

June 19, 2007

Restoring the PLP's Primacy Report on the Post-Election Survey

To: Perry Christie, Paul Adderley, Philip "Brave" Davis

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Despite a disappointing loss on May 2, the PLP retains an enviable position. It is a major force in Bahamian politics, with the largest parliamentary opposition bloc in the country's history. The party maintains the backing of a significant segment of the population, it gets high marks for its tenure in government, and its leadership remains personally popular. If a total of about 100 votes had gone the other way in some key districts, the PLP would have won re-election.

Nevertheless, the 2007 election was the first in Bahamian history in which an incumbent prime minister did not win re-election. The party obtained 5 points less than it did in 2002, even though most people thought they were better off than they were five years ago. As the PLP looks to regain its primacy and effectively use its parliamentary bloc, it needs to understand what accounted for its adverse performance this year.

It would be a mistake to blame the election result on the FNM having larger rallies, campaign caravans of supporters or even outspending the PLP. The impact of street money is at best a partial explanation. Both sides in Bahamian politics have always tried to entice supporters and wavering voters with material incentives. Significant across-the-board shifts, as occurred this year, owe to more fundamental factors. These fundamentals must be aggressively and systematically addressed for the PLP to effectively rebuild itself.

Our research suggests that the PLP faces four fundamental challenges:

1. **Expanding the party's base.** The PLP won a majority of votes among only one age group – voters 60 and over – and one socio-economic group – those with less than a high school education. The party will have great difficulty winning elections in the future if it cannot expand its following among younger voters and those who are better off.
2. **Cleansing the party's reputation.** The party lost in part because of perceptions that its government was scandal-ridden. It needs to take concrete actions that convey its seriousness about purging corruption from the party and state. There is a perception among voters – one deepened by the FNM – that the PLP has become more focused on doing things that benefit its own politicians than for people.

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3. **Conveying Perry Christie's leadership qualities.** The former prime minister is personally popular, but voters equate his leadership style with weakness. Given the focus on the leadership of the parties, the PLP's success will depend to a large degree on rebuilding Christie's public image with a strategy that shows voters he can be a forceful, decisive leader.

4. **Advancing a progressive social agenda.** As the opposition, the PLP will spend most of its time airing criticism of the government and its policies. That is fine and appropriate. But the party also needs to be associated with an affirmative agenda. It must stand for something that speaks to people's real needs. As we develop below, we would urge that it be a social package encompassing health care, urban renewal, and education that would contrast an FNM approach tailored to the rich and powerful.

Expanding the Base

The PLP's narrow demographic base of support is worrisome. [Figures 1 and 2.]

Depending on older and lower-class voters is not a recipe for long-term success as the former die off and the country and its citizens become more prosperous. With the passage of time, fewer people associate with the country's colonial legacy, the fight for independence, and the accomplishments of Lynden Pindling. The PLP needs to update its posture and rhetoric so that it has greater appeal to younger and more prosperous voters.

Figure 1: PLP Fared Worse Among Younger Voters

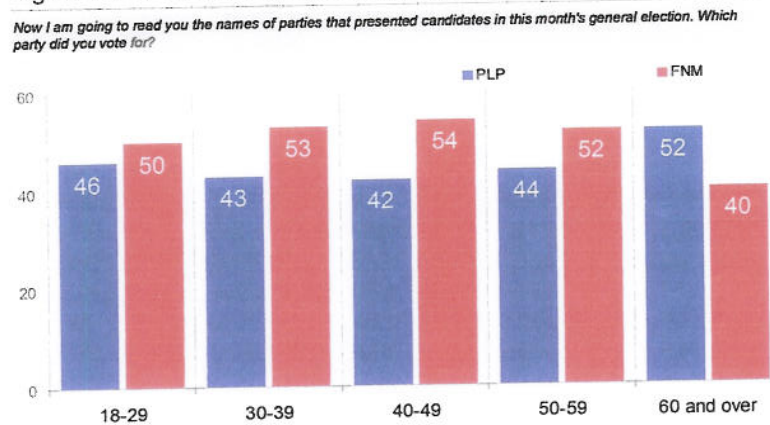
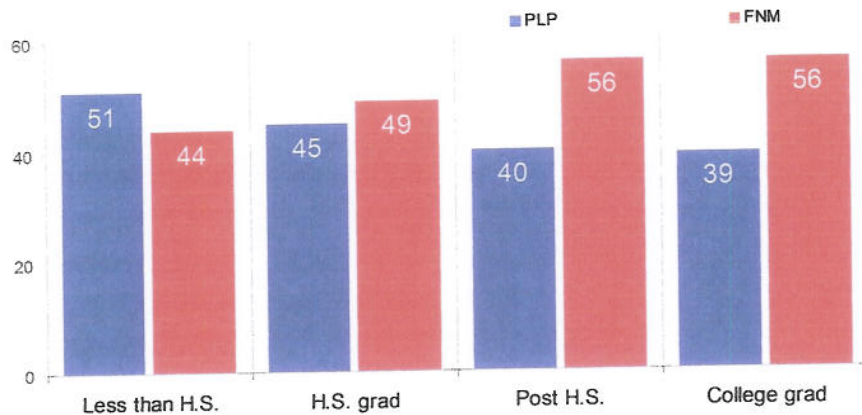


Figure 2: Lower Classes were PLP Base

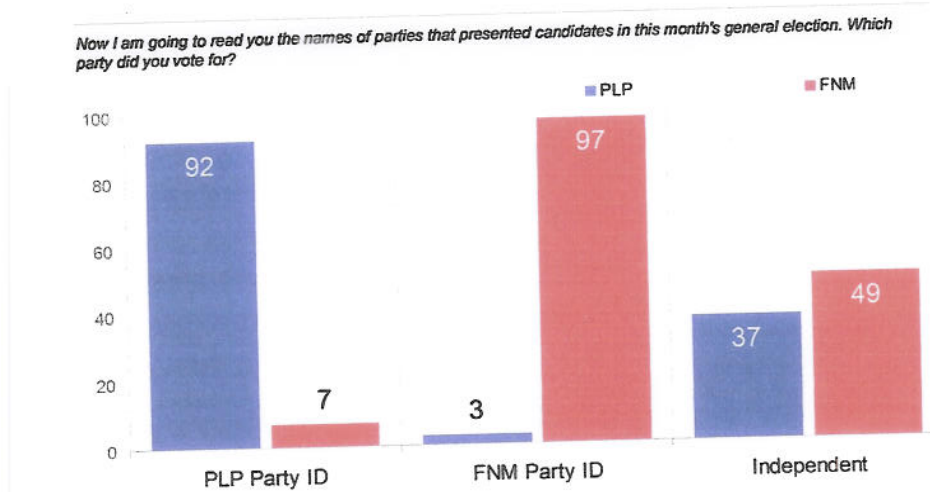
Now I am going to read you the names of parties that presented candidates in this month's general election. Which party did you vote for?



The party needs to keep in mind that its challenge is not so much to preserve the party base as it is to appeal to the many independent voters in the country. In our post-election survey, about one-third of the public does not associate with either party. It was striking that throughout the campaign, both parties' appeals were directed

almost exclusively at their supporters, rather than the independents who were going to decide the election. Ultimately, the FNM won because it carried the independent vote by 12 points. [Figure 3.]

Figure 3: Independents Give Edge to FNM



The party should take a number of steps to reach out to voters who are not traditionally or habitually PLP voters. In the case of the young, it can:

- ◆ **Establish a formal structure to reach out to younger voters.** A youngish (20- to 30-something) and charismatic individual should be given the responsibility to lead the PLP youth wing and expand the party's following among voters under 30. This should be a full-time job with institutional support in terms of an office, staffing and a budget. The outreach should begin immediately so that come the next election, the party is building on a pre-existing network and base of support, rather than starting from scratch. Generating interest in party politics among youth will not necessarily come easy, but it is possible with a long-term sustained program targeting this group.
- ◆ **Hold Town Hall meetings in every constituency.** The new youth outreach coordinator can kick off his or her work with a series of Town Hall meetings throughout the country. The sessions would be billed as an opportunity for youth to meet with senior officials to air their concerns about the country and offer recommendations. The officials would be there to answer questions and make brief presentations, but the focus would be on listening to the views of the outside participants. The objectives would be two-fold: to demonstrate the party's commitment to serving the interests of younger voters and to collect information and ideas about how best to serve them.
- ◆ **Develop a package of proposals that speaks to young people.** The PLP has to do a better job of speaking to the aspirational desires of young people. One of the best ways to do this is by taking the lead to expand access to higher education, an idea we develop further below.

Appealing to more prosperous voters poses a more distinct challenge. The key for the party is to retain its standing as the party of the disadvantaged, while also appealing to the more

privileged segments of Bahamian society. It needs to be able to find common ground and a message that resonates with voters across the socio-economic divide.

As a start, the party needs to demonstrate that it is receptive to segments of the population that it has not been so successful at cultivating, such as young professionals. During our last meeting, Christie shared some ideas about how to go about doing this, including via an entity he likened to the Democratic Leadership Council. There are other approaches the party might take as well, such as:

- ♦ **Create a "Young Professionals" Network.** The campaigns of both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have broken new ground in this area over the past year. The idea is to build a host committee of successful young movers and shakers, and have them take turns organizing receptions and events where you "bring a friend" and recruit other young professionals to the PLP. Research shows that people most often go to a new church because a friend invited them. The same is true for getting involved in politics: people have to be asked by someone close to them.

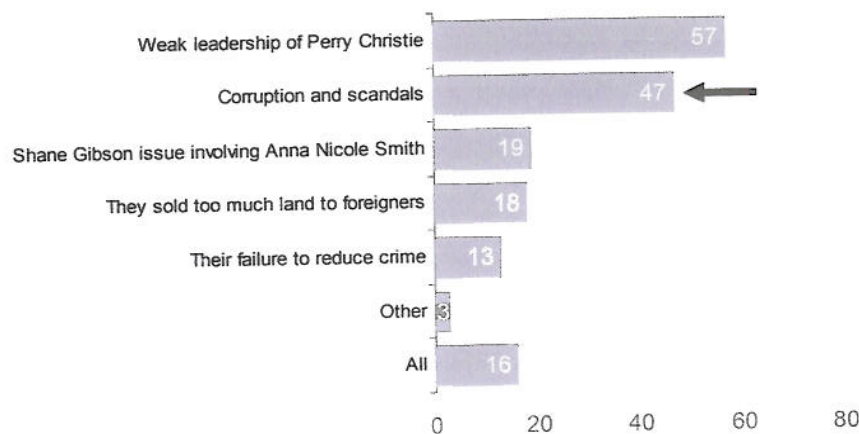
Cleansing the Party's Reputation

We cannot overstate the importance of this point. It goes to the heart of people's concerns about the PLP, and must be seriously addressed with concrete action.

The perceived sense of scandal and corruption in the PLP was one of the main reasons the party lost. [Figure 4.] For women over 35, that was the most important reason to not vote for the PLP.

Figure 4: Alleged Scandals Took Toll

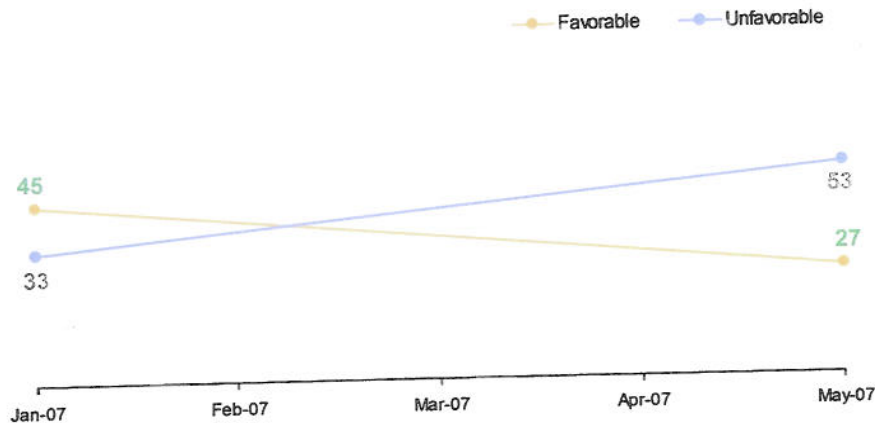
Which TWO of the following were the most important for you in deciding to NOT vote for the PLP?



The corruption issue also contributed to the perception of Christie as a weak leader. Voters perceived that he was unwilling to take action against advisers or Cabinet officials accused of wrongdoing, an impression that was reinforced by the delay over Shane Gibson's resignation.

The Anna Nicole Smith affair was particularly damaging to the PLP among independents. Gibson's image remained positive among PLPs, but independents have a much more negative view of him now than they did in January. [Figure 5.]

Figure 5: Shane Gibson Favorability Declined among Independents



For now, the corruption issue hurts both parties, as voters believe that officials from both sides have their hand in the cookie jar. Whichever party takes credible action against corruption and demonstrates that it is truly committed to public service and not personal gain will likely gain at the polls.

There are a number of things the party could do to show the public it takes corruption seriously:

- ◆ Develop, and publicize, a party code of conduct that prohibits its leaders from exploiting public office for private gain.
- ◆ Institute a party tribunal that is authorized to investigate allegations of corruption against party members and to recommend penalties.
- ◆ Propose a bill requiring all ministers to publicly declare their finances before and after they take office. If the FNM opposes the measure, PLP members can do it on their own.
- ◆ Propose a bill lifting legal immunity for all ministers. If the FNM opposes the measure, PLP deputies can voluntarily give up their immunity.

As popular as some of these measures might be, nothing would send a stronger signal of the party's seriousness about ethics and integrity than to expel a senior member for corruption. We are not recommending an unwarranted hunt for some sacrificial lamb; but the truth is, no action would have as much political impact as a well-know figure being exposed and punished by his or her *own* party.

Conveying Perry Christie's Leadership Credentials

The 2007 election was driven in large part by a comparison of party leaders. Although Christie and Ingraham are both popular and seen to have performed well as prime ministers, the focus on the two leaders redounded to the benefit of the FNM.

Voters saw Ingraham as a straight-talking, forceful leader. Most respondents in our survey indicated that the main reason they voted for the FNM was because of Ingraham's leadership. [Figure 6.] Moreover, the principal reason people did not vote for the PLP was because of Christie's image as being weak and indecisive. [Figure 7.]

Figure 6: Ingraham Leadership Drives FNM Vote

I'm going to read you a list of reasons why some people voted for the FNM. Which TWO of the following were the most important for you in deciding to vote for the FNM?

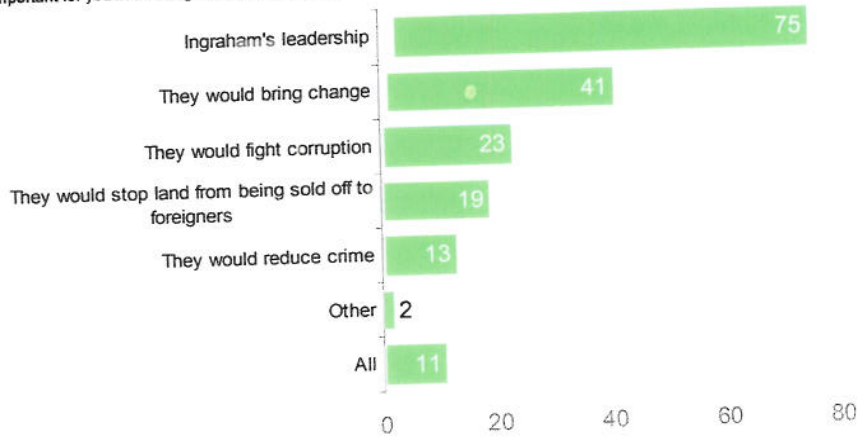
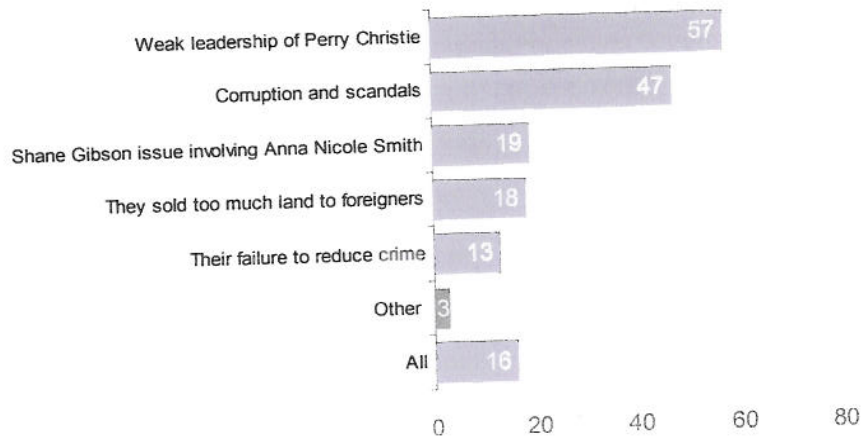


Figure 7: Perceived Shortcomings to Christie Leadership Style

Which TWO of the following were the most important for you in deciding to NOT vote for the PLP?



Nevertheless, the PLP party base is not looking for an alternate leader. Most PLPs want Christie to continue as party leader, although independents are lukewarm about the prospect of Christie's staying on. [Figure 8.]

There are two ways for Christie to regain the advantage relative to Ingraham. The first is to highlight his relative strength as someone who is in touch with and concerned about people. That would imply emphasizing a social agenda and critiquing the government for neglecting people's needs at the expense of the rich and powerful. The second would be to seek opportunities to show a more forceful, decisive side.

Figure 8: PLPers Favor Christie as Leader; Independents Divided

As you may know, the PLP may elect a party leader later this year. Do you think that Perry Christie should continue as party leader or do you think someone else should be elected as party leader?

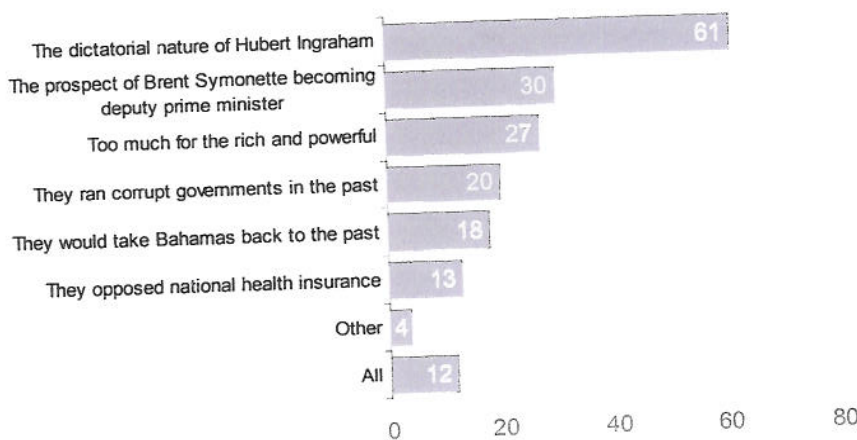


These two approaches can be mutually reinforcing. For example, to the extent that Christie becomes a powerful opposition voice standing up for the people that the government neglects, he would also come across as a strong leader.

There are other ways to appear strong too. The anti-corruption measures would make Christie look like a no-nonsense leader who will take action against anyone who carries out misdeeds. Christie could present the reform measures in a dramatic way – he might make a major address to party activists and declare that the party bears responsibility for the loss, that it needs to reform, that certain PLPs, like the FNMs, have not always conducted themselves with the utmost of integrity and that that must stop.

Figure 9: Ingraham Seen as Dictatorial

Which TWO of the following were the most important for you in deciding to NOT vote for the FNM?



These party reforms could include an effort to democratize the PLP further and draw a stark contrast to the FNM and the stranglehold that Ingraham has over his party. Much of the public considers the current prime minister to be autocratic. In fact, the principal reason that PLP voters give for not having voted for the FNM is that Ingraham is dictatorial. [Figure 9.] The PLP can show that it is different,

that it wants all members to have a say in the party, by opening up party deliberations. For example, the selection of leader might take place via a public vote in which all PLPs (or even all voters) could participate, not just more prominent members. What an extraordinary contrast that would show with the FNM and its exclusive style of leadership.

Advancing a Progressive Social Agenda

As the PLP works to restore its primacy, it will need a central message to carry to the voters who have doubts about the party. The success of the outreach efforts described above will depend upon the party's having something appealing to say. Just as it is important in a campaign to have message discipline in order to reach disengaged voters, it is equally important in a non-electoral environment. The PLP's ideas will not penetrate among the public unless they are connected to a cohesive narrative that is repeated regularly.

Although we did not have room to test messaging in this survey, the results, as well as our post-election research, suggest that the PLP should position itself as the party fighting for average Bahamians versus an FNM that favors the privileged. As the survey results suggest, lower-class Bahamians still tend to tilt toward the PLP, while most upper-class Bahamians back the FNM. The poll shows, moreover, that one of the main reasons PLP voters cited for not voting for the FNM was the sense that they were for the rich and powerful. Unfortunately, during the campaign, that was a messaging element that the party failed to utilize. The party did not effectively explain what it meant to turn back – that is, to a government that catered to the privileged.

There should be two sides to this approach for the party. On the one hand is a critique of every measure the FNM takes that fails to advance the interests of average Bahamians – be it a backtracking on health insurance, a scaling back of the popular urban renewal program, or some infrastructure project that benefits big investors more than its users. On the other is an affirmative social agenda that includes measures on health, education, and urban development.

We are obviously not experts on Bahamian public policy, but the research is instructive on the kinds of initiatives the public is looking for. We know from our pre-election research how much support there was for the national health insurance program. On education, the current survey indicates that programs designed to expand technical training for students who do not plan to attend college and to help qualified college-bound students with scholarships would be very popular.

As the party advances these issues, it should use creative means to dramatize them just as it might during an electoral campaign. For example, rather than just making speeches in Parliament, Christie and other party leaders should find illustrative backdrops. We call these "message events," and they will be part of the overall communications plan we are preparing for you now. For example, health remarks can be delivered at a hospital or with care providers, while schools could be used as venues for speeches on education. The idea is to use such visuals to help convey a message and reinforce the point in people's consciences.

This populist approach does not have to be in conflict with the party's efforts to reach out to the modernizing sectors in the economy. As Bill Clinton showed in the 1990s, it is possible to reform a party and expand its following while maintaining the party base. Education, and in particular an emphasis on preparing students for modern jobs of the 21st century, can appeal to people at various socio-economic levels. Health insurance is also an issue that cuts across socio-economic lines. And of course, the party's successful economic approach appeals to rich and poor alike as it has been based not on distribution but expanding the economic pie by attracting investment and creating thousands of stable, well-paid jobs.

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We are eager to meet with you again to develop these ideas further and help you start taking action. Chad is prepared to go to Nassau this month to present a comprehensive communications strategy and implementation plan that incorporates the findings laid out here. Please let us know what dates work best for you.