

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Voters in Jamaica

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to update the knowledge reservoir on contemporary Jamaican voters. One of the pillars upon which ‘good’ democracy is built is one’s right to change governments through the autonomous process of voting. Voting behaviour of Jamaicans dates back to 1944. After 1944 to 1971, voting behaviour was analyzed by way of the electoral data. Carl Stone, on the other hand, has shown that opinion survey can be effectively used to predict an election by way of knowing the profile of the electorates. Since Stone’s study in 1993 no one has sought to update and evaluate the voting behaviour of Jamaicans. This study utilizes data taken from two surveys that were administered by the Centre of Leadership and Governance (CLG), University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, in July to August 2006 and May 2007. For each survey, the sample was selected using a multistage sampling approach of the fourteen parishes of Jamaica. Each parish was called a cluster, and each cluster was further classified into urban and rural zones, male and female, and social class. The final sample was then randomly selected from the clusters. The first survey saw a sample of 1,338 respondents, the second survey, 1,438 respondents. Descriptive statistics would be used to analyze the data. The current survey indicates that PNP still retains a 3 percent lead (36.2% PNP to 33.2% JLP) among eligible voters. However, a substantial narrowing has occurred since August 2006, when the comparable figures were 53% PNP and 23.1% JLP. This represents a 10% net increase for JLP, and a 17% decrease for PNP. Furthermore, from the May 2007 survey, 41% of the males identified with PNP and 42% with JLP, whereas for females 42% identified with PNP and only about 35% with JLP--a substantial gender difference in party preference. Women also are less satisfied with the two-party system generally, with 22% opting for “something else”, as compared with 17% among males. Voting behaviour is not, and while people who are ‘undying’ supporters for a party may continue to voting one way (or decides not to vote); the vast majority of the voting populace are more sympathizers as against being fanatics. Generally, people vote base on (i) charismatic leadership; (ii) socialization - earlier traditions; (iii) perception of direct benefits (or disbenefits); (iv) associates and class affiliation; (v) gender differences, and that there is a shift-taking place in Jamaican landscape. Increasingly more Jamaicans are becoming meticulous and are moving away from the stereotypical uncritical and less responsive to chicanery. Education through the formal institutions and media are playing a pivotal function in fostering a critical mind in the public.

**Key words:** Voting behaviour, Voters, Governance, Jamaica

### INTRODUCTION

Since its transition from the colonial system to independent self-government, Jamaica is one of the few countries in the global South that has entertained a competitive party system (Stone, 1978). There had been a regular transference of power between the two dominant political parties, the Peoples National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP). But with the PNP having been in power since 1989, Jamaica may be seeing a shift in voter preference, or a larger transition in their

democratic process. In the subsequent elections under universal suffrage (1944 to 1971), voting behaviour was analyzed by way of the electoral data. Stone (1992; 1989; 1981; 1978a, b; 1974) demonstrated that opinion surveys could be effectively used to predict an election by way of knowing the profile of the electorates. Dearth of literature exists in the past on voting behavior in Jamaica using the electoral system and survey opinion polling; since Stone’s study no one has sought to update and evaluate the voting behaviour of Jamaicans. Using data taken from two surveys that were administered by the Centre of

Leadership and Governance (CLG), University of West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, this paper seeks to update the knowledge reservoir on Jamaican voters in 2007, pending a very critical upcoming election period. The Centre for Leadership and Governance was launched in November 2006 within the Department of Government, UWI, Mona, Jamaica, to develop governance structure, encourage student participation, and provide policy based research activities for parliamentarians.

Until the late 1980s, no political party has had more than two terms in office in Jamaica (Stone, 1978b). There had been a regular transference of power between the two dominant political parties: the 'left' oriented Peoples National Party (PNP) and the capitalist oriented Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) - Despite the fact that the political affectation of the PNP has changed since its original installation, the party is still associated with social democratic principles. Stone (1978a, b) argued that the continuous changing of the political directorates was a hallmark of a healthy democratic system. The victory of the PNP in 1989 changed this cycle; following that victory, the party won four consecutive general elections, something that has come as a surprise to many political pundits. This change signals a paradigm shift from what constitutes a "healthy" democracy. The Peoples National Party (PNP) has accomplished an unprecedented feat, having been in power for the past 15 years; therefore, an analysis of voting behaviour is needed in order to understand what has changed this two party competitiveness that once existed in Jamaica. But to what extent can we assess people's support of democratic freedom from their voting behaviours? If a people continue to democratically elect the same party, it could be construed as a change occurring within the political culture. Space does not allow for a thorough examination of Jamaica's political culture, nor is such an examination the thrust of this paper, but it is important to offer some thoughts on political socialization as it relates to this study. It has been argued that the political culture of a society is tied to its socialization, which is a consensus of beliefs, customs, preconception and a certain orientation among its members (Powell *et al.*, 2007). In this research, political socialization will refer to the process by which Jamaican's develop their partisan attitudes and affiliations. It would be dangerous to assert that the socialization process is the process by which people form their beliefs and customs, is owed entirely to the family unit. Recognizing the role that the family plays in locating people within larger structures like class, it is the contention of this paper that education too plays a pivotal role in political socialization.

One of the particular features of Jamaican political culture is the class affiliation of the two dominant parties. It can be argued that the "lower" and "middle" classes of Jamaican are predominantly oriented towards the PNP

while Jamaica's "upper" class is generally affiliated with the JLP. Each of the main political parties in Jamaica, the JLP or the PNP, will amass support from various social classes because of programmes that they employ. For example, when the Michael Manley administration (PNP) took the decision to introduce free education in the 1970s, maternal leave for pregnant women, "crash programme work" for the working class, this resonated with the working and middle classes in Jamaica. The JLP through Sir Alexander Bustamante has equally contributed to the perspective of the particular classes. When Bustamante took the position to die rather than leaving the sugar workers, it resonated with the working class of the day, and could justify his victory at the polls.

This study borrows from Stone's (1978), previous usage of opinion polling to determine voting behaviour. What was unique about Stone's work is that he was aware of the limitations of empiricism, and therefore sought to explain the "swings" in electoral outcomes via a political economy framework (Edie, 1997). The likelihood of a Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) win or the continuance of current PNP administration, which in and of itself would be furthering a neoteric history of voting behaviour in this country, which requires careful analysis beyond aggregate numbers. Indeed, the association between factors such as gender, and age and their impact on voting behaviour and voters numeration will be important considerations in this paper as well. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study is to examine the differences in voting behaviour by gender. A second objective is to evaluate whether there are differences in support for the two main political parties across age groups and social classes.

One of the challenges of such a study is the static use of self-reported data as a yardstick to assess future decisions of people. Human behaviour is fluid, and so any attempt to measure this in the long-term might be futile. Nevertheless, we will attempt here, to unearth some salient characteristics of the Jamaican voters as well as to provide a more in-depth understanding of a probable outcome, of the next general elections. While this study is not concerned with furthering the epistemological framework that Stone relied on, we recognize that the survey research technique could offer tremendous insights on Jamaica's voting behaviour in the forthcoming elections. This study should offer some grounds on which to compare and contrast the voting behavioural patterns of Jamaicans currently and perhaps in the future, and to understand those factors that are likely to influence non-voters.

Originally, political economists used electoral data to provide rich information on aggregate voting patterns by regions (Stone 1978b; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). The study of voting behaviour emerged out of the electoral data, but this only offers scholars and non-academics

alike. An aggregate perspective on the actual voting patterns by geographic space (Stone, 1974; 1978b). (Check sentence not finish) A comparison between electoral statistics and sample survey method, is that the former is not able to probe the meaning systems of people, their attitudes, perceptions, moods, expectations, and political behaviour that justify their actions (or inactions). On the side of the delimitation of electoral statistics, it is primarily past events with subdivision concerning socio-demographic and psychological conditions of people. Therefore, this approach whilst offering invaluable information on the ideographic, cross-national and comparative patterns of voting, and equally providing a contextual background on the political milieu from which the voters are drawn is limited in scope. As voters are not only influenced by those conditions, but also impacted upon by socio-psychological and economic conditions (Stone, 1974), the need was there for a method that would capture those tenets, which is the 'political sociology of voting'.

It follows then that when Professor Carl Stone introduced sample survey method in the political landscape to probe people's voting behaviour it was a first for the nation (Stone, 1973; 1974; 1978b). The sample survey method allows for a more detailed analysis of voting behaviour, by way of those demographic, socio-economic and political factors that influence the choices of voters. The sample survey method allows for the use of the social structure model in seeking investigating voting behaviour. Among the advantages of the use of the survey method is its ability to predict behaviour, provide association (or the lack thereof), is high in ability to generalize, can be used for national, regional and international comparison among other nations. With this approach, Stone was able to consecutively predict all the winners for the general elections between 1970 and 1994. The social structure model places emphasis on social conditions such as social class as predictors of voting behaviours. In this paper, the authors will only address age, gender and class as predictors of voting behaviour, because the survey with which this analysis will be made possible can only accommodate those social factors.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This survey was administered by the Centre of Leadership and Governance (CLG), University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, in May 2007. The sample was randomly selected from the fourteen parishes of Jamaica, using the descriptive research design. The sample frame is representative of the population based on gender and ethnicity. A total of 1,438 respondents aged 18 years and older were interviewed for this study, with a sampling error of approximately  $\pm 3\%$ , at the 95% confidence level (i.e. CI). The results that are presented

here are based solely on Jamaicans' opinion of their political orientation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

For each survey, the sample was selected using a multistage sampling approach of the fourteen parishes of Jamaica. Each parish was called a cluster, and each cluster was further divided into urban and rural zones, male and female, and upper, middle and lower social classes. The final sample was then randomly selected from the clusters. The first survey saw a sample of 1,338 respondents, with an average age of 34 years and 11 months  $\pm 13$  y and 7 months. On the second survey, 1,438 respondents aged 18 years and older were interviewed, with a sampling error of approximately  $\pm 3\%$ , at the 95% confidence level. The results presented here are based solely on Jamaicans' opinion of their political orientation.

**Operational Definitions:** It is necessary here to provide some clarity on the terms that are being used in this study. We are attempting to make some predictions on voting behaviour, which is the level of voters' participation in a democratic society. In other words, voting behavior here refers to "which party you intend to vote for or have voted for," and the frequency of support or lack of it. Survey participants were asked if they were (a) definitely voting for the PNP, (b) definitely voting for the JLP, (c) probably voting for the JLP, or (d) probably voting for the PNP. Voter enumeration is another important term that we are dealing with in this study. Enumeration here is defined as the self-report of people who indicated that they are registered to vote in an election. In the survey it was denoted as a binary value (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

This paper also attempts to look at Jamaica's political culture in terms of social constructions, such as gender, and social class. We recognize gender as a social construct and set of learned characteristics that identify the socio-cultural prescribed roles that men and women are expected to play. In the survey it is also represented as a binary value (0 = female, 1 = male). Social class here is defined subjectively. Respondents were asked to indicate using their self-assessment as to which social class they consider themselves to be in (1) working class, (2) middle class, (3) upper-middle class or (4) upper class. Educational level is an integral part of defining social class, even subjectively. By educational level we are referring to the total number of years of schooling, (including apprenticeship and/or the completion of particular typology of school) that an individual completes within the formal educational system (1 = primary and/or preparatory and below; 2 = secondary or high; 3 = vocational; 4 = undergraduate and graduate education, and 5 = post-university qualification).

Lastly, age is defined as the length of time that one has existed; a time in life that is based on the number of

years lived; duration of life. Age is represented as a non-binary measure (1 = young, 1 = middle age- 26 to 59 years and 3 = elderly). The United Nations has defined the aged as people of 60 years and older (WHO, 2007). Oftentimes, ageing (i.e. the elderly) means the period in which an individual stops working or he/she begins to receive payment from the state. Many countries are, however, using 60 years and over as the definition of the elderly including Professor Eldemire (1995), but for this paper, we will use the chronological age of 60 years and beyond.

## RESULTS

**Sociodemographic factors:** Some background information on May 2007 survey is helpful. According to the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (2002) 91.61% of Jamaica is African (Black), while 0.89% are East Indian, and those of Chinese, and European descent comprise 0.20 and 0.18% of Jamaica's population respectively. (6.21% of Jamaicans were classified as "other"). Some 81.3% (n = 1168) of the sampled respondents considered themselves to be Africans (or Blacks), 3.8% (n = 54) Indians, 0.5% (n = Asians-Chinese), 0.5% (n = 7) Syrians (or Lebanese), 0.2% (n = 3) Europeans (or Caucasians or Britain or French), 0.1% (n = 1) North American Caucasians and 13.2% (n = 190) reported mixed.

Approximately 33% (n = 468) of the respondents were youth, 62.3% (n = 891) were middle age and 5.0% were elderly. Some 28.7% (202) of the males are youth, 65.9% (n = 463) are middle age while 5.4% (n = 38) are 60 years and older. Concerning the female population, 36.6% (n = 266) are youth, 58.9% (n = 428) are middle age and 4.5% (n = 33) are senior citizens. 74.4% (n = 1009) of those who supplied data on their ages indicated that the current government favours the rich more than the poor. Of those who reported that the government is fostering the interest of the rich, 33.3% (n = 336) were youth, 62.3% (n = 629) were middle age and 4.4% (n = 44) were elderly. Disaggregating the data reveal that 50.4% (n = 506) of those who indicated that the current policies favour the affluent are males compared to 49.6% (n = 498) of the females. Most (58.8%, n = 293) of the female respondents who reported that that the present policies of the government favour the rich are middle age, with 37.6% (n = 187) who are youth compared to 3.6% (n = 18) who are elderly. More middle-aged men (65.8%, n = 333) than middle-aged women (58.8%, n = 293) believe that the current administration's policies favour the rich. A major difference between the genders and age cohort was found as substantially more youth females (37.6%, n = 187) than youth males perceived that government's policies are anti-poor.

**Voting patterns:** Several important shifts can be seen to have taken place in voter attitudes over the past ten

months. When asked whom they would "vote for in the next general elections", the current (May 2007) survey indicates that PNP still retains a 3 percent lead (36.2% PNP to 33.2% JLP) among eligible voters. However, a substantial narrowing has occurred since August 2006, when the comparable figures were 53% PNP and 23.1% JLP; this represents a 10% net increase for JLP, and a 17% decrease for PNP. There has also been a shift in 'overall party support' during that same period. Again, PNP remains slightly ahead, but has lost ground in the intervening months. When asked what party they "always vote for" or "usually vote for", 43% of the respondents to the May 2007 survey say they "usually" or "always" vote for PNP, whereas 36.3% "usually" or "always" vote for JLP. As of the August 2006 survey, the comparable figures were 57.2% PNP supporters and 25.2% JLP supporters -- an 11% increase for JLP and 14% drop for PNP over a ten-month period (Bourne, 2007).

A shift in terms of political orientation seems to be taking place as 5.3% of 'Definite' supporters of the PNP reported that they would definitely be voting for the JLP compared to 4.7% of the 'Definite' JLP who indicated that they would definitely be marking an X for the PNP. Further, 1.5% of 'Definite' PNP indicated a possibility of voting for the JLP compared to 2.8% of 'die-hearted' JLP supporters who mentioned that they probably might be marking that 'X' for the PNP. Furthermore, 3.4% of those who have a political leniency toward the JLP reported that they will definitely be voting for the PNP with 4.3% mentioned 'probably'. However, among those with the PNP orientation, 18.9% of those who voted PNP in the last general elections reported that they will be voting for the JLP, with another 16.5% who said that they might be marking that X for the JLP.

Those whose political culture is not party based, but whose perspective is shaped possibly on issues, 21.3% indicated that they might vote for the PNP compared to 15.7% for the JLP. Of this same group of voters, 25% reported a definite preference for the PNP with the JLP receiving the same percentage. The dissatisfaction with the political system is higher for those with a PNP orientation as against with a JLP belief: 9% of 'Definite' PNP voters reported that they would not be voting in the upcoming elections compared to 5.7% for JLP. Political culture is not static and so, of those who expressed a leniency toward a party, the dissatisfaction is higher again, for the PNP as 15% reported that they will definitely not be voting in the upcoming general elections compared to 10% for the JLP.

The study found a positive statistical relationship between future voting behaviour of those who are enumerated and past voting behaviour. The findings reveal that 75.5% of those who are 'sympathizers' of the JLP support will retain this position in the upcoming elections compared to 68.2% for the PNP. Continuing of 'Definite' voters, 11.3% of the JLP supporters reported

that they 'probably' would vote for their party compared to 15.9% of the PNP supporters.

**Social class:** There appears to be important 'class-related' differences in Jamaicans' election preferences, yet they are paradoxical -- tending to have different effects depending on whether one is looking at voting, party, or candidate preferences. Approximately 67% of the respondents to the May 2007 survey perceived themselves to be in the "working class" (i.e. the lower class), 27% in the "middle class", 4% within the "upper-middle" class, and 2% "upper class." Although the survey shows PNP with a slight advantage in the votes across all of the social classes, that advantage tends to be weakest and most vulnerable among the lower class (36.7% PNP, 34.7% JLP), who make up approximately two-thirds of voting age adults. The PNP's advantage is somewhat stronger among middle class voters (35.6% PNP, 31.2% JLP), and is strongest among the 'upper-middle' and 'upper' class voters (44.3% PNP, 31.1% JLP). With respect to 'party identification' ("which do you consider yourself to be?"), PNP has a slight advantage among the lower (43.2% PNP, 39.6% JLP) and middle (38.6% PNP, 35.6% JLP) classes. However, in the "upper-middle and upper class" category, JLP has the edge in party identification. (40.3% PNP, 43.5% JLP).

Within the lower class, marginally more people believe that Simpson-Miller (38.6%) "Would do a better job of running the country" compared to Golding (36.2%). However more people within the middle class reported that Golding (37.4%) would do a better job of running the country than Simpson-Miller (31.9%). Upper-middle and upper class respondents on the other hand, gave Mrs. Simpson-Miller the nod over Mr. Golding's (40.3, 33.8% respectively).

Clearly, there is a class dimension to the voting preferences. Most of the sampled population had completed secondary school (including traditional and non-traditional high schools) (31.9%, n = 459). Approximately 23% (n = 333) of the respondents had at least an undergraduate level training, with 13.4% being current students. Only 4.7% of the sampled population (n = 1,438) had mostly primary or preparatory level education.

**Political socialization:** Have you ever stopped to think about WHY you have the political beliefs and values you do? Where did they come from? Are they simply your own ideas or have others influenced you in your thinking? Political scientists call the process by which individuals acquire their political beliefs and attitudes "political socialization." What people think and how they come to think it is of critical importance to the stability and health of popular government. The beliefs and values of the people are the basis for a society's political culture and

that culture defines the parameters of political life and governmental action (Mott, 2006).

Unlike other species whose behaviour is instinctively driven, human beings rely on social experiences to learn the nuances of their culture in order to survive (Macionis and Plummer, 1998). "Social experience is also the foundation of personality, a person's fairly consistent patterns of thinking, feeling and acting" (Macionis and Plummer, 1998), which is explained by Mott that political socialization helps to explain one's attitude to people, institution and governance. In cases where there is non-existence of social experiences, as in the case of a few individuals, personality does not emerge at all (Macionis and Plummer, 1998). An example here is the wolf boy (Baron *et al.*, 2006). They noted that a boy who was raised by wolves, when he was brought from that situation into the space of human existence in which he was required to wear clothing and other social events died in less than two years from frustration. This happening goes to show the degree to which individuals are 'culturalized' by society, and that what makes us humans is simply not mere physical existence but the consent of society of that which is accepted as the definition of humans.

Macionis and Plummer (1998) argued that Charles Darwin supports the view that human nature leads us to create and learn cultural traits. The family serves as the most natural vehicle for the creation and assimilation of cultural traits. Macionis and Plummer, 1998, further expressed that the "family is the most important agent of socialization because it represents the centre of children's lives". Charles A Beard (Thomlinson, 1965), believed that mothers should be appropriately called "constant, carriers of common culture"; this emphasizes the very principal tunnel to which mothers guide their young, and they are equally conduits of the transfer of values, norms, ideology and perspective of the world for their children. Infants are almost totally dependent on others (family) for their survivability, and this explain the pivotal role of parents and-or other family members. The socialization process begins with the family, and more so those individuals to which the child will rely on for survival. This happening dictates how the child is fashioned into a human being, and not merely because of birth. The child learns to speak, the language, mode of communication, value system, norms and the meaning of things through adoption, repetition, and observation of the social actions of people within the environment. The process of becoming a human being is simply not only performed by the family but other socio-political agents.

Our political upbringing simply reflects political socialization (Munroe, 2002). Munroe suggests that the ways and means through which our views about politics and our values in relation to politics are formed is part of our political socialization. The astute professor of governance further states that, "It is also our upbringing

Table 1: Likely voter for the 2007 general elections by subjective social class

	Subjective social class			
	Working class	Middle class	Upper-middle class	Upper class
Probably PNP	71 12.7%	28 14.7%	3 12.5%	1 7.7%
Definitely PNP	162 28.9%	50 26.2%	5 20.8%	9 69.2%
Probably JLP	67 11.9%	24 12.6%	8 33.3%	2 15.4%
Definitely JLP	151 26.9%	52 27.2%	6 25.0%	0 0.0%
Would not vote	110 19.6%	37 19.4%	2 8.3%	1 7.7%
Total	561	191	24	13

that made us believe that politics is corrupt, dirty and prone to violence.” There are ranges of channels through which our political personalities are formed and these are known as primary and secondary agents of political socialization. This is in keeping with other scholars that argue that socialization albeit political or otherwise shapes the belief system, the attribute, the customs, the culture and the norms of a group of people. It is undoubtedly clear from Munroe’s, Macionis and Plummer’s and Haralambos and Holborn’s positions that, individuals are directly and indirectly influenced by the family, the school, the church, the mass media, political institutions and peer groups, as they all share the same focal view on socialization. That is, the political and sociological scientists have converged on a point of principle, that socialization albeit political or sociological is one of the same.

The family imparts its political beliefs on the children by way of its biases, acceptance and approval of a particular political ideology (Munroe, 2002). He believes that, the indirect approach is one that the attitudes being formed are only indirectly related to politics. For example, in the school or workplace there is some form of authority. The relationship form of authority develops an attitude to authority. This means that the attitude formed towards authority spills over to government. Both Political Scientists’ and Sociologists’ propositions of socialization are similar except that the Political Scientists look at socialization from a political aspect (political ideology as a result of socialization). Sociologists, on the other hand, examine the process of socialization and its impact on society, on the individual in general, and not from a micro unit of the political system as that is only an aspect in the ‘culturalization’ process of the individual. Hence, are we proposing that human behaviour and conceptions are learned?

Formal education that is branch within the socialization units provides the individual with a particular premise upon which to rationale his/her decisions. Education is no different from the family in the socialization process. It is able to make available certain set of tools in how events are viewed; matters are

conceptualized and interpreted along with the reasoned conclusion on matters. The lack of this product means that the individual must rely on the other agents of socialization such as the family, the church, the mass media, and political institution for a platform upon which to interpret the world. Education is associated with social class. Education is varied among the classes, with the upper class benefiting from improved access to education, compare to the middle and working class. This, therefore, means that particular classes with have more of it (middle-class) than others (working or lower class) and even the upper class. The irony that holds here is that the upper class has the resources and wealth and so they are able to purchase the middle class skills to execute their objectives. Therefore, the issue of political socialization is carried out through education and social classes.

It follows that amongst the working class, the political preference is one that favours the PNP (Table 1). In the ‘Definite’ supporters, the PNP has a lead of 2.0% over the JLP and an even smaller advantage in the probably category (0.8%). In the lower-middle middle class, the ‘Definite’ supported favour the JLP by 1.4% over the PNP and the reverse is the case in the probably group (i.e. 2.1%). This means that the PNP has an advantage of 0.7% in the lower-middle middle class. The JLP’s ‘Definite’ supporters in the upper middle class are 4.2% more than that of the PNP’s. However, the PNP trails the JLP in the probably category by 20.8%. In the upper class, the JLP has an advantage over the PNP in the probably category (i.e. by 7.7%), compared to 69.2% preference of the PNP in the ‘Definite’ supporters.

**Gender:** Stone’s work did not give an accurate depiction of the female participation in political life either by using representative involvement in positions of authority or by the use of mass meetings, dialogue and other such events. The number of women who are actively involved in mass meetings, and canvassing outstrip that of the men (Figuroa, 2004). Contrary to Professor Stone’s belief, women are the mobilizing engines of the political parties, and their male counterparts are merely the face of the assiduous work that was spent to fashion the event seen

by the publics. In Figueroa’s work (2004), he argued that women play a more dominant role in political participation than their male counterparts. Among the findings of Powell *et al.* (2007), 13% (n = 169) of the sampled population (n = 1,338) reported that they agreed with the statement “Generally speaking, men make better political leaders than women...” compared to 85% (n = 1,142). If Jamaicans believe that men are not genetically better leaders than women are, this begs the questions ‘What explains the contemporary situation of one female prime minister in the nation’s annals; and why the disproportionate gender imbalance in parliament?’

While women play an importance role in the political culture of Jamaica, it can be argued they have opted to give the face of their contributions to the men because of the patriarchal underpinnings of the society. Many women have been socialized within this male dominated culture, and have come to operate within its infrastructure. In analyzing the Electoral Office of Jamaica’s data (EOJ), Figueroa found sex differences in role participation. From Figueroa’s work (2004), women constitute 80% of indoor agents, 80% of poll clerks, and the list goes on. He pointed to the following that, “In the grass-root structures of the parties, the women predominate” and that, “Women are the main ones to attend the local party meetings” but he reiterates the point of male dominance, when he said that, “Yet the base-level organizations still have a tendency to elect the disproportionate number of male delegates to higher party bodies” (138-139). Therefore, they frequently assume a role ‘second’ to the male in the political arena, and a system that is generally accepted by the wider society. Vassell (2000) and Figueroa (2004) demonstrates that men continue to dominate leadership positions in Jamaica, in particular political management. This ranges from the House of Representative to the Standing Committees of the two main political parties. To further argue this point, Figueroa (2004) highlighted that none of Jamaica’s Governor Generals or prime ministers [at the time of writing the article] were females.

“In the second half of the twentieth century, women have moved into many spaces previously occupied by men” (Figueroa, 2004). Does the changing of the political guard in the PNP from a man to a woman, denote a shift in gender privilege in the male dominated socio-political arena within Jamaican society? Figueroa further provided some insight on the never-ending cycle of patriarchal society when he said, “Women have made progress but the old patterns of gender privileging continue to reproduce themselves” (Figueroa, 2004). Nevertheless, this is the beginning of a transformation in culture that will take years of reimagining the people’s present socialization. Because the incumbent Prime Minister is a woman, some have argued that ‘woman time come’ and that gender differences could be a decisive factor in determining the outcome of the election. If we are to

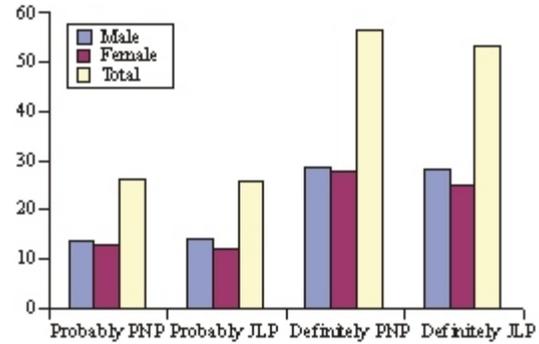


Fig.1: “Likely” Voters for the 2007 General Elections by Gender

consider the disparity in voter numeration (Fig. 1), voter participation on general or local government elections, the number of positions in representational politics, and the plethora of males in political leadership positions, this will automatically skew an appearance of male dominance in the political arena (therefore when the data was disaggregated by gender, in the probably category, males had a marginal preference (0.4%) for the JLP, and for the females the PNP leads by 1.0%). This is not necessarily the case, as the female execute many roles in the political process.

In the May 2007 survey, 41% of the males identified with PNP and 42% with JLP, whereas for females 42% identified with PNP and only about 35% with JLP--a substantial gender difference in party preference. Women also are less satisfied with the two-party system generally, with 22% opting for “something else”, as compared with 17% among males.

The May survey also indicates about a 3 percent difference in anticipated voting patterns. Of those who indicated a choice of either PNP or JLP in the coming election, the males were about evenly split at 50.6% JLP / 49.4% PNP. However, among women, 53.5% said they would vote for PNP and 46.5% for JLP -- a 7-point difference.

Women also appear to be less satisfied with the performance of their existing MPs. When asked ‘How satisfied are you that the MP from this constituency listens to the problems of the people?’, 12% of the May 2007 sample said they were ‘satisfied’, 54% said ‘sometimes’ and 35% indicated ‘dissatisfied’. Of those who reported being ‘satisfied’, 51.0% were males and 49.0% were females. However of the ‘dissatisfied’, 46% were males with 54% being females.

**Does age make a difference?:** If we consider Fig. 2, in regards to ‘Definite’ supporters of the two political parties, significantly more elderly (16.6%) have indicated a preference for the PNP. The reason for this probably lies

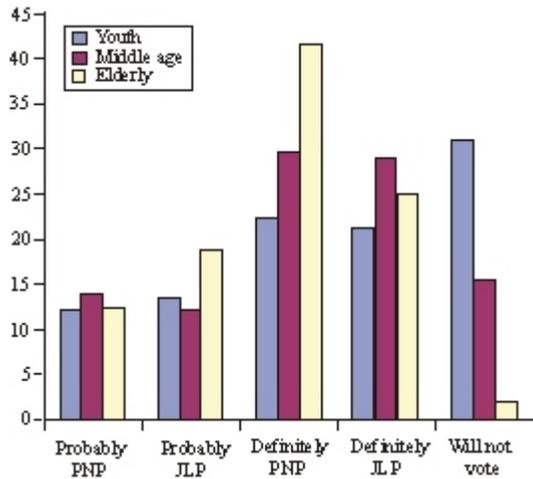


Fig. 2: Likely voters for the 2007 general elections by age cohort

in the fact that the PNP has implemented programs that significantly reduce health care costs for the elderly. Therefore, campaign issues become of much more importance to the elderly, who cannot always attend political meetings and the like. The political orientation for the youth was relatively the same in both the ‘Definite’ and the ‘probably’ categorization. In the ‘Definite’ group, the PNP had a 0.9% lead over the JLP, whereas for the probably grouping, the lead was for the JLP of 1.3%. This means that the JLP comes out ahead of the PNP in the youth age cohort (by 0.4%). In the middle age cohort, the PNP has the advantage in both categories. The lead was 0.9% in the ‘Definite’ supporters and 1.7% in the ‘probably’ age cohort. Hence, people’s choices are dictated to some extent by their ages. With this said, younger voters can be said to be less interested about social values and are more driven by material resources and personal gratification that politics is of little interest to them except they were socialized in understand these issues.

With respect to party identification, of the 32% of sampled respondents in the May 2007 survey who are ‘youth’ (under 25 years), 40.4% of those reported a PNP orientation, compared to 31.5% who said they leaned toward the JLP. Youth also report being more disenchanted with the existing two party systems than is the case for their elders. Some 28% of youth reported that they are ‘something else’ than PNP or JLP, compared with only 16% who chose this response among the older adults. Among those who are middle-aged (26-60 years), the difference between those who favour the PNP and favour the JLP shrinks to only 1% (at 42.2 and 41.4% respectively). The elderly (over 60), on the other hand, are substantially PNP sympathizers. Approximately 50%

reported a PNP preference compared to 34% for the JLP, which represents a 16% difference -- a significant preference for the PNP when compared to the other age groups.

In terms of how they intend to vote in the coming election, among ‘youth’ 30.8% say they will vote for PNP, 26% for JLP, and 34.7% say they will not be voting. The figures are much closer for middle-aged adults, with 38.7% saying they will vote for PNP and 36.3% for JLP. Among the elderly, there is a ten-point spread, with 48% for PNP and 38% for JLP. Levels of nonvoting are highest among youth, with 34.7% saying they “will not vote”, compared to 19.8% among middle-aged adults, and 10% among the elderly. These figures are generally in accord with voting studies in many other societies that have consistently shown that as adults’ age and become more engaged in the social order; they tend to vote at higher levels.

## CONCLUSION

The current survey (May 2007), indicates that Peoples National Party still retains a small lead among registered voters. More than half of the respondents to the May 2007 survey perceived themselves to be in the “working class” (i.e. the lower class), 27% in the “middle class”, 4% within the “upper-middle” class, and 2% “upper class”. Although the survey shows PNP with a slight advantage in the vote across all of the social classes, that advantage tends to be weakest among the lower class, which makes up approximately two-thirds of voting age adults. Therefore there remains the question of what will influence the voting behaviour of this rather substantial voting block. The PNP’s advantage is somewhat stronger among middle class voters, and is strongest among the ‘upper-middle’ and ‘upper’ class voters.

We have also evidenced gender dissimilarity in voting behaviour. From the May 2007 survey, 41% of the males identified with PNP and 42% with JLP, whereas for females 42% identified with PNP and only about 35% with JLP--a substantial gender difference in party preference. Women also are less satisfied with the two-party system generally, with 22% opting for “something else”, as compared with 17% among males. It is significant that levels of non-voting are highest among youth, with 34.7% saying they “will not vote,” compared to 19.8% among middle-aged adults, and only 10% among the elderly. Stone (1974) found the highest level of age involvement in the political process occurred for ages between 30 and 49 years. This study did not allow us to assess the age cohort in which there is the highest level of involvement in the political process in present day Jamaica. It is the contention of this paper that this age

cohort holds an important position in determining the outcome of the upcoming election because of the potential for voter enumeration, and therefore the opportunity to exercise political will in favour of either dominant political party. One area that this study did not allow us to delve into is the issue of why people are not voting if they are registered to do so. Further research in this area may allow us to explore other influences concerning voting behaviour that may be more external than political socialization.

As the populace leader may not be the next prime minister, it appears that the winner of the election will be dependent on a few conditions. First, will the alleged uncommitted (or undecided) voters, decide to vote? Secondly, which political leader will be able to mobilize voters to execute their democratic rights will make the difference? How will the gender distribution of the votes turn out? Will the Most honourable Mrs. Portia "Sister P's" Simpson-Miller gender give her the advantage or will the opposing leaders take the advantage because of their actions or lack thereof? Lastly, how will marginal seat behaviour be on the day in question?

Voting behaviour is not only about political preference, and while people who are 'undying' supporters for a party may continue to vote one way (or decides not to vote); the vast majority of the voting populace are more sympathizers as against being fanatics. With this said, voting behaviour is never stationary but fluid and dynamic. It is influenced by a number of social factors. Generally, people vote base on their appreciation of charismatic leadership, political socialization, their perception of direct benefits, associates and class affiliation, and gender differences. Increasingly more Jamaicans are becoming meticulous and are moving away from the stereotypical uncritical and less responsive to chicanery.

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