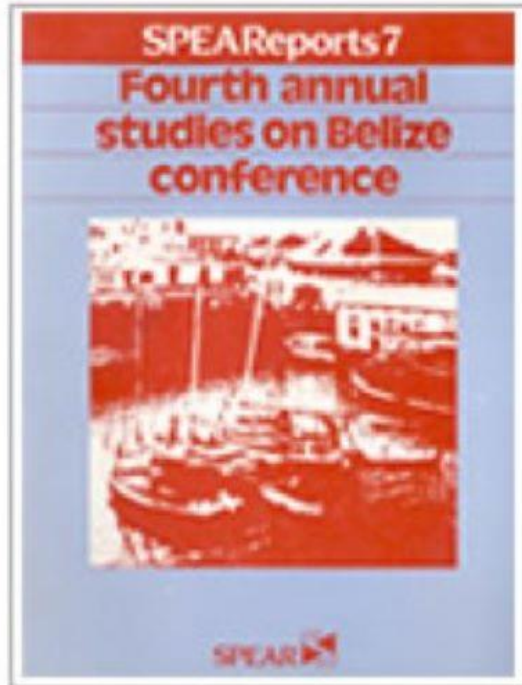


Elections in Belize City: Who is Participating

Speareports 7, Pages 48 to 60

I Myrtle Palacio



Elections in Belize City: Who is Participating?

A Critique of our Voting System

Myrtle Palacio

Introduction

This paper is a first effort to quantify election results in areas that to the best of my knowledge have not been attempted by anyone including the government-managed Elections and Boundaries Commission. The only statistics available to the John Q. Public (the electorate), are total votes and percentages of total votes polled by political parties, as well as by individual candidates. This is also an attempt at quantifying who is voting by occupation, gender, community, and political division, done by analysing behaviour and attitudes.

Embedded in this paper is the answer to the question, how representative is our democracy? If after 30 years of post-adult suffrage electioneering, the politician does not use the data available to him about the electors, then how can he represent the needs of his constituents?

Lastly this study shows the lack of seriousness on the part of politicians on the most crucial aspect of our western democratic tradition – that of voting. There are wide variances between data gathered by politicians and that of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Furthermore, there is no concern by politicians on the quality of the information that is fed to the public.

It is my hope that this paper will prove useful to the electorate. They will be able to

see where their voting strength lies and thus will better use their votes for the welfare of their community or neighbourhood. One of my major findings is information on the range of voting behaviour in the neighbourhoods of some constituencies. Even though the sample is limited, it is still possible to make some generalizations useful to politicians as well as social scientists and students. Presently, this is as close as one can get to data which is fairly representative of who voted.

More importantly, it is information on Belize compiled by Belizeans. In a rapidly changing society as ours, the physical appearance as well as values in our communities are changing drastically. We therefore need to compile data and share them for better understanding of ourselves.

I would like to thank members/leaders of both political parties (UDP and PUP) for providing information and answering our questions. I would also like to thank Ms. Obrien of the Elections and Boundaries Commission and Mrs. Carmen Cawich for being prompt and efficient in providing us with data. Lastly, I would like to thank staff members of GLESSIMA, José Meggs and Mireya Castillo for the keyboarding and statistical analysis of the data, as well as their patience in dealing with politicians.

Aims and Objectives

The primary reasons for doing this research are as follows:

- To provide the public with helpful information that normally would have been discarded
- To better understand the political system under which we live
- To show the extent to which data are wasted, using my experience in managing my campaign
- To understand the voting behaviour of the electorate in an effort to produce accurate political polls in Belize City in the near future

Data Source and Method

Our primary source of data is registers from the 1989 City Council elections which have been marked off in the Polling Stations to indicate who voted. One representative for each candidate is allowed to sit in at each polling station to observe and record the voting process, usually by drawing a line through the name of each voter as he/she comes in to cast his/her vote. Therefore, we had to rely solely on political leaders and candidates for these "polling station" registers.

Each record on the register was coded by Glessima. It was entered into the computer using a software called "Survey Mate" written by Dr. Henry Elkins. The statistical output was frequency distribution by variables, broken down into numeric frequency, percentage, cumulative percentage, mean as well as cross tabulations. I selected the following variables to satisfy my topic: date of registration, gender, occupation, division/constituency, vote – yes or no.

We also did some library research, col-

lecting data from the Elections and Boundaries Commission, SPEAR, and the Government Information Service (GIS), to arrive at reference data going back to 1980.

It took three staff members of Glessima over six months to gather the data. Politicians were so suspicious and lacked basic understanding about the usefulness of research that we had to resort to heavy marketing and educating at some point emphasizing the benefits of the exercise. Coding, keyboarding data, and preparing statistical analysis took only three weeks.

Sample

The sample is the population on the voter registration list for the 1989 Belize City Council elections. As explained later, we encountered some difficulties in collecting 100 percent of the sample. Indeed, we count ourselves fortunate in collecting what we have, notwithstanding the overwhelming constraints. Despite the limitations, the analysis resulting from the findings reveal information, some of which is unique.

Findings

My findings will be divided into two parts. The first part will be a statistical overview of the data. The second part will be an analysis based on the statistical information, combining this with information from my paper "Social Profile of Belize City" (presented last year), and my experience as observer/participant in the 1984 general elections.

Table 1: Data Collected by Division

Division	Status	*Registered	% collect	# collect
Lake Independence	none	3,389	0	
Port Loyola	none	3,114	0	
Queen's Square	complete	2,897	100	2,897
Mesopotamia	none	2,878	0	
Caribbean Shores		2,860	59	1,688
area 4	complete			1,688
area 5	missing			
Fort George		2,816	51	1,438
area 8	A-K only			692
area 9	A-L only			746
Collet		2,694	41	1,105
area 18	complete			1,105
area 19	missing			
Albert	complete	2,550	100	2,550
Pickstock		2,465	76	1,871
area 6	A-K only			563
area 7	complete			1,308
Freetown	complete	2,447	100	2,447

* Source: Elections and Boundaries Commission

Table 1 above shows the number of records collected by electoral division. Out of 10 divisions in Belize City, data was collected on seven of them, namely Queen's Square, Caribbean Shores, Fort George, Collet, Albert, Pickstock, and Freetown Divisions. Of these seven, three handed over complete "polling station" lists to us. They are Queen's Square, Albert, and Freetown Divisions. The other four which I will call the "incompletes," collectively represent 57 percent of data collected; the highest being Pickstock with 76 percent and the lowest Collet with 41 percent.

For control in the voting procedure, electoral divisions are organized into different polling stations. A registration list of a select

number of voters is attached to each polling station in a particular division. For example, Fort George is divided into two areas, (Table 1) namely, Area 8 and Area 9. Registered voters in Area 8 cast their votes in one of two buildings or polling stations. All those registered with surnames beginning with A-K voted in one polling station and those registered voters with surnames beginning with L-Z in yet another polling station. Therefore when registration lists are misplaced, it happens by polling stations. In Table 1, registration lists for whole polling stations were missing for the four incomplete divisions, and entire areas for three divisions. For example, in the Collet Division, the entire Area 19 was missing;

for Fort George L-Z for Area 8, and M-Z for Area 9 were missing.

The primary reason for partially completed data then, according to my informants, was not being able to find registers, or misplacing them. I also observed that certain factions within divisions for the same political party were tightly guarding their turf and deliberately hiding some lists.

There are three divisions for which we were absolutely unable to secure data on, namely: Port Loyola, Mesopotamia, and Lake Independence. The reasons are as follows:

- Two gentlemen responsible for different divisions and from opposing political parties deliberately lied to us. Each time we dared to make contact the answer was "next month." This went on for five months. They did not have the guts to say no.
- One gentleman thought that if we got hold of his data the computer would be able to analyse who voted by political party (UDP or PUP). This shows real ignorance.
- Another said that pertinent information was noted on his registration list and he

did not want to part with this information. This response came after we had offered to pay someone of their choice to transfer what we needed to a blank registration list.

- Another openly told us that they were disorganized and did not know where the lists were.

Table 2 below shows a comparison of the data from the Elections and Boundaries Commission and data collected from the politicians on the number of persons who voted by their respective political divisions. For the purpose of this comparison, we matched data we collected with that of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

All seven divisions show a variance. The four divisions with incomplete data collected show the smallest variance mainly because data collected were incomplete. What the information shows is that the problem of variance is obvious in all divisions.

According to the information from Elections and Boundaries 1,198 persons voted in the Freetown and 1,251 voted in the Albert Division. This is a variance of 221 and 250 - respectively less than data gathered by the politicians. This also represents 18 percent

Table 2: Comparison of Total Who Voted by Division

Division	*Elections and Boundaries	Politicians	Variance
Freetown	1,198	977	-221
Caribbean Shores	841	858	+17
Pickstock	1,131	1,181	+50
Fort George	641	628	-13
Albert	1,251	1,001	-250
Queen's Square	1,372	1,206	-171
Collet	494	575	+81

* Source: Elections and Boundaries Commission

Table 3: Percentage of Votes Cast by Division

Division	# voted/registered	% of votes cast
Lake Independence	1,652/3,389	49
Port Loyola	1,467/3,114	47
Queen's Square	1,372/2,897	47
Mesopotamia	1,307/2,878	45
Caribbean Shores	1,389/2,860	49
Fort George	1,296/2,816	46
Collet	1,306/2,694	48
Albert	1,251/2,550	49
Pickstock	1,131/2,465	46
Freetown	1,198/2,447	49
Total votes cast		47.5

Source: Elections and Boundaries Commission

and 20 percent of votes that the politicians have missed. Only two divisions, Collet and Pickstock had more votes in their (politicians) favour.

If one can assume statistically that the variance can be evenly shared, then we can assume for example that Fort George which is 49 percent incomplete, should have a variance of 25 votes. If this argument holds then we can assume that Albert Division had the largest variance and Fort George had the smallest variance closely followed by the Caribbean Shores Division.

Table 3 shows that the percentage of voter turnout was 47.5 percent less than half of the electorate. This figure includes potential voters who are away. Collecting information on persons who are registered and reside abroad can prove useful. This information was not available.

Lake Independence and Port Loyola had the highest number of voter turnout, 1,652 and 1,467 respectively. This may be be-

cause these two divisions are also the largest in number of registered voters – 3,389 and 3,114 respectively. However, only one, the Lake Independence Division, is included in the highest voter turnout. Three other divisions shared this higher percentage of voter turnout, namely, Freetown, Caribbean Shores, and Albert Divisions. All four divisions have 4 percent more voter turnout than Mesopotamia Division which had the lowest (45 percent) voter turnout, and 2 percent more than the average.

The five largest divisions in number of registered voters are: the two mentioned above, Lake Independence and Port Loyola Divisions; as well as Queen's Square, Mesopotamia and the Caribbean Shores Divisions. Freetown Division is the smallest with 2,447 registered voters, some 20 percent smaller than the largest division, Lake Independence.

Tables 4 and 5 show those who voted; Table 4 represents percent of occupation

Table 4: Percentage of Voters by Area and Occupation

Area	Civil Servant	Management	Skilled	Unskilled	Student	H/Wife
Lake Independence						
Port Loyola						
Caribbean Shores	40	43	39	47	44	58
Queen's Square	28	26	34	40	36	54
Mesopotamia						
Collet	39	14	31	91	50	90
Fort George	47	37	36	40	48	50
Albert	46	29	38	43	36	54
Freetown	40	40	34	40	40	50
Pickstock	41	38	48	65	50	68

Table 5: Percentage of Male and Female Voters by Area

Area	Female	Male
Lake Independence		
Port Loyola		
Caribbean Shores	53.0	49.0
Queen's Square	34.9	42.6
Mesopotamia		
Collet	54.0	51.0
Fort George	45.0	42.0
Albert	43.0	42.0
Freetown		
Pickstock	64.0	63.0

who voted by area, and Table 5 represents percent of gender who voted by area. The information was arrived at, for example, percent of women, by dividing the number of women who voted by the number of women registered to vote in the particular division.

Generally, the highest percentage of voter turnout with respect to occupation is housewife (Table 4), and the lowest is the business persons category, closely followed by civil servants. I have divided occupation into six main categories for ease of analysis as follows:

Civil servant: nurse, teacher, policeman
Management: business person, banker, accountant, lawyer, doctor, entrepreneur
Skilled: clerk, typist, mason, electrician
Unskilled: labourer
Student: students
Housewife: domestic, housewife

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Collet and Pickstock Divisions (Table 4) are dominated by women voters, as 90 percent and 69 percent respectively of those registered as housewives/domestics turn out to vote. These same divisions show the highest voter turnout of students and labourers.

In the management category, the Caribbean Shores Division shows the highest tur-

that those who are voting with respect to occupation are students, the unskilled, and housewives no matter what the socioeconomic standing. Civil servantry as an occupation is highest only in the Albert Division and our data shows the highest turnout of these were teachers. Although management was highest only in the Caribbean Shores, it is still less, percentage-wise, than students and the unskilled.

In the Queen's Square Division the register shows 56 percent women and 44 percent men as a percentage of total voters. Of those who voted 51 percent were women and 48 percent male. However, the percentage of voter turn out as a percentage of gender (Table 5), shows that 35 percent of women and 43 percent of men turned out to vote. This is the only division where a higher percentage of men than women turned out to vote. This division also showed some uniqueness in my paper "Social Profile of

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The following is information on communities in each division showing primarily highest and lowest percentage of voter turnout.

Albert

Highest: Berkeley St. - 50%;
Dean St. - 50%; King St. - 50%
Large numbers: Dean St., Racecourse St., Prince St., Regent St. West

Freetown

Highest: Lizzarraga - 54%; York St. - 53%
Lowest: Cran St. - 25%
Large numbers: St. Thomas, York St., Lizzarraga Ave.

Fort George

Highest: Craig St. and Hydes Lane - 54%;
Pinks Alley - 52%
Lowest: Queen St. - 35%,
Handy Side St. - 38%
Large numbers: Eve St., Barrack Road

Collet

Highest: Mayflower and Mogul Sts. - 55%
Lowest: Lake View St. - 48%

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Handy Side St. - 38%
Large numbers: Eve St., Barrack Road

Collet

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Lowest: Lake View St. - 48%
Large numbers: Cemetery Rd., Mayflower St.

Analysis

I took on the challenge in the 1984 General Elections to be the PUP candidate for the Mesopotamia Division. Prior to the first week of October 1984, I had absolutely no political aspirations and was relatively

select and train my campaigners, and generally become familiar with the area, with politicking, and with my colleagues. Therefore I was left with six weeks to campaign. Looking back now, it sounds like suicide.

I am mentioning this experience to show the relative frivolousness with which politicians treat our electoral system. Our data show that it is generally still the same. The primary reason why we did not have data on three divisions was because registration lists were misplaced or lost. Similarly, the case is the same for those divisions with partial data. Out of 10 electoral divisions, we can now safely say that only three divisions were organized enough to have complete lists available to us. These divisions are Albert, Queen's Square and Freetown. This is really a poor show indeed. Although elections have been taking place

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What then could be the reason for this? One obvious reason is basic selfishness, not wanting to help the next brother at a cost to

tion. For example, in City Council elections, it is usually a landslide victory for one political party or the other.

My second reason is ignorance of the concept of research and the cost of labour; and thirdly, general disorganization. Examples of these can be seen in other reasons given earlier for not giving us data; as well as the length of time it took us to get the data. We only got them after months of marketing and persistence. As a part of our marketing, we had to convince political leaders how useful the information would be to them as well as education to the electors. So then the politicians need to be educated as to the reason for collecting data. But do they want to? According to Shoman in his book *Party Politics in Belize*, "both parties have long accepted their roles as 'catch-all' parties, appealing to every class and sector in society." (p. 58) But how long can this continue in a society which is becoming highly socially stratified, with a new sense of political maturity?

The huge variances in Table 2 again emphasize the inconsistencies and lack of seriousness of the politicians. The bottom line is to win. The recording process in the election room is only ritualistic. What if the Elections and Boundaries Commission personnel make errors in their count, as did the political workers in this study? How do we know that their information is correct? How can the politicians challenge this when they have no data for analysis and post mortem? It is obvious that politicians do not spend money to train workers, yet they waste money discarding precious data which they can utilize to properly document their findings in an effort to better represent the needs of the electors. They just take the electors for granted.

Tables 4 and 5 prove that primarily

women participated by voting in the past City Council elections, also unskilled persons and students participated – all relatively poor people. In a city of approximately 50,000 (nearly 1/3 of the country's population), how representative is the City Council of the people who elected them? There is only one woman in the Council and you can hardly call the other nine unskilled or students. Shoman writes in his book *Party Politics in Belize*: Rogers states that "the masses that the political parties appeal to are hardly taken into consideration first. If anything, they get attention last." (p.59) The electorate's feeling of alienation is obvious these days. The new talk show hosted by Dickie Bradley on KREM on Wednesday nights in Belize City is a good example. Week after week, people's complaints range from the canal, to high bush, pot holes, land unavailability, etc. These are information/complaints that they should pass on directly to their councillor or area representative, not to Dickie Bradley. Sometimes Dickie advises them to do exactly that. However, usually the feedback by the caller is that they had done so and received no response. This shows that the politicians are not making themselves available to the people who turned out to vote for them: If this is so then there is no wonder that less people are voting.

In 1989 less than half of the electorate (47.5 percent – see Table 3) exercised their right to vote in the City Council elections signifying that our leaders are being placed into office by a minority of the electorate. This proves fairly unrepresentative.

This was also the case in 1986. According to *Disweek* (vol. 1, no. 30, Friday, 16 December 1983) "Voter apathy as predicted, was high: barely 57 percent of the electorate bothered to vote, one of the lowest voter

turnouts in our history." The *New Belize* (vol. XVI, no. 12, December 1986) in its editorial comment had this to say: "The trend toward declining voter turnout on which we wrote about in last month's issue continued in the December 10th Citco Plebiscite. Voter turnout dipped to 49.4 percent this time, down from 60.5 percent in 1980." The *Belize Today* in their cover story (p. 2 of Jan, 1990) entitled "PUP Landslide to Renew Belize City" said: "Less than half of Belize City residents eligible to vote cast their ballots. This 47.6 percent of registered electors who voted on December 6, 1989 fit a pattern of low voter turnout among urban Belizeans." The trend towards low voter turnout is tremendous from 60 percent in 1980 to 47 percent in 1989, a 13 percent decline in one decade or three elections. The reason for this is not only apathy as quoted by the newspapers mentioned above; one possibility is also absentee voters due to death or migration. The politicians should have access to this data when canvassing door to door for accurate assessment of their data.

We also found out that very little training is done by the political parties and the government of the day to enlighten the electorate. The idea of and the responsibility to vote can be emphasized through advertisements and discussions using the media. This can be organized by the political parties or accomplished as an initiative by the government of the day. This is yet to be done. The government of the day does not need or may not want to enlighten the electorate. Selwyn Ryan in his book *The Confused Electorate*, says: "A low voting turnout was more likely to benefit the incumbent – party that the larger the voting turnout, the greater the votes received by the opposition." (p. 150)

Although we do not have data on

Mesopotamia, Port Loyola, and Lake Independence Divisions, I would like to say that the voting behavior in these divisions with specific reference to occupation, would be similar to that of Queen's Square and Collet Divisions; particularly Mesopotamia and Lake Independence. These divisions have a similar socioeconomic profile – high incidence of women-headed households, primary school to high school education level, and low socioeconomic status.

Therefore, I strongly feel that there is high voter turnout for housewives and the unskilled.

The information on the "Streets/Communities" in each of the seven constituencies shows different voting patterns. The lowest voter turnout was on Tanoomah St. (21 percent), and Cran St. (25 percent) of the Queen's Square and Freetown Divisions respectively. Both streets are short, but are on the opposite side of the city. Particularly due to the relatively short length of these streets, it should be easier to reach more potential voters. Why did 3/4 of the eligible voters decide not to exercise their right to vote? The probability that they have migrated or died or both is small. I took a walk around both neighbourhoods recently. Tanoomah Street is in a bad shape – full of craters. Cran Street does not look too great either, and the residents complain of burglary.

Two streets in the Pickstock Division show the highest voting consciousness. They are Cleghorn and Castle Streets. Part of Cleghorn Street runs parallel to Cran Street, mentioned above. Physically, however, Cleghorn Street is doing much better than Cran Street in the following ways:

- better streets on Cleghorn
- there is some semblance of "gentrification" home improvement on Cleghorn

- there are more businesses on Cleghorn – Caribbean Tobacco, tyre shop, car repair shop, to name a few.

I would also like to mention that the registered voters. These are the neighbourhoods that could do with what I call voting

politicians and have a low interest in voting, even at the level of parliamentary elections. The other half of the electorate who represent the disgusted non-voters, are turned off from both parties. They see the political leadership in the country as bankrupt, perceive no real difference between them, feel that the parties do nothing to help people like themselves and believe that politics and politicians have become quite irrelevant to their struggle to survive and get ahead in life. The Jamaican electorate has become disgusted with politics. The main underlying reasons for this tendency are the economic hardships people are experiencing, the many failed promises by politicians and the many unfulfilled expectations about benefits flowing from parties and party leaders."

other words they are the backbone of our voting system, yet they are not represented by their peers.

Finally our Caribbean neighbours are functions. One out of every three of these apathetic non-voters have weak party loyalties, are ambivalent about politics and

of Jamaica. can easily be traced the case for 1986 and 1989. This is fairly unrepresentative of the masses. Again political leaders have not done much to encourage voter turnout. The minority vote coupled with alienation by leaders of the electorate can indeed lead to apathy.

In my opinion only three out of 10 political divisions in Belize City were organized enough to be able to produce complete "polling station" registers at short notice. Also only three divisions show a high voting conscience in some of the neighbourhoods with over 50 percent of electors turnout. Lastly nearly 3/4 of the voters registered did so from the commencement of the new voter registration system.

The data on neighbourhoods or communities was gathered for the benefit of the electorate. For example, Raccoon and

Summary and Conclusion

electorate and analysing data gathered.

The leaders are elected by a single member constituency system, corresponding to the 10 divisions for national elections. The candidate for mayor could be nominated along with each group of 10 and the mayoral candidate who emerges with the highest overall votes city-wide will become mayor, to complete an eleven member council. This would ensure that each sector of the city is represented on the council and would increase the probability of an opposition. Along with all this should come municipal reforms under a city constitution empowering the City Council to enact ordinances for the good government of the city and to raise sufficient revenue for that purpose."

George Streets in the Queen's Square Division by sheer numbers should be able to impress on politicians the needs of these

participation. I believe that Belize City Council elections should be held under a 10

grumble for the next three to five years, and

We also calculated a cross tabulation of date of registration by division. Ge what this information showed is that approximately 65 percent to 75 percent of electors registered in 1978/1979. A but nearly equal amount registered in 1983/1984 and 1988/1989, approximately 10 percent to 16 percent. On the basis of this information we can say that most electors are old voters, who had registered from 1978 and beyond, and that the response to register prior to and during election year (1984 and 1989) is poor.

Very few women are directly in the political arena, as men dominate political municipal and national level. However, research indicates that women are campaigners, they form committees, are the ones who go to the polls on election day, and are the ones who

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Aspects of State Policy on Land Distribution and Use in the Crown Colonial Period and After

Carla N. Barnett, Ph.D.

Discussion of the evolution of the patterns of land ownership and tenure in the pre-crown colonial period may be found elsewhere.¹ This paper briefly examines the role of public policy towards land in respect of ownership, distribution and use in the crown colonial period and after, that is the post-1871 period. It discusses the land reform programme of the 1960s and 1970s and highlights the importance of this programme in the development of the sugar industry of Belize. In this process, the operations of the national estate were important.

The paper also examines the role of the land reservation policy in the struggle, between the colonial state and the dominant landowners, for political and economic control and the policy with respect to the choice of crops and methods of cultivation.

Uneven Distribution and Idle Land

By 1871, the land of the territory was virtually divided in the middle by the Sibun River – the northern half being privately owned land and the southern being national land.² Private land was largely comprised of a small number of very large estates and a large number of small landholdings.³ Much of the land in the territory was held idle and undeveloped, and the extraction of forest

products was undertaken with little effort at regeneration of forest resources.

Concern about the vast acreage of private land held idle by their owners did not emerge until well into the colonial period. Bringing idle land into productive use required two strategies. On one hand, there was a need to bring national land into productive use by giving access without fostering increases in the acreage of idle private land. Several means of achieving this were attempted including population settlement schemes⁴, the location ticket system⁵, the establishment of Central Farm⁶ for agricultural experimentation by the agriculture department and the development of plantations by the Colonial Development Corporation.⁷ On the other hand, there was a need to offset the limited and uncertain access to privately owned idle land by landless farmers to whom land was available mainly on annual tenancies. This practice still dominates tenure arrangements on private land.⁸

Early unconcern about the vast idle acreage of potentially arable land may have been fueled by a suggestion that the more fertile land of the country were those to the south which remained unalienated to private owners. Writing in 1988, Bristowre, et al, noted that in the south, "although the narrow belt of land on the sea-coast is nearly all taken up (by private owners), and rapidly developing under the energetic operations of fruit-growing agriculturalists and settlers, the lands of the interior are said to be richer