

Factors Influencing Voter Behavior in Two Inner-City Communities in Jamaica

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Abstract

A phenomenological study explored the decision-making process of voters in two inner-city communities in Jamaica, wherein results of three consecutive general elections showed homogenous voting in favor of incumbent candidates. Voting behavior examined through theoretical frameworks of reciprocal determinism and counter-control supported influences among environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors.

Problem

Voters in the inner-city communities of Jamaica repeatedly elected the same public officials to office in general elections or voted for the party they represent, in spite of the fact that the needs of their communities have not been addressed over several election cycles.

Understanding the lived experiences of these voters revealed reasons for their tendencies to vote in high numbers for incumbent candidates who do not perform, rather than for any opposition party

Purpose

To explore the **decision-making process of voters** who participated in at least three consecutive general elections in Jamaica, in which the same political representative or political party was returned to office, despite the needs of their communities not being addressed.

To determine how voters in two inner-city communities in Jamaica were influenced to vote the way they did.

Relevant Literature

Politicians linked to gangs who terrorize supporters of opposition parties through fraud and violence and use political patronage to buy votes (Clarke, 2006; Johnson, 2010).

Engagement of the two major political parties, the People's National Party (PNP) and the Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) in violence to achieve political goals (Sives, 2009).

Application of value preferences persuasion by personally delivered campaign messages to resist election-related crime (Arceneaux, 2004).

Use of **Bandura's** (1978) theory of reciprocal determinism to examine a continuous reciprocal interaction among environmental, cognitive, and behavioral influences.

Use of **Skinner's** (1971) theory of counter-control in reaction of individuals to environmental forces.

Research Questions

How is the decision made by voters to vote repeatedly for the same political officials or the political party they represent, over several election cycles, in spite of the fact that their communities continue to have dire needs that remain unaddressed?

- Have you voted for the same person or different people in the last three general elections? On what basis did you make these decisions?
- What do you hear your political official say that influences the way you vote?
- Without calling names, do you know of anyone who received or accepted favors in exchange for voting for the political representative and how is this done?
- What do you believe are the greatest needs of your community?
- If your communities have needs that are not being addressed, what would you suggest can be done to get these needs attended to?
- Overall, how many years do people usually remain as residents in your community and why do you believe they live here for this amount of time?
- For those who leave the community, why do you believe this is so?

Procedures

▪ **Phenomenological research** design used to determine how voters made their decisions to vote repeatedly for the same political officials in spite of the detriment to their communities.

▪ **Snowball sampling** technique used to identify **10 interviewees** who had voted in at least three consecutive general elections in Jamaica in which the same political representative or political party was returned to office.

Data Analysis

Data coded and analyzed through NVivo 10 analytic software that generated themes.

Data verified through triangulation, member-checking, and pattern-matching.

Themes analyzed through theoretical frameworks of reciprocal determinism and counter-control.

Research and open-ended, semistructured questions reflected on from perspective of participants' responses and interpreted as emergent findings..

Findings

Decision making of voters influenced by:

- intimidation by political gangs and dons
- favors in exchange for votes
- love for party
- obligation to vote for the party that is favored in the community
- activities of organization that receives tax waivers benefiting constituents
- lack of employment creating dependency on political handouts
- high illiteracy level and policing style facilitating homogeneous voting

Limitations

▪ Researcher's inability to be attentive and observant to the level required.

▪ Researcher's obligation to guard and not divulge information.

▪ Researcher's presence a deterrent to participants' divulging unbiased response.

▪ Researcher seen as an intrusion.

▪ Results not generalizable to another location.

Conclusions

▪ Urgent need for agents of social change to initiate actions that ameliorate inhumane conditions under which people in some inner-city communities exist.

▪ Vital need to provide basic human necessities, such as water, food, shelter, and security, for individuals in some inner-city communities.

▪ Potential for research questions to increase awareness in the decision making of voters.

▪ Possibility of attracting more candid participants if time period for data collection was extended.

Social Change Implications

▪ Increased voter awareness of their voting patterns and the benefits of voting for public officials who will address the needs of their constituencies, while eliminating from office those who neglect the communities they were elected to serve.

▪ Increased voter cognizance of the way they make their decisions on how to vote.