

BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

BELIZE

Submitted to:

Elections and Boundaries Commission

February 2004

Submitted by the Task Force:

Mr. Gian Ghandi

Mrs. Noreen Fairweather

Mrs. Myrtle Palacio

BACKGROUND

A three person Task Force was appointed by the Elections and Boundaries Commission with the following Terms of Reference:

1. Definition and limitations in the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act
2. Geographical and statistical limitations
3. Recommendations in respect of impediments in:
 - a) Adjusting the existing boundaries and
 - b) Affecting the existing numbers of constituencies

The Task Force members are:

Mr. Gian Ghandi, Legal Council, Min of Finance
Mrs. Noreen Fairweather, Lands Information Officer, Min. of Natural Resources
Mrs. Myrtle Palacio, Chief Elections Officer, Elections and Boundaries Dept.

The following are findings and recommendations of the Task Force for this phase of the Boundary Delimitation Project. The paper is divided into five sub-topics, namely, legal framework, geographical analysis, statistical analysis, history of boundary delimitation in Belize, a formula for population quota. Each sub-topic ends with the Task Force's views as the last paragraph. The paper ends with a summary of the recommendations.

I. LEGAL FRAMEWORK (Structure and Rules)

The Belize Constitution sets out both the authority and the criteria for boundary redistricting, while the ROPA sets out the regulations for the adjustment of records and Electoral Lists. **Section 90 (1) and (3)** empowers the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) to make proposals for the redistricting of electoral divisions to the National Assembly, the body authorized to make the final decision.

Section 90 (1) (a) and (b), establishes the number of divisions and the criteria for boundary delimitation.

- Each division to “have as **nearly as may** be, equal number of persons....”
- Total number of electoral divisions to be **not less** than 28

In making the above determination the EBC is guided by **Section 90 (2)**, which stipulate that consideration be given to:

1. Transport and other facilities of the division
2. Physical features of the division

Lastly, **Section 91** stipulates that boundary changes “come into operation at the next general election held after [the] re-division...”

The Task Force is of the view that the requirements in Section 90 (1) (a) of the Belize Constitution can be satisfied if the disparities in the number of voters in the electoral divisions are within a reasonable tolerance limit. This will be consistent with the practice in other jurisdictions bearing in mind that in fixing the boundaries Section 90 (2) requires the EBC to have regard to transport and other facilities and the physical

features of the divisions. These differences in the physical and other characteristics of the division would justify differences in the number of voters in the divisions, provided that such differences are within reasonable limits.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

There are twenty-nine electoral divisions in Belize at present. The first twenty-eight were established prior to the 1984 elections and the twenty-ninth in 1993. Since then, boundaries for several constituencies were adjusted from time to time (Appendix i). Some schedules for these divisions do not precisely define the geographical boundaries of each electoral division. For example, in the rural areas, most boundaries are described by only including the names of communities. Subsequently, many of these communities have grown and many new ones have developed. To address such situations, the Elections and Boundaries Department created additional polling areas in order to ensure that all electors are included on the Electoral Roster.

Almost all the current schedules, particularly in the rural areas, describe boundary limits that consist of arbitrary (imaginary) lines, which oftentimes divide property boundaries and communities. The following are some examples:

1. **Toledo District**—the boundaries shown (Appendix ii)
 - Have been arbitrarily delineated and cut through property boundaries
 - Did not take into account transportation routes making it difficult for electors to reach their polling stations
 - Disregarded administrative boundaries with electors living in the Stann Creek District polling in Toledo District

Appendix iii shows where this situation was improved significantly, after the boundary adjustments of 2002. The communities in the two divisions were confined district administrative boundaries, and new and extended communities were identified.

2. **Cayo South/Central**—Buena Vista Village
According to the present boundary description, Buena Vista Village is located partly in Polling Area 87 (Cayo South), and in Polling Area 78 (Cayo Central). In an effort to resolve eligibility to vote in the Cayo South By-election (October 2003), a survey team from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment lent support to the Elections and Boundaries Department to verify the boundary. It was discovered that 85% of the village is located in the Cayo South Electoral Division, the remaining 15% in Cayo Central.

3. **Corozal District**
In the Joseito Layout at Corozal Bay and San Andres Village in Corozal North, the polling area boundaries overlap on house lots, also in Alta Mira, Consejo and Copper Bank.

Natural geographic features (physical) such as roads and rivers, as well as, surveyed boundaries should be used, where possible, to establish boundaries. The use of natural boundaries and maintaining contiguous polygons alleviates the aforesaid scenarios, as

well as, support the immediate detection of unassigned geography, that is, any area that has not been described will easily be seen by simple inspection of the electoral maps. This will help tremendously to eliminate the current situation where there is much ambiguity with regards to elector location.

Notwithstanding the significant merits of utilizing natural geographic features, there are some impediments. People settle where they do for a number of reasons including, access to sources of income, connectivity and amenities, and oftentimes result in roads and rivers, particularly in rural areas, that pass through communities. The community of Duffy Bank where people reside on both banks of the Macal River is one such example. Therefore, it is important to consider the facilities of communities and not alienate portions as a result of using natural features.

The Task Force is of the view that geography and other physical features are critical, and should be utilized where necessary, and to include complete communities within polling areas where possible.

III. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The population of the Electoral Roll of Belize as at September 2003 is 126,977 (Table 1). Cayo South, with a population of 8,818, is the largest while the smallest, Pickstock, has 2,018. The variance between the two is a ratio of 4:4. However this is not a new phenomenon for Belize. A new Electoral Roll produced for the 1998 General Election, immediately after the Re-registration exercise, showed the same two divisions as the largest and smallest respectively. The margin of difference between the two was a ratio of 3.5:1. This is an indication that there is very little change in the distribution of electors over the last five years.

An observation gleaned from Table 1 is that the rate of growth for each division ranges from 41.2% for Cayo South to 13.0% for Collet. Other fast growing divisions next to Cayo South are Lake Independence (35.0%), Cayo Central (32.0%) and Queen Square (31.2%). Most of the increases occurred between August 2002 and February 2003, and may have been influenced by the impending election. Stann Creek West (42.1%) and Toledo East (-5.6%) show unusual growth due to the boundary changes in October 2002.

Table 1

**Growth Of Electoral Roll
August 1998 – September 2003**

Electoral Division	No. of Electors		% of Growth
	Re-Registration 1998	September 2003	
Freetown	1,988	2,524	21.0
Caribbean Shores	3,058	4,016	23.9
Pickstock*	1,489	2,018	26.2
Fort George	1,693	2,068	18.1
Albert	1,738	2,288	24.0
Queen's Square	1,904	2,719	31.2
Mesopotamia	1,707	2,144	20.4
Lake Independence	4,024	6,193	35.0
Collet	2,479	2,849	13.0
Port Loyola	4,349	5,783	24.8
Belize Rural North	2,526	3,343	24.4
Belize Rural Central	3,524	4,625	23.8
Belize Rural South	2,653	3,713	28.5
Corozal Bay	4,031	5,307	24.0
Corozal North	3,052	4,009	23.9
Corozal South East	3,704	4,763	22.2
Corozal South West	3,171	3,903	18.8
Orange Walk Central	2,654	3,402	22.0
Orange Walk North	3,949	5,029	21.5
Orange Walk East	4,162	5,485	24.1
Orange Walk South	3,936	5,303	25.8
Cayo North	5,045	6,841	26.3
Cayo Central	4,107	6,040	32.0
Cayo West	3,286	4,682	29.8
Cayo South*	5,186	8,818	41.2
Dangriga	3,346	4,257	21.4
Stann Creek West	3,304	5,704	42.1
Toledo East	4,533	4,291	-5.6
Toledo West	3,575	4,915	27.3
Total Registered Voters	94,173	126,977	
Variance ratio (largest/smallest)*	3.5:1	4.4:1	

Two other observations are as follows. Firstly, Belize's population demonstrates high mobility for demographic and geographic reasons. This is not echoed in the Electoral Roll, as the tendency is to remain at the initial registration address and/or ancestral address. Although the law provides for transfer of addresses, this is generally overlooked and less than 0.5% transfer annually, with the exception of 2002, when there was an influx of transfers of approximately 2.5%.

Secondly, Belize has a large percentage of uncommitted voters, persons who are not loyal to any particular political party. The trend in voting behaviour in post-independent Belize demonstrate frequent changes in government, and wide margin of seats in favour of the winning party. A comparative description of election outcomes by electoral

division and political party for the last five elections, 1984 to 2003, demonstrates that there are no marginal seats to greatly affect election outcome in favour of one party or the other.

The Task Force is of the view that the potential to affect the outcome of elections other than through the will of the people has not manifested itself in the political history of Belize. At this juncture adjustment to the divisions may be kept to a minimum.

IV. HISTORY OF BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

Since the election 1954, Belize has increased electoral divisions three times. In 1961, the divisions increased from nine to eighteen, Belize District being the recipient of six of the nine new divisions (Appendix i). A second increase of ten new divisions came in 1984, and Belize District increased by four, to twelve. The third and last increase was by one, and occurred in 1993, leaving the Belize District with thirteen electoral divisions altogether.

Boundary adjustments have also been conducted from time to time. In 1998, adjustments were made to boundaries of Cayo South and Cayo Central. Similar adjustments were made in other divisions in 1997 and 1998 (Table 2). In 2002, the boundaries of Stann Creek West and Toledo East electoral divisions were adjusted to provide for:

- Maintenance of electoral boundaries to remain within administrative boundaries
- Natural boundaries, such as, major highways and rivers to correct anomalies in Toledo East

Two issues stand out in the history of Boundary Redistricting in Belize

- Electoral Divisions remain within administrative boundaries
- Belize District has the larger share of constituencies

In relation to the latter issue, Belize City was the main hub of economic, political and social activities. It still is, as presently Belize City provides for not only its 70,000 residents, including 45,000 voters, but also for all of Belize. Approximately 25 busloads of commuters come to Belize City to work every day from the north and west of the country, while numerous others commute on a weekly basis.

The Task Force is of the view that divisions remain within district administrative boundaries, and that Belize District maintain the same number of divisions.

V. A FORMULA FOR POPULATION QUOTA

Many Commonwealth countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, devise a formula to arrive at a population quota for each electoral division. A tolerance level or limit is the one criterion utilized in boundary redistricting. The following demonstrates the calculation to arrive at a national average number of electors per division, which is the basis for the varying tolerance levels shown in the three scenarios of Table 2.

# of electors as at April 2003	126,539
# of electoral divisions	29
National Average (<i>126,539/29</i>)	4,364

Table 2
National
Maximum and Minimum electors Permissible per Division

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario 1</i>	<i>Scenario 2</i>	<i>Scenario 3</i>
Tolerance Levels	10% (437)	15% (655)	20% (873)
Maximum Electors permissible	4,801	5,019	5,237
Minimum Electors permissible	3,927	3,709	3,491

Table 2 demonstrates tolerance levels in three situations. Scenario 1 has a tolerance limit of 10%, whereby each division is not more than 110% and not less than 90%. At this level, the maximum permissible number of electors in any division is 4,801 and the minimum is 3,927. The second circumstance shows a tolerance limit of 15%, whereby each division is not more than 115% and not less than 85%. At this level the maximum number of electors permissible in any division is 5,019 and the minimum is 3,709. Similarly, Scenario 3 presents a tolerance limit of 20%, with a maximum number of electors permissible in any division as 5,237 and the minimum as 3,491.

In each of three situations, Belize City Divisions and the Cayo District Divisions prove to be the most challenging. In Belize City, 7 divisions fall far below the minimum and 2 divisions above the maximum. In the Cayo District, 3 out of 4 divisions fall far above the maximum, in such a manner that requires an increased number of divisions.

The Task Force is of the view that to maintain the practice and precedent set at 2002, of keeping the divisions within the administrative districts, the best tolerance level is scenario 2 at 15%. Also, to add two more divisions to the Cayo District as it is overwhelmingly large. The following tables demonstrate minimum/maximum levels by district at 15% tolerance limit.

Minimum/Maximum Levels By District

Maintaining the September 2003 statistics, the following tables demonstrate minimum/maximum levels by district at 15% tolerance level.

1. Belize District:

Number of electors as at September 2003	44,233
Number of electoral divisions	13
Average number of electors per division	3,403

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (510)
Maximum Electors Permissible	3,913
Minimum Electors Permissible	2,893

2. Corozal District

Number of electors as at September 2003	17,982
Number of electoral divisions	4
Average number of electors per division	4,496

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (674)
Maximum Electors Permissible	5,170
Minimum Electors Permissible	3,822

3. Orange Walk District:

Number of electors as at September 2003	19,219
Number of electoral divisions	4
Average number of electors per division	4,805

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (720)
Maximum Electors Permissible	5,525
Minimum Electors Permissible	4,085

1. Stann Creek District:

Number of electors as at September 2003	9,961
Number of electoral divisions	2
Average number of electors per division	4,980

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (747)
Maximum Electors Permissible	5,727
Minimum Electors Permissible	4,233

2. Toledo District:

Number of electors as at September 2003	9,206
Number of electoral divisions	2
Average number of electors per division	4,603

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (690)
Maximum Electors Permissible	5,293
Minimum Electors Permissible	3,913

3. Cayo District:

Number of electors as at September 2003	26,376
Number of electoral divisions	6
Average number of electors per division	4,396

<i>Item</i>	<i>Scenario</i>
Tolerance Levels	15% (654)
Maximum Electors Permissible	5,050
Minimum Electors Permissible	3,742

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following summarizes the views of the Task Force in respect of each sub-topic and is recommended that the Elections and Boundaries Commission consider these as guiding principles for boundary delimitation:

1. Set a tolerance limit of 15% for each constituency
2. Utilize geographic and physical features such as roads, rivers, crests of hills, park and/or estate boundaries as the prevalent features to define the limits of electoral boundaries and polling areas
3. Maintain electoral divisions within district administrative boundaries
4. Keep adjustments to a minimum—transfer adjoining polling area or part of from the division with excess to the division with deficiency
5. Expand the Cayo District by 2 divisions to 6
6. All boundaries to be contiguous and where it is not possible to utilize natural boundaries and physical features, geographic referencing should be used
7. The inclusion of complete communities within polling areas where possible

Appendix i
Constituency and Boundary Changes by Year of Change

Year of Change	No. of Seats/ Division	New Constituencies
1945	6	Northern, Cayo, Toledo, Stann Creek, Belize (2)
1954	9	Belize District: Belize North, Belize South, Belize West, Belize Rural, Orange Walk, Corozal, Cayo, Stann Creek, Toledo
1961	18	Belize District: Freetown, Pickstock, Fort George, Albert, Collet, Mesopotamia, Belize Rural North & South Cayo District: Cayo North & South Corozal District: North & South Orange Walk District: North & South Toledo District: North & South Stann Creek District: Town & Rural
1984	28	Belize District: Caribbean Shores, Lake Independence, Queen Square, Port Loyola Cayo District: Cayo West, Cayo Central Corozal District Corozal Southwest/East, Bay Stann Creek & Toledo Districts Name change Orange Walk District: Orange Walk Central, Orange Walk East
1993	29	a) Belize District: Belize Rural Central b) Boundary adjustments to: Port Loyola, Collet (2 of 1993)
1997	29	Boundary delimitation changes to: Cayo Central and Cayo South (11 of 1997)
1998	29	Boundary adjustments to: Caribbean Shores, Freetown, Fort George, Pickstock, Belize Rural South, Belize Rural Central, Corozal North, Corozal Bay, Corozal South West, Orange Walk North, Orange Walk East, Orange Walk Central (16 of 1998, 13 of 1998)
2002	29	Boundary adjustments to: Stann Creek West and Toledo East—Independence, Placencia, Seine Bight Village and surrounding Communities of the Stann Creek District moved from Toledo East to Stann Creek West (11 of 2002)

Source: "Who & What in Belizean Elections—1954 to 1993", Myrtle Palacio
"A Framework for Voter Education", Myrtle Palacio

