

**AN ANALYSIS OF
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2000
Belize**

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March 2000

INTRODUCTION

This is purely a descriptive statistical analysis of the March 1, 2000 municipal elections. I have refrained from including my own perspective, and have let the figures speak. The information comes from data retrieved from Returning Officers immediately after the election, and also from data gathered by students who represented the Elections and Boundaries Department in the polling stations countrywide.

On March 1, the Elections and Boundaries Department had the opportunity to foster the development of the democratic process when it successfully implemented the new City of Belmopan Act and the new Town Council Act through free, fair orderly and peaceful elections. The Department put into the electoral process the election of a Mayor for each municipality by popular vote. Eight municipalities in six districts participated, comprising seven towns and the City of Belmopan.

Table 1
Registered Electors by Municipality

Municipalities	# of Registered Voters	% of Registered Voters
San Pedro Ambergris	2461	07.94
Corozal	4447	14.33
Orange Walk	6512	20.99
San Ignacio/Santa E.	6484	21.89
Benque Viejo	2456	07.92
Dangriga	3616	11.65
Punta Gorda	2065	06.65
Belmopan	2985	09.63
Total	31026	100.00

A total of 31,026 persons (Table 1) were eligible to vote in this election. Two towns stand out as having the largest number of registered electors, namely, Orange Walk and San Ignacio/Santa Elena. Each of these two towns, in terms of population, is approximately three times the size of the smallest municipality of Punta Gorda. The PUP won by a landslide all seats in 7 municipalities including the City of Belmopan, and 2 seats out of seven, in the municipality of Benque. This represents 51 out of a total of 56 seats (91.1%) countrywide, that was won by the PUP. Some 150443 votes were cast. Of this amount, the PUP obtained 83316 (55.38%), the UDP 65579 (43.59%), and the combined independents and PLF candidates, 1548 (1.03%) (see pie chart).

The Department conducted a post-mortem (evaluation), at a meeting of Returning and Registering Officers countrywide on Friday March 10, 2000. Generally Election Day went relatively smoothly. The main contention for most municipalities was the 100 yards line. The Department of Transport was assigned the responsibility of demarcating this line. However, there were disagreements exactly where it should be demarcated on the day of election. In most cases, where there was a culture of a political party “camping” in a certain area, then that was accepted as the 100 yards. This was the situation in

Belmopan, Punta Gorda and San Pedro. Also the law is not clear regarding the starting point of the 100 yards line.

Collaborative efforts with other government departments and the private sector, coupled with proper money management, led to some savings on the election budget. Some of these collaborative endeavours include:

- The private sector---discounts of up to 25% on purchases
- Vehicle Care Unit—provided government vehicles countrywide to registering officers and election workers
- Transport Department—Demarcated 100 yards line countrywide

We also collaborated with tertiary level institutions and the Central Statistical Offices (C.S.O.) nationwide to assist with data collection from all polling stations. This was the first time that personnel representing the Elections and Boundaries Department were placed in the polling stations to gather data on voter participation. The students performed this duty, while the staff of C.S.O. supervised and transmitted the data to the Central Office on a timely basis throughout the day. The managers of the schools along with the students were more than willing to participate at this level. The students as well as C.S.O. staff were awarded a stipend of \$25.00 for that day. The participating schools were:

- University College of Belize (UCB), Toledo
- Ecumenical Sixth Form, Dangriga
- UCB Belmopan
- Corozal Community College, Sixth Form
- Muffles College, sixth form

A total of 91 students and 8 CSO district staff participated. At the Central Office, data were processed to produce detailed reports on each municipality using variables such as, sex, age cohort, and community.

All staff members countrywide through the Registering Officers were directly involved in every process of the election. This was also a first for the Department. It proved positive as they were complemented by all Returning Officers for their part in helping to make the process more efficient. On the other hand, the Registering Officers claimed that their direct involvement in the process at this level, underscored their appreciation and understanding of their roles and functions within the Department.

On Election Day, information was posted to the website, BELIZE-ELECTIONS.ORG on a timely basis. This was another “first” for the Department. The hourly report was posted on an hourly basis, a more detailed report twice for the day, and the final report at the end of the count. Posting of information to a website was also a first for the Department and for Belize. The website attracted 31,417 hits and 3,211 visitor sessions, from November 24, 1999 to March 24, 2000. Most of the hits (80%) occurred around March 1, 2000, with an average of length of time of 9 minutes and 4 seconds per visitor.

Six training sessions were conducted for Election Officers, one in each district town, and one in the City of Belmopan. Police Officers and Transport Officers also attended the

training. A total of 288 public officers were trained using a manual on the Representation of the People Act. Included in the training were simulation exercises on the procedures for the counting of ballots. The Department trained a total of 400 (Table 2) persons in preparation for the elections.

Table 2
Categories of Personnel Trained

No.	Category	Total
1.	Public Officers--election officers	288
2.	Police Officers	10
3.	Central Statistics Officers—data collection	8
4.	Students	91
5.	Transport Officers	3
Total		400

FINDINGS

General

In this report, I will be using the terminology split, solid, ballots, and votes. Votes are the total number of “x’s”. There are a maximum of seven votes (1 mayor and 6 councilors on each ballot paper. Solid ballots exist when one elector give all seven possible “x’s” to one political party. Split votes exist when the elector shares the seven votes among more than one party.

Attached to the report as appendices, are three sets of tables demonstrating election results in varying formats. The three sets represent the following:

1. *Election Results by Political Party and Municipality*
This demonstrates solid and split votes garnered by each political party and independent candidates by polling area and municipality.
2. *Results of Town Council Election 2000*
There are eight of these tables, one for each municipality. Each table demonstrates the results of the election for each candidate by political party. Also some statistical information such as total solid and split votes, ballots spoilt and rejected, persons voted and registered, and number of votes cast.
3. *Detailed Report on the election Results*
There are eight of these tables, one for each municipality. Each table demonstrates voter turnout by sex, age cohort, and polling area. It also includes a summary of the votes and ballots cast.

Some of the information on these tables overlap, but it is worthwhile viewing each one as each shows a different perspective. The Data presented in the tables in body of this paper are taken from the appendix.

Solids vs Splits

There were a total of 18,148 solid ballots representing 127,036 votes. Of these 10,236 (56.4%) were garnered by the PUP, 7860 (43.3%) by the UDP, and 52 (.3%) by Sosa’s Independent group (Table 3).

Table 3
Political Parties by No. and % of Solid Ballots

Municipality	Solid Ballots		Total		Total Solid Ballots	Total Persons Voted	% of Solids & No. Voted
	PUP No.	PUP %	UDP No.	UDP %			
Corozal	1487	57.41	1103	42.59	2590	3075	84.23
Orange Walk	2568	60.51	1676	39.49	4244	4897	86.67
San Ignacio	2007	50.87	1938	49.13	3945	4625	85.30
Benque	805	48.91	841	51.09	1646	1967	83.68
Belmopan	845	68.1	344	27.72	1241*	2075	59.8
San Pedro	783	54.68	649	45.32	1432	1860	76.99
Dangriga	1048	57.4	771	42.6	1825	2331	78.29
Punta Gorda	693	56.57	532	43.43	1225	1459	83.96
TOTAL	10236	56.4	7860	43.3	1848	22289	79.87
	* Sosa’s Independents—52 Ballots, 4.19% of Belmopan’s ballots and, 3% of total solid ballots						

Table 3 demonstrates solid ballots by political party and municipality. Some 79.87% of all voters who voted on March 1, 2000 voted solidly for a political party. Orange Walk Town with 86.67% and San Ignacio/Santa Elena with 85.30% were the municipalities with most solid ballots, and are followed closely by Corozal, Punta Gorda, and Benque. The City of Belmopan stands out, not only as the municipality with the least solid votes, (see graph) but trailed 26.87% less than Orange Walk, and 22.07 % less than the average of 79.87%.

The PUP was the recipient of most solid ballots in all municipalities, with the exception of Benque Viejo. Also four municipalities stand out as those that voted overwhelmingly PUP in solid ballots. These are the City of Belmopan with 68.1% and Orange Walk Town with 60.51%, and closely followed by Corozal 57.41% and Dangriga 57.46%.

I perceive split votes as popular votes aimed more at the individual candidate than the political party. Table 4 demonstrates the performance of political parties with split votes.

Table 4
Political Parties by No. and % of Split Votes

MUNICIPALITY	SPLIT VOTES				TOTAL SPLIT VOTES
	PUP NO.	PUP %	UDP NO.	UDP %	
Corozal	1189	45.47	1426	54.53	2615
Orange Walk	1977	55.7	1573	44.3	3550
San Ignacio	1730	48.1	1870	51.9	3600
Benque Viejo	917	50.5	898	49.5	1815
Belmopan	2300	43.02	1862*	34.82	5346
San Pedro	1274	54.61	1059	45.39	2333
Dangriga	1539	54.4	1290	45.6	2829
Punta Gorda	738	55.95	581	44.05	1319
TOTAL	11664	49.8	10559*	45.1**	23407
*Does not include: PLF 70 (1.3%), Sosa 278 (5.3%), Morgan 836 (15.7%)—Total 1184 (22.16%) ** Independents 1184 (5.1%)					

Total number of split votes was 23407. Some 11664 votes or (49.8%) of this amount were garnered by the PUP, 10559 (45.1%) by the UDP, and 1184 (5.1%) by the PLF and the independent candidates in Belmopan (see graph). The variance of number of votes gained between the two major political parties is 1105 votes (4.1%).

The PUP having gained the highest number of total split votes, it is of interest to look at the municipalities who percentage-wise were mainly responsible for this success. These are Punta Gorda (55.95%) and Orange Walk (55.7%), followed by Dangriga (54.4%) and San Pedro (54.61%). When comparing percent of solid ballots and percent of split votes, the following aberrations are obvious.

- In Corozal the PUP garnered most of the solid ballots (57.41%), but lost (45.47%) the popular votes to the UDP (54.53%).
- The situation is the same for San Ignacio/Santa Elena for the PUP, except that the variances are not so overwhelming for both solid and spoilt.
- The UDP in Benque obtained most of the solid ballots (51.09%), but PUP gained the majority (50.5%) of the split votes.

Weak/Strong Polling Areas

There is no vacuum in political popularity; one party's minus is another's plus. So I will concentrate on one political party, as the result will be just the opposite for the other major political party. Most of this data is taken from Appendix i, entitled Election

Results by Political Party and Municipality. Polling Areas represent smaller communities within the Town. For example, polling area #95 represents the Lakeland Area.

Corozal Town presents an unusual situation as the PUP scored less than the UDP for all polling areas in split votes (Appendix i). But the result is the opposite with solid ballots. In Orange Walk, the weak polling area for the PUP both for solid ballots and popular votes is polling area #55. The PUP lost #55 in the splits by 4 votes, and although the PUP got most of the solid ballots, the variance of win is also small, some 17 ballots. In Benque Viejo, the weak polling area over all, is #83 (Appendix i). There are two weak polling areas for the PUP in San Ignacio, namely, polling areas #73 and #76. In Dangriga, polling area #92 showed weakness for split votes. In Punta Gorda, Belmopan, and San Pedro, the PUP showed overwhelming strength in all polling areas for both solid ballots and split votes.

Candidates

Although electors voted overwhelmingly for a political party, the split vote as a vote for an individual is still very important as it can ascertain a win or loss, as is the case with Benque for the UDP and PUP respectively. Table 4 displays the names and votes earned, of all those candidates who “topped” the polls or the most popular person in their respective communities.

Table 4
“Candidates Who Topped Polls by No. of Votes”

Municipality	PUP Candidates	UDP Candidates	Office Sought	No. Votes Gained	Variance with Mayor
Corozal	Gregorio Garcia	Rosita Silva	Councilor	1737	155
Orange Walk	Henry Castillo		Councilor	2902	136
San Ignacio	Evaristo Avela		Councilor	2278	68
Benque			Councilor	998	21
Belmopan	Anthony Channona		Mayor	1333	--
San Pedro	Baldemar Graniel		Councilor	1034	134
Dangriga	Cassian Nunez		Mayor	1304	--
Punta Gorda	Anthony Fuentes		Councilor	818	45

Only two out of all eight mayoral candidates topped the poles, namely, the PUP mayoral candidates for Dangriga and Belmopan. These two communities voted overwhelmingly by split votes and solid votes. While the variance for Benque is the smallest (21 votes), the variances are wide ranging for the other seven communities, with 68 votes in Benque Viejo to 136 votes in Orange Walk Town.

The poorest performance for Mayoral candidates in popular votes were UDP mayoral candidates for Dangriga and Santa Elena, and the PUP mayoral candidate for Punta

Gorda. All three mayoral candidates gained the least votes within their respective political party, as well as in the respective towns. In Corozal, although not a Mayoral candidate, one UDP candidate was a minister of government in the past administration, but is among those who gained the least votes.

The independent and third party candidates continue to be ineffective in election outcomes. Together they gained 5.1% of the total votes cast countrywide, and 11% of the total votes in Belmopan. The Morgan/Enriquez faction, although only two candidates garnered most of the votes, 836 or 5.95% of all votes cast in Belmopan, and 52.78% of the combined votes obtained by the independents and third party combined. Sosa's group fielded seven candidates and obtained 52 (4.19%) of the solid votes for Belmopan.

Women have performed well in this election. A woman topped the polls in Benque Viejo. Also, in Benque, two out of four female candidates were elected into a politically mixed town council, and one that is male dominated. In Dangriga and Belmopan, women female candidates took second place. In Dangriga this female councilor received only four votes less than the mayoral candidate, and a UDP candidate received the second highest number of popular votes, within the respective political party. Dangriga Town's electoral register shows that it is women dominated. Similarly, in Belmopan, a female councilor candidate for the PUP garnered only ten votes less than the mayoral candidate. This is a community that has demonstrated a discriminative voting behaviour.

Voter Turnout

Lastly, voter turnout is the number or percentage of registered electors who turnout to vote. This has been suffering a steady decline for municipal elections countrywide for the past two decades. The following list of election years by voter turnout demonstrates this.

Election Year	% Voter Turnout
1963	80.47
1966	76.39
1972*	57.99
1981	76.7
1985	67.58
1988	69.3
1991	68.23
1994	68.3
1997	66.22
2000	71.84

- Years not available—1969, 1975, 1978

In 1981 voter turnout was 76.7% and declined to 66.22% in 1997. In March 2000, this declined in voter turnout changed to an increase of 5.62%. Many factors have attributed

to the upswing in voter turnout. I am suggesting that the efforts of Elections and Boundaries Department in community outreach as outlined in the “End of Year” report, is one factor in the higher voter turnout. One of the objectives for this aspect of the community outreach was to increase voter turnout by 5%, for the March 2000 elections.

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