money.”*  
*“What we are lacking is justice.”*  
*“There is only justice for the people in power.”*  
*“The Justice System is corrupt.”*

The lack of an equitable justice system is mentioned as one of the essential problems of the current democracy. And yet, the lack of mechanisms for delivering true Justice is nothing new, but has been part of Paraguayan history.

*“There never was justice.”*  
*“What matters is who has money.”*  
*“The Justice [System] has always served the rich.”*

And corruption among judges and public officials is considered to be a common practice inherited from previous regimes.

*“It has always been this way.”*

*"Everything has a price. There is no justice."  
"You can buy and sell anything you please."  
"They are all corrupt."  
"Corruption is a daily occurrence."*

The situation is now worsened with the coming into power of different groups and the resulting intensification of traffic in influences and cash payments. A specific mention is made of drug trafficking and "money launderers" as fueling the explosion of corruption.

#### **4.2        *The Concept of Democracy***

The concept of democracy held by the interviewees in rural areas is narrowed to a few specific functions. They describe a limited democracy, particularly associated with freedom of expression.

The meaning they give to the concept of democracy refers to:

*"Being free men."  
"Being able to choose freely."  
"Being able to speak one's mind."  
"Not being punished for what one says."*

Democracy is a value strongly linked with the respect for individual liberties, and opposed to repression/punishment.

*"You can say whatever you want."  
"You are not punished for speaking."*

However, there are some authoritarian aspects still lingering, and people are still afraid.

*"I am still a little afraid."  
"Fear is still with me, a little less pronounced, but still there."  
"Fear that someone will say something about me."  
"People are still fearful."*

The concept of democracy as a political system opposed to a dictatorship prevails, but people do not envision institutions which are emblematic of, or inherent to the democratic system. The institutions that are most closely associated with democracy are the school and the health care systems, and the Church.

*"The Church does a lot for democracy."  
"Schools are crucial to eliminating ignorance."  
"...Everybody in good health, that is what democracy is."*

*“Without education there is no democracy.”*  
*“The Church brings us closer to democracy.”*

It is interesting to note the absence of expressions linking the concept of democracy with institutions inherent to the democratic system: the legislative and judicial branches of government, the division of powers, etc.

Democracy, thus categorized and conceptualized, is restricted to resolving the basic needs of the population.

Consequently there is still an understanding of the political system as based on the observable benefits it produces.

In this context, the current democratic system dynamics are undervalued, because of what the interviewees describe as the gap between the promises made and the results achieved.

*“Democracy is something good, but it is misused.”*  
*“The governing class does not have a democratic attitude.”*  
*“Democracy is an opportunity for taking control legally.”*  
*“What is done is the will of businessmen, not that of politicians.”*  
*“Government is in the hands of businessmen, as in the past was in the hands of the military.”*

As a result, the current period of transition into democracy and democratic institutions does not have a significant impact in rural areas.

*“All we can do is talk.”*  
*“We talk but there is no one to hear us talk.”*  
*“There is freedom, but only to speak.”*  
*“Everybody speaks their mind, say whatever they please, but there is nothing else.”*  
*“We are all chatterboxes but nothing is achieved.”*

#### **4.3      *Advantages of Democracy Compared with other Systems***

The political behavior and the momentum gained by the democratic process in the segments of the population interviewed has not had the result of creating an institutional framework to sustain the concept of democracy and expand its meaning.

The view that there is no change in economic/social/moral conditions, in the way the democratic system relates to the people, serves as tangible proof of the system's limitations.

*“Democracy is O.K. but I think that we are actually worse off.”*  
*“Since we are democratic, my money doesn't go as far.”*  
*“Nothing has changed for the better.”*

*"There are fewer jobs now."  
"Before I had enough for my kids."  
"We are poorer now."*

In this regard, it is uncertain whether there is satisfaction with the democratic system. The comparative advantage is seen with regard to [the absence of] punishment/repression, but the system does not go as far as to include the characteristics inherent to Democracy. The democratic system is poorly represented, because the system's strength is thought to reside on the basic notion of sanctions and punishment vs. gratification and [social] benefits.

#### **4.4. *Meaning of Political Parties***

The interviewees understand political parties as something inherent to the country's political life in general, regardless of the political system in power.

Political parties are part of the country's history, with the bi-partisan system representing the most notable feature.

*"We always had political parties in this country."  
"There have always been the Colorados and the Liberales."  
"It is how people divide themselves into groups."  
"Political parties are just a way for people to meet."*

It is because of this [bipartisan tradition] that the growing number of various party lines/ groups/factions within the party, and the emergence of new parties leads to a feeling of insecurity, expressed as follows:

*"There are too many political parties."  
"And each member has a different party line."  
"There are too many of them."  
"Parties are sprouting everywhere."  
"It is confusing to have so many."*

This division into different groups is interpreted as resulting from the chaos created by lack of rules and lack of order. That is, diversity is not seen as an expression of the dynamics of democracy, but as evidence of lack of control.

*"We always had two parties."  
"Why do we need so many."  
"Maybe one more is O.K., but not so many."*

This argument is used to "preserve" the meaning of the party, since it is considered almost an extension of the family group.



The concept of “family-party” constitutes a key element in the collective way of thinking of the rural population. The “family-party” has historically been seen as the “provider” of the essential needs of the population (social assistance/health/education, etc.)

Though, from a theoretical viewpoint political parties are seen as the most appropriate means for channeling people’s participation in politics, their most salient characteristic [in people’s minds] refers to the creation by the party of a sense of community/family identity.

As a result, people’s identification with a political parties is strongly linked to the family history and has an emotional and affective rather than rational component.

*“I have always been Colorado.”*  
*“Changing one’s party is out of the question.”*  
*“I come from a Liberal/Colorado family.”*  
*“I have been Azul all my life.”*

The people interviewed consider the emergence of non-traditional political parties (e.g. *Partido de Encuentro Nacional*) as something peculiar to urban areas.

*“It is an urban party.”*  
*“It means nothing in the campaign.”*  
*“Here they are considered meaningless.”*  
*“We know about them, but we don’t vote for them in the countryside.”*

Their mistrust and criticism is not directed to the political parties themselves, but to their leaders.

*“They are a [social] cancer.”*  
*“They do not represent the people, only their own interests.”*  
*“It is not the political parties that need to be changed, but the politicians.”*  
*“One does not choose, but rather votes for the party.”*  
*“They are groups who only want power.”*  
*“Politicians divide the community.”*

#### **4.5 Freedom/Democracy vs. Order/Security**

Current conditions are seen as destabilizing, and conducive to or exacerbating violence, hence the strong demand for order and security.

*“Security is essential.”*  
*“If there is order, there can be other things.”*  
*“We have no security today.”*  
*“When there is order, there are economic possibilities.”*

Hence the reason for the following:

*"I miss what we had."  
"One could leave everything unlocked."  
"It was possible to go to sleep with the windows open."  
"Thieves used to be punished."  
"There used to be less crime."*

The discontent which can now be expressed thanks to current democratic conditions focuses on growing poverty, an increase in violence and the lack of control on the part of the institutions in charge of maintaining and preserving public order (the police).

Democracy and freedom, although valued, are considered of secondary importance at the present time.

*"Improving the economic situation is what is essential."  
"If there is nothing to eat, everything else is of little meaning."  
"[What is needed is] order and security, for things to get back on track once and for all."  
"There are people who don't have enough to eat."  
"[What is needed] today is to improve the economic situation."*

The demand for economic well-being emerges as a priority and is strongly linked to the worsening of conditions in the rural sector.

*"It is not possible to sell cotton now."  
"The countryside is very poor."  
"The countryside has been forsaken."  
"We used to be able to depend on cotton."*

The dissatisfaction over economic conditions and the dwindling purchasing power are seen as the reasons for the rise in crime.

*"That is why we have thieves."  
"Something is being stolen at all times."  
"For just about any reason your home is burglarized and you may even get killed."  
"People no longer work, they steal."  
"Children begin stealing at a tender age."*

This situation is creating a climate of general insecurity which becomes exacerbated by the feeling that institutions are ineffective --that there is [both] lack of law enforcement and ineffective sanctions for criminals. And the institutions in charge of ensuring social restraint and/or control are seen as involved in corruption.

*"All policemen are corrupt."  
"They take thieves to jail and then let them go."  
"Nobody stays in prison."  
"Some [of the thieves] are policemen."  
"There is a theft and no one gets punished."*

While democracy and freedom are linked as values, in practice freedom is also [seen] as the cause of some of the social problems experienced by the population.

The essential issue for this sector is not freedom and/or democracy, but the lack of training and education of the population in the ways of using that freedom; the rural sector is also concerned about the lack of security and instability.

*"[There is] licentiousness rather than freedom."  
"[Now] with democracy one can do and say whatever one pleases."  
"There is no respect for morals."  
"People's honor is at risk."  
"People say anything."  
"There is a lot of freedom for thieves and scoundrels."*

The freedoms associated with democracy create the impression of a lack of rules and a lack of control over social behavior. Democracy and freedom are understood as abstract values which in daily life may generate --and do generate, according to a large number of the interviewees-- lack of control and social excesses.

The people interviewed make the political class responsible for not being able to lead the process of change. Consequently, the difficulties the country is currently experiencing -- the economic difficulties in particular-- are linked by a large number of interviewees to the coming into power of the democratic administration.

The frustrated expectations expressed by large segments of the population, regarding the lack of job prospects, insecurity, and the need to moralize politics are directly associated in their minds with the democratic form of government.

Thus, there is nostalgia for the "past" in an attempt to recover a social identity which the people feel is threatened and very weak.

*"Now there is no one to tell us what must be done."  
"There used to be a call for democracy, and now that we have it, there is nostalgia for the past."  
"The military would have handled some things better."*

V. - URBAN SECTOR -

ANALYSIS

## 5.1 *General Climate Regarding the Country's Situation*

- Youth -

The country's political, economic and social conditions are described as being in a state of great conflict. Basic concerns are connected to the economic difficulties people are experiencing.

*"We are one of the poorest nations in the world."*

*"We are in very bad economic shape."*

*"Money doesn't go far."*

*"The economy does not work."*

*"We are ruined."*

*"There are no jobs, no money."*

All the groups studied, but particularly young people, have commented about the lack of job opportunities.

*"No one hires us, because we have no experience."*

*"There is no work for young people."*

*"You leave school, and there are no jobs to be found."*

*"There is a lot of unemployment."*

*"[Businesses hire] those accepting the lowest salaries."*

*"It is an employer's market, because of the lack of jobs."*

Young urban people belonging to middle and high-middle classes also argue that young people are socially excluded and neglected.

*"They don't want young people to take control."*

*"They do not let us become part of the labor force."*

*"We are excluded."*

*"They don't want us to work."*

*"They want to sacrifice us."*

The attitude most common among young people is that the beginning of a new stage [of participation] of the Paraguayan youth in the country's economic and social life will represent a step forward, and the possibility of breaking out of the economic and moral stagnation the society is experiencing. There seems to be a kind of "generational tension" with the new being associated with the possibility for change, and the old with the preservation of privileged [groups]. Thus, the generational gap is identified with the need to preserve the privileges of traditional leaders.

Yet, despite the criticism expressed regarding Paraguay's labor and economic conditions, young urban people describe the current moment in history as a time of change and transformation, although it is slow in satisfying their aspirations.

*"It feels good to have civil liberties, but not much has improved in other areas."*  
*"It is good to get out of the dictatorship, because it gives Paraguay a place in the world."*  
*"We have recovered the ability to speak."*  
*"In Paraguay we have freedom of speech, but nothing else."*

The major areas where change is said to have taken place, refer to the greater degree of political participation, described as follows:

- ✓ Greater freedom of expression
- ✓ Less degree of repression
- ✓ A move towards change within party structures
- ✓ The creation of students' organizations
- ✓ The possibility of expressing opposition

But there is also, among young people, much anxiety over the change itself, for fear that they will fail.

*"[I fear] being unable to live up to my own expectations."*  
*"[...] not being able to find a job."*  
*"We are discriminated against."*  
*"What you study doesn't help you to find work."*  
*"The current government does not create opportunities for the young."*

While young people from the middle and high-middle classes believe that Paraguay's major problem is lack of education and the "backward mentality" of the average citizen, young people in the low-middle class are concerned about the lack of work and health care.

However, both groups believe that there is a "new beginning" in the making; and that the process, although painful, brings new hope.

The urban population in the ages 40-55, and particularly those belonging to the middle class, express the same criticism towards economic conditions in general, and an increasingly skeptical attitude about the same problems. The situation is described as one of "chaos and social unruliness" and, contrary to young people, the 40-55 age group seldom recognizes the current situation as a period of transition and change.

*"If there is change, it is extremely slow."*  
*"There is a lot of bureaucracy."*  
*"There is no possibility for change in this country."*  
*"We are stagnating."*  
*"There is no future."*  
*"The people are manipulated because of their ignorance."*

*"We are touching bottom."*

The problems of the farmers are often mentioned by the urban population in general. Both young people and adults acknowledge that conditions are not equitable for this sector. The concern over the rural sector may indicate fear over the deterioration of their own family's economic situation.

*"The farmers are in very bad shape."*

*"Dying of hunger and disease."*

*"Living in inhuman conditions."*

*"We have it bad here, but their situation is desperate."*

*"They are at the end of their rope."*

However, the concern over the neglect of the rural population is closely associated by the urban population with the lack of security.

Security in urban areas is considered very uncertain, and this is seen as the result of both economic policies which impoverish large sectors of the population, and a weakening of repressive controls.

*"Everyone is robbed."*

*"We have less security now than before."*

*"Thefts are a daily occurrence."*

*"There are children begging everywhere."*

*"It is unwise to walk on the street."*

*"There is a lot of violence in Paraguay nowadays."*

The situation is more difficult for young women because of discrimination and the macho and authoritarian culture characterizing the Paraguayan society.

*"A woman has to struggle a lot harder."*

*"Women are discriminated against."*

*"Life is considerably more difficult for us women."*

*"Being a woman is a disadvantage."*

*"We are restricted in what we can say."*

*"We have to work double because of our cultural conventions."*

With regard to politics, the interviewees describe a high degree of:

- ✓ inability on the part of the political leaders to resolve essential problems.
- ✓ Lack of resolve to implement measures for improving the current conditions.
- ✓ Corruption, which seems to be the *modus operandi* of the political system, and, together with acts of impunity, creates generalized mistrust.

The immunity enjoyed by government officials and the sectors closely associated with the government was a recurrent subject in the conversations with the interviewees, who expressed severe mistrust of Paraguayan institutions --particularly the Justice System and Congress, but also the business sector.

The coming into power of a democratic system is not seen as creating a new scale of values or establishing conditions for institutions to develop and allow equal participation of the people.

What is perceived is the consolidation of an evil and obdurate mechanism of corruption/[acts of] impunity, which feeds upon itself and is considered responsible for the country's current economic and social decline.

Democracy appears to be circumscribed to freedom of expression as its highest value --although a value empty of meaning, since there is no one to hear the people's demands.

The social and political opening in Paraguay is reduced to the circulation of messages, which have little effect on reality. Consequently, democracy is described as a sham which hides structural conditions, and such conditions remain and become exacerbated to the detriment of large segments of the population.

Freedom of expression and the existence of political parties become the visible elements of democracy, but in economic terms there continues to be a concentration and accumulation of wealth (the opposite of participation and equal opportunities).

*"Wealth is in the hands of a few."*

*"In the countryside the farmers are desperate; they are the ones receiving the least assistance."*

*"In a poor country all you can do is survive."*

The "new political class," composed of business political and business leaders -- known as "Barons of Itaipú"--, are the ones who have the "real power," control the government, and are considered responsible for this situation.

The logic of the people interviewed is full of contradictions. They want to reconcile:

Political democracy ← → Economic dictatorship

The people interviewed say that the transition to democracy "has left the economic power unchanged." Democracy has allied itself with the old forms of power and has produced formal political changes, at a political level, while changing nothing with regard to the "actual" participation of people. The economic sphere seems to be separate from the political sphere.

*"They use power for their own ends."*



*"They are but parasites, living off their positions."  
"They only look out for themselves."  
"They only seek their own profit."  
"They are the ones who take the money away."  
"They have sinecures."*

**- The group of adults -**

This group also shares with young people the view that the country is in crisis.

From a political perspective:

- ✓ Adults question the increased level of strife among the various political sectors and within the parties.
- ✓ and the government's inability to issue policies for the entire nation.

*"They are the only ones to benefit."  
"They do nothing for the people."  
"We are all becoming poor."  
"They steal everything."  
"We are getting poorer and poorer."  
"They are incapable of creating wealth for the people."  
"We are worse off than before."  
"Everybody speaks and nobody listens."  
"The political class is becoming corrupted."  
"Everything is rotten."  
"There is no way one can live in a system like this."*

The freedom that comes with democracy is considered to have relative value, since it does not produce the desired effects. The following demands are being made:

- ✓ Greater possibilities to participate in [the country's] decisions
- ✓ Better social policies
- ✓ Greater productivity
- ✓ Conditions that lead to the creation of jobs
- ✓ Providing health care for more social sectors
- ✓ The improvement of the educational system
- ✓ Equal opportunities

The adult group of interviewees places great emphasis on the "negative aspects" of freedom:

*"No one shows respect for any one."*

*"It is just a question of [exchanging] insults."  
"There are no rules to be followed."  
"[All] values and sense of authority has been lost."*

The lack of a regulatory and punishing framework to control deviant behavior, leads to "licentiousness" and to the need to act with a firm hand.

This description seems murky and paradoxical, because it takes us back to an undesirable stage in the country's history: that of the dictatorship. Yet, people express the need for a regime that will impose sanctions and set limits, make possible living together, show strong leadership, and to command respect for authority.

*"There should be freedom, not licentiousness."  
"A little more respect."  
"Democracy and freedom does not mean doing whatever we want."  
"Now people do anything they please, there are no sanctions."  
"There is a lack of role models for the youth."  
"We are not ready for democracy."*

In everyday life, greater freedom is associated with:

- ✓ Licentiousness
- ✓ Growing insecurity
- ✓ Loss of moral values
- ✓ People's disrepute, and lack of respect for the authorities.

## **5.2      *Assigning Blame and Responsibility***

The major causes of the current situation are described by the people interviewed as follows:

- ✓ A dictatorship for 35 years (this is mentioned particularly by the youth)
- ✓ An intellectual vacuum
- ✓ Inability on the part of government authorities
- ✓ Lack of a regulatory framework to legitimize the new Administration (adults)
- ✓ Greater growth of the economic sector vs. the production sector (adults)
- ✓ Lack of capable and responsible institutions
- ✓ Lack of an effective and impartial judicial system
- ✓ An ineffective Legislative Power
- ✓ An increase in drug trafficking and money laundering (adults)

The adults interviewed place greater responsibility on the low caliber of the institutions and the people in power. Specifically, the "Barons of Itaipú" are seen as the reason for the current

political and economic situation. The “Barons of Itaipú” is a term that refers to the current government and to the new “business” leadership which has taken hold of the country’s politics.

*“It is the engineers who made their money in Itaipú.”*

*“The businessmen/executive officers.”*

*“The ones holding the power today were in Itaipú.”*

### 5.3 *Image of the Political Parties*

Notwithstanding the fact that Political Parties are seen as the roots of the democratic system, the political class in general is described as a group which holds the power and uses it for its own benefit.

*“Without parties there is no democracy, but our leaders must be replaced.”*

*“Political parties cannot be pushed aside.”*

*“They cannot disappear. What must be changed is the way of conducting politics.”*

Consequently, the associations made by the interviewees regarding political parties places them in a negative light. Basically political parties are described as:

- ✓ Ineffective → “they are unable to resolve people’s problems.”
- ✓ Lacking the necessary mechanisms to promote social participation → “They do not listen to the people.”
- ✓ Having little representativity → “They elect each other.”
- ✓ Having business interests → “They only seek their own benefit.”

Dissatisfaction and displeasure is expressed as follows:

*“The Paraguayan people are not involved in the struggle.”*

*“It is a struggle between the people in power.”*

*“They are vying for a piece of stale bread.”*

*“They only strive to get more money.”*

*“They fight among themselves to defend their own interests, rather than the people’s.”*

*“They are removed from the people.”*

*“They all make promises, but don’t keep them once they take power.”*

*“They think about the people only at election time.”*

*“There has been no renewal within the political parties.”*

A strong emotional component is observed in the image people have of the various parties, and in [how they react to] the absence of party platforms, which would make it possible to differentiate one party from another. This attitude is based on traditional attitudes (both in terms of the family and the country’s history), rather than on contrasting values/ideas.

Notwithstanding that there is a high degree of party registration, a change is taking place regarding party loyalty. Nowadays party loyalty and the predeterminism to vote is questioned, as people entertain the possibility of "*voting for another candidate not belonging to one's own party.*"

This situation is more significant among young urban people, whose commitment is less unwavering than that of the adult urban population, or the rural population.

Among adults -and also in rural areas-- the following factors are at play

- ✓ historical
- ✓ hereditary [sic]
- ✓ familiar

and have a great influence in building a party identity

*"They are hereditary" [sic]  
"I always belonged to the party."*

#### **5.4      *The Concept of Democracy***

People are ambivalent about their attitude to democracy. They value democracy --particularly by contrast to their experience during the dictatorship--, but this contraposition between democracy and dictatorship is what shapes their understanding of democracy.

In theory, the concept of democracy is understood as embodying the following qualities and values:

- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Participation
- ✓ Dialogue
- ✓ A higher quality of life

In practice, democracy is perceived as:

- ✓ Lack of opportunities
- ✓ Unemployment
- ✓ Greater insecurity
- ✓ Licentiousness instead of freedom
- ✓ Increase in social violence

Democracy is valued, particularly by young people, as the legitimate political system of modern western society; but older groups, although valuing the democratic system in theory,

continue to lean strongly towards political systems more focused on the resolution of specific problems. The political methodology used to satisfy such needs is of second importance to them.

*"Democracy is a good system, if it is used well."*

*"Democracy is O.K., if it helps."*

*"It is good to have Democracy, but people don't know what it means"*

The value placed on the democratic system is closely tied to the immediate effects it produces in satisfying people's essential needs; that is, the need to:

- ✓ Eat
- ✓ Feel secure
- ✓ Be economically solvent
- ✓ Be safe and not in fear of violence

Thus, the areas linked to economic needs and security are the most highly praised features of democracy.

Contrary to other countries studied, in Paraguay the acceptance of the symbolism of the democratic system is not as strong, since the values of

- ✓ Fairness
- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Freedom of speech
- ✓ Lack of persecution
- ✓ Independent branches of government, which are part of a system of checks and balances
- ✓ Electoral competition
- ✓ Equal opportunities

rank second in the understanding of democracy.

Young urban people, from the middle and middle/high-middle classes, value the various symbolic aspects of freedom in a more hierarchical fashion.

*"Freedom and Democracy are good, but what is most important is order and security"*  
*(adults from the low middle class)."*

*"People mistake the meaning of freedom, and that leads to a rise in violence."*  
*(adults from the high middle class)."*

The experience of the population interviewed regarding Democracy indicate that there is an insufficiently defined hierarchy of values, which the interviewees attributed to lack of education.

*"The Paraguayan people are not fully ready."  
"Education is lacking."  
"We have freedom of expression, but nothing else."*

The lack of a tangible correlation between democracy and [the solution of] economic needs and lack of security makes democracy into something limited and rather effective. Individual and social achievements are given little importance, and this results in a feeling of frustration and a low commitment level.

### **5.5. *Freedom/Democracy vs. Order/Security***

The urban population stresses freedom and democracy as priority values which make it possible to achieve economic progress and a more fulfilling life.

But the interviewees also express a demand for order and security, which they feel are very scarce.

Such a situation is attributed to the economic decline and the ineffectiveness of the Judicial System and the Security Forces.

There is a feeling of increasing corruption and lack of law enforcement, which leads to thinking that the country's institutions are weak.

While young people place great emphasis on the importance of freedom and democracy, adults do not value such symbolic aspects of democracy as much, and are increasingly concerned about the lack of personal safety and the heightened climate of violence.

There is clearly a generational gap in the axiological frame of reference. While young people consider freedom/ democracy a priority, the adult population places greatest emphasis on order/security.

However, the order demanded from democracy seems to be more closely tied to establishing rules, control and safety measures, than acting with a "firm hand."

*"It is necessary that there be order, but not violence."  
"Order is achieved through education."  
"It is necessary to educate the people."  
"If there is violence, there is order, but also fear."*