

Jamaica Moves Forward



In the 1980 election season 800 Jamaicans reportedly died from politically-motivated violence. In 2016, our last national election, two people died from alleged politically-motivated violence, the second, the victim of a suspected reprisal attack for the first.

This is a story about how Jamaica has moved forward, and how any country can. These ingredients contributed to a significant drop in political violence. It is also a story about persistence and caution. We are going to ensure that political conflict remains low as we approach an election in the next 12-18 months.

Where did Jamaica start? Like many countries in the Caribbean and the Americas, Jamaica's history was marked by enslavement of Africans, genocide of native populations and colonial rule since the 15th century. Independent in 1962 Jamaica carried the socio-economic and political baggage associated with its 300 plus years of European rule. Like other post-colonial societies across the Americas and the Caribbean, the two main political parties sought to engage working class, urban and rural voters. Towns and cities became divided between rival political, and later criminal gangs, which supported one party over the other. The political tribalism that was created led to intense violence, especially in the 1970s in the capital.

In 1988 both major parties engaged in a dialogue – led by civil society, church, academia and other public influencers. Out of that dialogue – and it is important that it was a dialogue – came agreement.

POLITICAL OMBUDSMAN: INDEPENDENT, NEUTRAL INFLUENCER

Jamaica established a Commission of Parliament, neutral and independent and that the Office under the Political Ombudsman (Interim) Act, would

S12(1)“...investigate any action taken by a political party, its members or supporters, where he is of the opinion that such action-

a) Constitutes or is likely to constitute a breach of any agreement, code or arrangement for the time being in force between or among political parties in Jamaica; or

b) Is likely to prejudice good relations between the supporters of various political parties.



HON. DONNA PARCHMENT
BROWN, CD, JP.

POLITICAL OMBUDSMAN

The Commission of the Political Ombudsman would also educate the public and hold political actors to the Agreement and Declaration on Political Conduct (Code) – a Code of political conduct that all political parties would sign on to in 2005. That body is the Political Ombudsman, which was enshrined in law in 2002. The Political Ombudsman calls witnesses, brokers solutions and makes recommendations to political party leaders for corrective action. To ensure the Political Ombudsman's independence and neutrality, it reports to - and is funded by - Parliament itself, made up of the governing and the opposition parties - not a government ministry.

The Political Ombudsman administers the Code and Standards below:

8 Standards in the Code of Conduct

Non-Violence and Non-Intimidation

Safety of Private & Public Property

Avoiding Confrontation

Public Utterances

Freedom of Access

Avoidance of Defacing of Buildings or Installations

Ending Political Tribalism

Code of Ethics

teaches the public about that Code, works with the police and politicians on enforcement in and out of election periods, often resolving issues through mediation before they escalate. This with other strategies including electoral reform, has almost eliminated political and electoral violence.

The Political Ombudsman has resolved multiple issues, and notes, "none of those who have resolved a complaint have ever been the subject of a second one."

2020 STRATEGIES

Readying for election campaigning in 2020 and with elections due by mid 2021, Parchment Brown has developed key strategies designed to engage the public in the work of protecting Jamaica's democracy and political life more generally. A Youth Ambassador Program, designed to get youth to reach out to their peers in a meaningful way, to spark interest in political life in general, and to 'demand more' from the politicians they elect is one important strategy.

“We have a lot of youth who don’t know the history we have experienced, and are just turned off by politics...It is our job to make sure young and old understand our progress and the institutions of a political democracy so they can exercise their right to participate.”

Parchment Brown

The Ambassador programme builds on the Political Ombudsman’s three year “Conversations with Young Jamaicans” initiative and includes: training and materials for youth in leadership across the island, and, in turn, gives them both life skills and core competencies they can use in their future work experience and as Ambassadors.

Other key strategies include a broad educational outreach campaign to senior high school students, key influencers and the public generally, a social media roundtable, and an earned media campaign with media partners.

The key to success of our democracy, is to treat every new generation of voters with respect, understanding what motivates their activity and inactivity in political life. Jamaicans and youth in every country – Jamaica, Mexico, US or any other can demand more from their politicians and amplify the work of peace and electoral bodies such as the Comisiones de Educacion Civica y de Asuntos Internacionales and the Political Ombudsman. We must give them the tools to understand how.



Concerniente a nuestra región, Centroamérica inauguró el calendario electoral con elecciones en El Salvador. Por primera ocasión desde la firma de los Acuerdos de Paz de 1992, ninguno de los principales partidos, ARENA y FMLN, se perfilaba como favorito para ganar, sino Nayib Bukele, un político anti-establishment, quien consiguió el 54% de los votos, evitando el balotaje. También lo hizo Panamá y Guatemala. En el primer caso, el opositor socialdemócrata Laurentino Cortizo, exministro y veterano político, resultó vencedor en las que han sido consideradas las elecciones más reñidas con una diferencia porcentual de dos puntos. Las elecciones en Guatemala darán relevo al populista Jimmy Morales, quien representó la frustración ciudadana por la corrupción rapaz y la violencia sistémica, pero que poco hizo para solventarlas. En cambio, se alineó más a la élite militar y bajo su mandato se desacreditó a la Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad (CICIG) de la ONU. El relevo ejecutivo habrá de definirse en el balotaje el 11 de agosto próximo.

Sin duda, el momentum de América Latina quedará sellado con las elecciones venideras en el segundo semestre: Bolivia, Argentina y Uruguay cierran el ruedo electoral con elecciones crispantes que prometen atizar más el ambiente político alimentado por el enojo contra la corrupción y el hartazgo ciudadano.

En el primer caso, es probable que Evo Morales se encamine a su cuarto mandato consecutivo. Empero, la polémica que rodea su candidatura por la duda constitucional y el referéndum fallido que impulsó en 2016, se convierten

en las cartas más fuertes que el expresidente Carlos Mesa podrá utilizar en su contra ante una eventual segunda vuelta. En Argentina Mauricio Macri buscará la reelección presidencial llevando en el ticket electoral al peronista Miguel Pichetto y en respuesta a la fórmula que presentó Cristina Fernández de Kirchner como vicepresidenta de Alberto Fernández, una cita mayúscula que se celebrará en un ambiente de recesión, inflación, devaluación y la caída de las pensiones y subsidios, así como Uruguay, cuyas elecciones internas del 30 de junio abren la competencia entre el Partido Nacional, el Frente Amplio y el Partido Colorado. 