



Jamaicans at home and in the Diaspora are still reeling with either glee, disappointment, or shock over the [People's National Party](#)'s (PNP) [landslide victory in the recent general elections](#). Although the close margin of PNP victory in some constituencies may prompt vote recounts, confirmed data from the Jamaica Electoral Office shows that the PNP defeated the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) 42 to 21 votes, giving the new government a two-third majority in the Jamaican Parliament and exclusive legislative power without need of Opposition votes.

Almost all analysts predicted a close election. Only one Jamaican pollster hinted at a possible 34-29 PNP victory. The National Weekly's prediction of a 33-30 PNP victory also cautioned about 14 seats that could go either way. Twelve of these borderline seats and three traditionally "safe" JLP seats went to the PNP.

The uncertainty surrounding election predictions, including the National Weekly's, lies in the 30 to 35 percent of persistently undecided voters. Based on this year's voter turnout, it appears that the majority of the undecided voted either PNP or refrained from voting. And with just some 52 percent of registered voters, it seems that more hard-core PNP supporters voted compared to hard-core JLP supporters, suggesting disenchantment with their party, and possibly, their leader,

When [Andrew Holness](#) was appointed as the JLP leader in October, this paper questioned whether, despite the enthusiasm inspired by his youthfulness, his decision to call early elections before establishing himself as prime minister proved sound political strategy.

[New Prime Minister-elect Portia Simpson Miller](#)'s enduring popularity among poorer urban and rural voters, and her new maturity as political strategist and organizer, still made her competitive. She remained an established, experienced

leader compared to the relatively unknown Holness.

Some people put the JLP's loss as the party's own political strategic failure rather than a direct judgment of the JLP government. Such people however should remember that the JLP under Edward Seaga suffered a similar resounding defeat in 1989, despite praise for the government's success in rebuilding the nation's ailing economy.

JLP administrations from 1962-1972, 1980-1989, and 2007-2011 governed with more focus on economic stability rather than social programs catering to the immediate needs of the majority poor. Unfortunately for the JLP, the poor cared less about effective economic management and more about their daily struggles. Meanwhile PNP administrations have strived to support the poor through more social programs, building through the decades its "people's party" image.

Now the new PNP government must learn how to balance economic stability while building its social programs to improve Jamaica's standard of living.

Politics in Jamaica have changed. Voters are no longer content supporting political leaders and parties based on tradition, but are increasingly adamant that those they elect perform. In a challenging global economy, this means improving the economic standard of the people.

Unfortunately, the JLP administration labored under some members who regarded their positions more as divine right, an attitude which might have affected the voting of this election. The message of December 29 is that elected officials are accountable especially when accusations of corruption are made against them. In today's world the role of elected officials isn't to flaunt the prestige of power while the majority struggle to find work and to eat. The role is to serve.

The incoming PNP administration needs to heed this election's message and understand the demands of the people. As Jamaica's new prime minister, Portia Simpson Miller might benefit most from delegating other ministerial responsibilities, and focusing on maintaining a strong relationship with the people and mobilizing her government to champion their needs. Remaining ignorant of public needs while governing could create a short term for the PNP, as it did for the JLP. The people have been disappointed too often, and will no longer be fooled.