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FEATURED Q&A

What Accounts for Voters' Support of Holness in Jamaica?



Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness, pictured after casting his vote on Sept. 3, was re-elected in a landslide victory. // File Photo: Jamaican Government.

Q Incumbent Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness was re-elected this month in a landslide victory, with his Jamaica Labour Party securing 48 of the 63 seats in parliament, 15 more seats than it previously had. What accounts for voters' overwhelming support of Holness and the ruling party? What do the election results mean for the country's opposition? Will Holness' second term bring significant changes in his cabinet, and can policy continuity be expected?

A Alan Zamayoá, associate analyst at Control Risks: "Support for Prime Minister Holness and the JLP is mainly due to the improvement in the country's economy during their first term (2016-20). After taking office in 2016, Holness has implemented actions aimed at rehauling and improving the economy. These include removing or reducing a series of taxes and creating more than 100,000 new jobs. As a result, poverty rates decreased by almost 8.6 percent between 2015 and 2018. However, overall concerns about the continuation of improvements are rising as the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the country's economy. The JLP's landslide victory in the Sept. 3 general election has shaken the main opposition party, the People's National Party (PNP), to its core. Peter Phillips won re-election but is resigning as president of the PNP. The process to find his successor as the party's president will be complex as the PNP is likely to fragment. There is no clear successor after Peter Bunting, who could have replaced Phillips as the PNP's president, lost his seat representing Manchester Central, a PNP stronghold. The continuation of the policies, especially fiscal and

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

U.N. Council Accuses Venezuela of Crimes Against Humanity

The United Nations Human Rights Council issued a report accusing Venezuela's government of perpetrating crimes against humanity, including extrajudicial killings and torture. The country's foreign minister denounced the report.

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ECONOMIC

Argentine Bonds Fall After Gov't Unveils Limits on Foreign Exchange

Argentine bonds plunged after the government expanded limits on foreign exchange in an effort to keep U.S. dollars in the country.

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POLITICAL

Poll Shows Arce With Solid Lead in Bolivia

A new opinion poll showed that MAS candidate Luis Arce could win a first-round victory in Bolivia's Oct. 18 presidential election.

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Arce // File Photo: Arce Campaign.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.N. Council Accuses Venezuela of Crimes Against Humanity

The United Nations Human Rights Council issued a 411-page report Wednesday accusing the government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of crimes against humanity, including arbitrary killings and the use of torture. “The mission found reasonable grounds to believe that Venezuelan authorities and security forces have since 2014 planned and executed serious human rights violations, some of which—including arbitrary killings and the systematic use of torture—amount to crimes against humanity,” said the mission’s chairperson, Marta Valiñas. “Far from being isolated acts, these crimes were coordinated and committed pursuant to state policies, with the knowledge or direct support of commanding officers and senior government officials,” she added. An independent U.N. fact-finding mission investigated 223 cases, including 48 in-depth case studies, and reviewed an additional 2,891 cases in order to “corroborate patterns of violations and crimes,” the Human Rights Council said in a statement. The mission said it investigated 16 cases of operations involving Venezuela’s police, military or both that resulted in 53 extrajudicial executions. The mission also said that it investigated 140 cases between 2015 and 2017 involving Venezuela’s Operation for People’s Liberation, or OLP, which was “purportedly established to fight crime,” and discovered that the group had committed arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial executions. The mission said OLP operations resulted in 413 people being killed, “sometimes shot at point blank range.” The Human Rights Council said, “Senior government officials repeatedly praised the operations, which typically involved hundreds of armed officers storming an area, sometimes using armored vehicles and helicopters.” It added that one operation by the OLP in the Santa Rosa de Agua area of Maracaibo in September 2015 left five men dead and more than 60 detained,

“most of them fishermen returning from work.” The operation also resulted in women being mistreated and household items being looted, the report said. “Even conservative estimates suggest that Venezuela has one of Latin America’s highest rates of killings by state agents,” the Human Rights Council said. The report also said the CICPC and the Special Action Forces, or FAES, units of the National Bolivarian Police were responsible for 59 percent of the killings by security forces during the time period that the mission examined. Some police officials told the mission that it was “common practice” to plant weapons in order to simulate confrontations with officers. Additionally, a training video for the FAES shows officers being encouraged to “kill criminals without compassion,” the rights council said. It added that Venezuela’s government “must hold to account those responsible for extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture, and prevent further acts of this nature from taking place.” Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza blasted the report, saying that a group of nations intent on attacking Venezuela was behind it, the Associated Press reported. “This report plagued by falsehoods was drawn up from afar without relying on rigorous methodology by a phantom mission directed against Venezuela by governments subordinate to Washington,” Arreaza said in a posting on Twitter.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Argentine Bonds Fall After Gov’t Unveils Exchange Limits

Argentine bonds plunged Wednesday after the government expanded limits on foreign exchange in a bid to hold on to U.S. dollars as reserves decline, Bloomberg News reported. Benchmark sovereign notes issued only several days ago following the country’s \$65 debt restructuring lost approximately two cents on the U.S. dollar, and Argentine companies’ debt also fell. The peso weakened as much

NEWS BRIEFS

Poll Shows Arce Could Win First-Round Victory in Bolivia

An opinion poll published Wednesday shows Bolivian presidential candidate Luis Arce, of former President Evo Morales’ MAS party, with the possibility of winning next month’s election in the first round, Reuters reported. Nearly 40 percent of Bolivians included in the Jubileo Foundation poll said they would vote for Arce in the Oct. 18 election. Opposition remains divided among different parties, with former President Carlos Mesa coming in second in the poll with 26.2 percent, while current interim President Jeanine Áñez had 10.6 percent of support in the poll.

Court in The Hague Rules in Chevron’s Favor in Dispute With Ecuador

The District Court of The Hague on Wednesday ruled in favor of energy company Chevron in a longstanding dispute with Ecuador, upholding a 2018 arbitral award by an international tribunal that found that a \$9.5 billion Ecuadorean judgment against Chevron was fraudulent and the plaintiffs’ legal team was corrupt, including by bribing the presiding judge and ghostwriting the judgment, according to a statement by the court in The Hague. The tribunal also rejected environmental allegations against Chevron.

General Becomes Brazil’s Third Health Minister During Pandemic

Brazilian Gen. Eduardo Pazuello took office Wednesday as the country’s third health minister during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Associated Press reported. A logistics expert, Pazuello had no prior health-related experience before being named deputy health minister last April. His two predecessors as health minister departed after clashing with President Jair Bolsonaro on how to fight the novel coronavirus.

as 3 percent in the “blue chip swap” market of international trading. The news came after central bank chief Miguel Pesce announced measures aimed at keeping dollars in the country, including new levies on purchases of the U.S. currency as well as a demand that firms with more than \$1 million in monthly debt payments through March find a way to delay those obligations. Among other things, the foreign exchange restrictions “partially [limit] access to the official [U.S. dollar-Argentine peso] market for corporate debt service,” Ezequiel Fernández, head of research at Balanz Capital in Buenos Aires, said in a note. “[It is] a concerning and partly unexpected event for both Argentina credits and equities, as investors could link this to an eventual full ban on dollar-access for corporates,” Fernández added.

Ecuador to Delay Loan Payment to China’s ExIm Bank

Ecuador has reached a deal to delay a \$474 million loan payment to the Chinese state-controlled and trade-focused ExIm Bank until 2022, the Andean nation’s government said on Wednesday, Reuters reported. Ecuador entered restructuring processes for its foreign debt after oil prices plummeted earlier this year, taking a toll on the government’s revenue. Oil is Ecuador’s main export. Additionally, the country reached a deal in August with the China Development Bank, another state lender, to delay another \$417 million payment by one year. It also reached a deal to exchange some \$17.4 billion owed to bondholders into new bonds with later maturity dates. “We have reprofiled the debt with ExIm Bank,” President Lenín Moreno said on Twitter. “We have now negotiated \$891 million with Chinese banks. We continue reducing strain on public finances, and attracting more resources,” Moreno added. Earlier this month, Fitch Ratings upgraded Ecuador’s long-term foreign currency issuer default rating and assigned ratings of “B-” to new securities issued as part of the country’s bond exchange. [Editor’s note: See related Q&A in the July 16 issue of the Advisor.]

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economic, implemented during Holness’ first term will continue. Most members of cabinet are likely to remain part of Holness’ team, although there are likely to be some reshuffles, and they will head different ministries from those they used to lead. Meanwhile, among the newcomers are Aubyn Hill and Everal Warmington, who were appointed as ministers without portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation.”

A **Scott MacDonald, chief economist at Smith’s Research & Gratings and senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS):** “Considering the Covid-19 hit to the Jamaican economy (which could contract anywhere from 5 percent to 10 percent in 2020), Prime Minister Andrew Holness and his Jamaica Labour Party’s overwhelming victory was a considerable achievement for the JLP, giving rare back-to-back electoral wins. Face masks and temperature checks were compulsory in polling stations, where the pandemic contributed to a historically low voter turnout of 37 percent. Turnout in the last election in 2016 was 48 percent. The JLP won the election because of the country’s improved economic performance over the past decade (including the efforts of the last People’s National Party government in 2012-2016), lower unemployment (achieving a historic low of 7.3 percent in January, from a peak of 16.3 percent in 2013) and reduced poverty. Moreover, the opposition PNP ran what many considered a lackluster campaign. Despite the JLP’s sweeping victory, Holness faces substantial challenges, including dealing with the still raging pandemic, reactivating the economy (not expected to be back to pre-Covid levels until 2022) and reducing violent crime. He also promised to take a tougher stance on widely despised corruption. In the pre-Covid-19 pandemic period, Jamaica had made considerable progress in restructuring its economy, improving government finances and reducing debt.

hit 5 percent of GDP for the year. Considering the nature of the economic and medical challenges, Holness has accomplished a significant political victory, but any optimism has to be tempered by the tough socio-economic landscape ahead.”

Nonetheless, work still remains in reducing the country’s vulnerabilities. Indeed, Fitch Ratings puts Jamaica’s debt burden at 92 percent of GDP, which is still high, while the current account balance of payments could

“**Despite the JLP’s sweeping victory, Holness faces substantial challenges...**”

— Scott MacDonald

A **Beverly Shirley, program officer for British Overseas Territories at The University of the West Indies Open Campus:** “On Sept. 3, the Jamaica Labour Party celebrated a landslide victory over the People’s National Party. In 2016, the PNP had secured 31 seats and the JLP 32, so then, what could have caused such a divide? The surge of the Covid-19 pandemic in Jamaica during the election may have had some impact on voting. Reports have shown that voter turnout declined by 11 percent in comparison to voting in the 2016 elections. Within this context, 9,219 fewer people voted for the JLP, while 127,871 fewer voted for the PNP in the 2020 elections. This therefore prompts the question concerning the inability of the PNP to mobilize its base as it did in 2016. As mobilization is a resource-led activity, could it be that access to resources in order to mobilize a largely unemployed, dependent electorate was problematic in the absence of legal frameworks? Other questions for discussion range from leadership selection processes, internal rifts, the discarding of Portia Simpson Miller, the seeming unrealistic-

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tic manifesto to its inability to connect with millennials, and how they may have contributed to the twist of events. The absence of a strong opposition weakens the democratic structures of any country. Now having the free rein of full political dominance, the JLP will strategically seek to consolidate its hegemony by placing die-hards in key positions. Therefore, the discourse concerns whether the Holness-led administration with an extremely weak opposition can move beyond the green (the color is one of the JLP's electoral symbols) to substantively represent all Jamaicans."

A **Anthony Bogues, Asa Messer professor of Humanities at Brown University:** "The Sept. 3 general election in Jamaica was a first. Not since 1944, when the island held its first general election under universal adult suffrage while still under British colonialism, was the voter turnout so low. Jamaican general elections are robust affairs within a two-party electoral democratic system, so to have only 37 percent of the electorate participating sends an important signal. Some have argued that the election held under Covid pandemic conditions contributed to the low voter turnout. This does not fully explain it. We are in a moment in which differences between the two parties are virtually indistinguishable. The economic policies of austerity and adjustment first implemented through IMF agreements and then continued by both governments postulate a language of fiscal discipline as basic

services such as health and education for the majority remain in parlous conditions. Local infrastructure such as roads and water continue to be elusive for many people, particularly in rural areas. Thus, many Jamaicans may have asked themselves—why

“We are in a moment in which differences between the two parties are virtually indistinguishable.”

— Anthony Bogues

vote? Why vote when it is generally known that politics is a game by which some get rich and the state has not found ways to stymie corruption? Party politics in Jamaica has been historically robust because often there was a feeling of hope for better. In this election there was no such hope, thus the historic low voter turnout. It signals a deep alienation away from party politics for vast sections of the Jamaican people."

Editor's note: This issue has been corrected. In an earlier version, Alan Zamayoa's commentary incorrectly said that Peter Phillips lost re-election and represents Manchester Central. In fact, Phillips was re-elected and represents St. Andrew East Central.

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org.

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