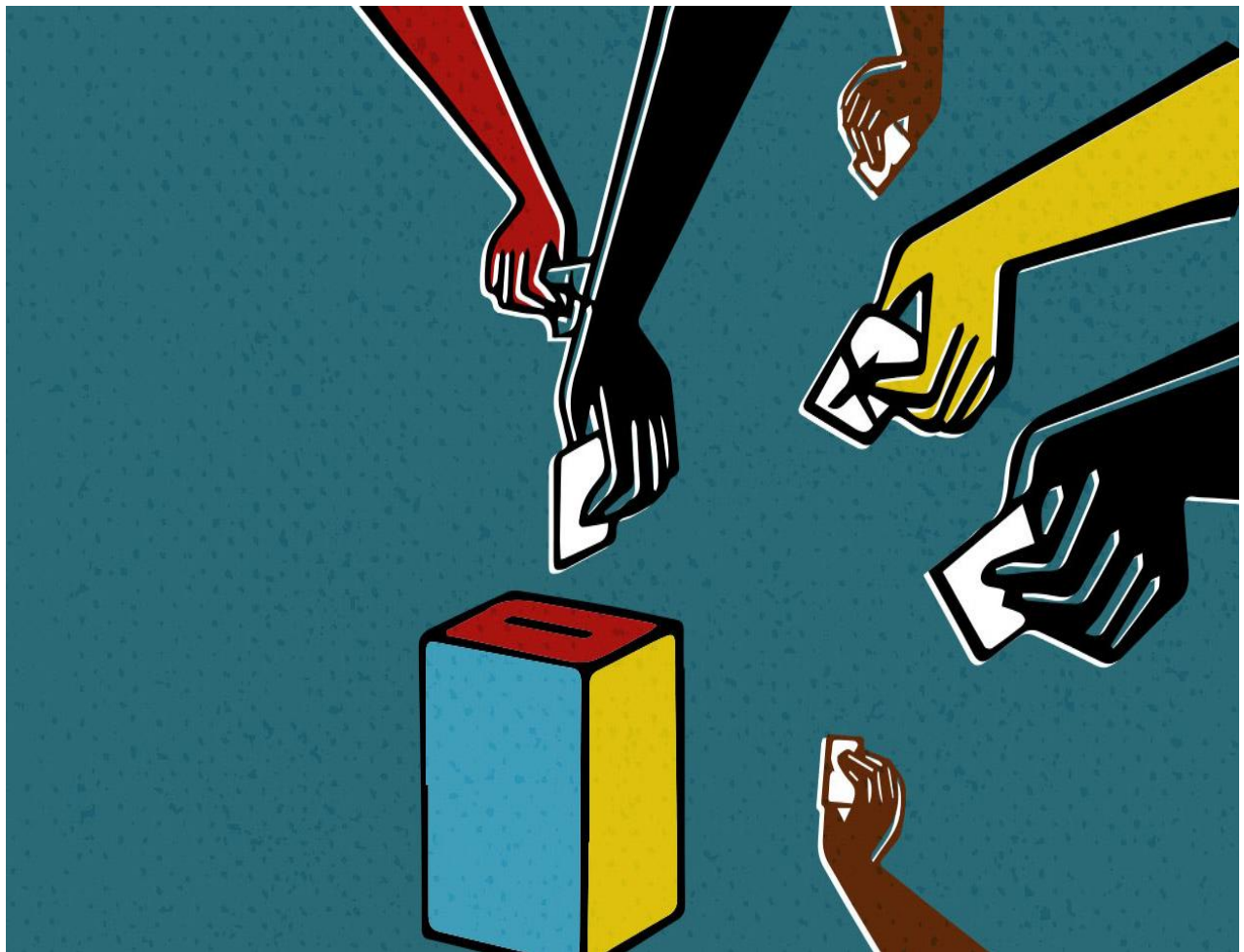


# Belize's Parliamentary Elections VOTER PARTICIPATION

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June 19, 2025



**Belize Parliamentary Elections**  
**VOTER PARTICIPATION—A Statistical Analysis**  
*I Myrtle Palacio--June 17, 2025*

**Introduction**

Voter turnout or voter participation is the percentage of eligible voters who cast a vote in an election. It is a review of political leaders; and an indicator of elector participation level in a country's democracy. Belize does not have a culture of ongoing citizen engagements in governance concerns, so the election vote is the primary or only avenue to give a voice. Voter turnout then, is symptomatic of the electors' stance and stand in the governance of the country, and an expression of confidence in the leaders who solicit their votes. This paper is a descriptive statistical analysis of Belize's electoral data as per the references below. In the absence of a systematic investigation via a questionnaire instrument, the figures speak. I have refrained from inserting my personal opinions.

**Parliamentary Election 2025**

Parliamentary election 2025 was not a snap election, and those in the election business knew it was coming. Besides candidates from the two major political parties PUP and UDP, there were several Independent Candidates and four Third Parties. Positioned at the helm, the PUP stood ready with Plan Belize 2.0. At the same time, members and leaders of the UDP were embroiled in a series of contentious disputes before, during and after the election period. These controversies spilled into the public arena, including the judiciary, in a manner never before experienced in our political history, (*National Perspective October 24, 2024, Channel 5, February 25, 2025, Channel 5 Belize March 31, 2025 and Love News Belize May 12, 2025*). On Nomination Day, two UDP standard bearers backed down at the time of nomination, and did not elevate to candidacy. In doing so, they conceded to the only contenders, PUP candidates Anthony Mahler, and Henry Usher in Pickstock and Fort George constituencies respectively. This is the first of such occurrence in Belize's political history.

At election 2025, the electoral population stood at 197,018 voters. It is slightly female dominated with a small percentage of more women than men, similar to the nation's population per the Statistical Institute of Belize. A few constituencies such as Corozal South East has a population that is slightly male dominated, while Dangriga, Freetown and Lake Independence Constituencies are overwhelmingly female populated. In terms of age cohort, the 25 to 34 (26.48%) and the 35 to 44 (21.71) together dominate nearly half (48.29%) of the electoral population. The youth 18 to 24 years (11.22%) and the elderly 64+ (11.60%) are the smallest groups.

A total of 128,002 (64.97%) electors cast votes, including 2,703 or 2.11% whose votes were rejected. This is the lowest percentage in voter turnout, and the highest percentage in rejected votes in post independent Belize. Voter turnout then is down from 2020 by 17.38%. However, 2020 had a post reregistration or relatively new list of voters. These new voters' lists garner higher voter turnout, as experienced in 1998 with 90.14%. The Dangriga constituency at 47.08% had the lowest voter turnout, less than 50%, followed closely by Stann Creek West with 50.89%.

The low turnout is evident of the near absence of a major opposition party in a two-party electoral system—the disgruntled supporters of the UDP, and those of the PUP who were certain of a shoe-in, sat out this one; not to mention the apathetic voters, who have quietly grown indifferent. I gathered opinions of a few political scrutineers who witnessed the vote count, and concluded that the high percent of rejected votes did not result from a lack of knowledge or confusion at the number of candidates on the ballot, but largely deliberate. Mesopotamia (6.08%) and Port Loyola (5.97%) had the highest percentage of rejected votes, but were also among the highest in 2020, similarly with Belize Rural Central. The only anomaly here would be Queens Square (3.55%) and Belize Rural South (3.16%). Two UDP candidates stood down on election day and did not contest, leaving the PUP candidate for Dangriga to do battle with an Independent Candidate, another first in our political history.

The breakdown of votes by political party reveals the following: the PUP garnered 26 seats, 66.48% (85,096) of the votes to form the government, and an increase in popularity relative to 2020 by nearly 8%. The UDP received 5 seats. However, votes were tallied in three groups, namely UDP (T) 13, 237, UDP (S) 23,739, and UDP (Boots) 352. This represents a vote of 37, 328 (29.16%); which is less than one-third of total electors' votes. Ordinarily this outcome would be flagged as the poorest performance of a major political party, if the party was not so divided. (T) and (S) represents Tracy Taegar Pantón and Shyne Barrow, respectively, who participated in about 26 out of 31 constituencies, with UDP (S) contesting in all 26 constituencies and UDP (T) in 17. Of the 5 seats won, two represented (S) and three (T). Strikingly evident is that in all 14 constituencies where both UDP (T) and UDP (S) contested together, UDP (T) overwhelmingly garnered more votes. This can be attributed more to individual personalities than to the party. UDP Party leader Shyne Barrow lost his seat, receiving 21% or less than 25 % of the constituency votes; representing another first. Tracy not only gained back the Albert seat, but improved on the outcome. In 2020 she won by only 41 votes, and widened the margin in 2025, by 221 (9.79%) votes.

The Third Party and Independent Candidates are yet to make any impact on the electorate in post independent Belize. The four Third Parties together garnered less than 1% of the votes. One Independent Candidate Elvia Vega Samos who contested in Corozal Bay stood out as she amassed 24.41% or nearly one-quarter of the votes. There has been only one other occasion in post-independent election history when an Independent Candidate garnered double digit percentage of votes. This occurred in 2003 when Sedi Elrington garnered 27.25% in the Pickstock Division. Both these Independent Candidates garnered more votes than the losing major political party candidate (UDP). I attribute such to *dramatis personae*, or the role these individuals played in their constituencies vis a vis certain traits determined more by their configuration on the person, and not the political party they were affiliated with.

Voter turnout by party and division demonstrates party and or candidate popularity by division, and is a telling trend to follow. For 2025, seven candidates, all PUP garnered 80% and more votes, namely Hyde of Lake Independence 96.06%, Martínez of Toledo East 90.88, Fonseca of Freetown 89.92%, Leal Jr. of Belize Rural North 87.42%, Espat of Cayo South 86.46%, Bernard of Orange East 83.99%, and Musa of Caribbean Shores 80.84%. This has not been attained in

recent elections; and occurred in only four other elections since 1954, namely, 2003 with Espat in Albert 82.24%, Pech in Orange Walk South with 83.47% and 87.6% in 1974 and 1969 respectively; in 1965 Marin Sr. of Corozal South with 83.4%. None of the party leaders, UDP nor PUP have received such a turnout. But why at this time, speaks to the reasons for the low turnout mentioned above, and that PUP voters came out.

Lastly, I determined several years ago that a larger percentage of registered women voters usually dominate the voting population. In this 2025 election men turned out and possibly in sizeable numbers. At the same time the younger voters 18 to 24 years though registered, may still be staying away from the polls in large numbers.

### **Synopsis**

Here are a few facts about Belize's voter participation in Parliamentary Elections, post-independence:

1. Voter participation in 2025 was at its lowest (64.48%), down by 17.38% relative to 2020. However, still relatively high to other countries in the CARICOM region, averaging 66.0% (1993). The highest voter turnout was 90.14% in 1998 and the lowest, 71.6% in 1993, 72.6% in 1989 and 73.16 % in 2012, 72.89% in 2015. The high voter turnout of 90.14% in 1998 and 81.86% in 2020, are primarily a result of voter re-registration (new voters' lists) immediately before the election.
2. Anti-incumbency vote is frequent, and has resulted in the opposing party winning the election with a super majority of 75% or more of the seats—1984 for the UDP, 1998 for the PUP, 2008 for the UDP, 2020 for the PUP. 2012 was also an anti-government vote, when the UDP lost 9 seats to the opposition PUP; and down to 17 seats from 2008.
3. Government formed with less than 50% (minority vote) of the party's popular votes, as occurred in 1993 when UDP formed the government with 48.7% of the votes and a seat majority of 16/29. This was repeated in 2012 with 49.88% of the votes.
4. Snap election is not a political strategy to win elections. The first snap election in 1993 caused the PUP to lose the election. While the PUP won the popular vote at 51.2%, the party did not amass enough seats (13/29) to form the government. The snap election called by the UDP in 2012, nearly caused the party to lose the election. UDP lost the popular vote, and formed the government with 17/31 seats; some 8 seats less than four years earlier (25/31) in 2008. The mood of the voters and the energy of the new PUP leadership at the time, were grossly misconstrued. The PUP went from 6 seats to 14, a popularity vote of 47.08%, and close losses in three divisions, namely Lake Independence (82 votes), Cayo North East (17 votes) and Cayo Central (44 votes).
5. Party popularity also speaks. The popularity of the PUP after 1993 lead to a supermajority win at 1998, then a decline in popularity between 1998 and 2008, leading to the supermajority win of the UDP. Four years later, at the snap election call for 2012, the anti-incumbency vote caused a sharp shift towards the PUP; just months after a leadership change (see #4).
6. 2025 is the election with the highest rejected votes at 2.11%. Those constituencies with over 3% rejected votes are Queens Square, Port Loyola, Belize Rural Central, Belize Rural South, Mesopotamia and Orange Walk Central. Mesopotamia (6.08%) and Port Loyola (5.97%) were also the highest in rejected votes in 2020.

7. The Third Party and Independent Candidates are yet to make any impact on the electorate in post independent Belize, at least with enough votes to effect a win.

The 2025 parliamentary election can be determined as out of the ordinary, and speaks loudly about the state of Belize's democracy. Most of the first time occurrences as outlined above, includes: absent standard bearers on nomination day, candidate AWOL on election day, publicly split major political party at the time of election call. Cordel Hyde of Lake Independence who received over 96% of this constituency's vote is LARGE. Lastly, a major party leader, Shyne Barrow of the UDP lost his seat to a party colleague, and with less than 25% of the votes cast in the constituency. This made way for a huge first, since the first "free" election of 1954, some 71 years ago. It is a first female Leader of the Opposition (LoO) Tracy Taegar Panton. Belize with Tracy Taegar Panton join other CARICOM countries in this new political history made in 2025!!

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