



Guyana General and Regional Elections

1 September 2025



The Commonwealth

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Guyana General and Regional Elections

1 SEPTEMBER 2025



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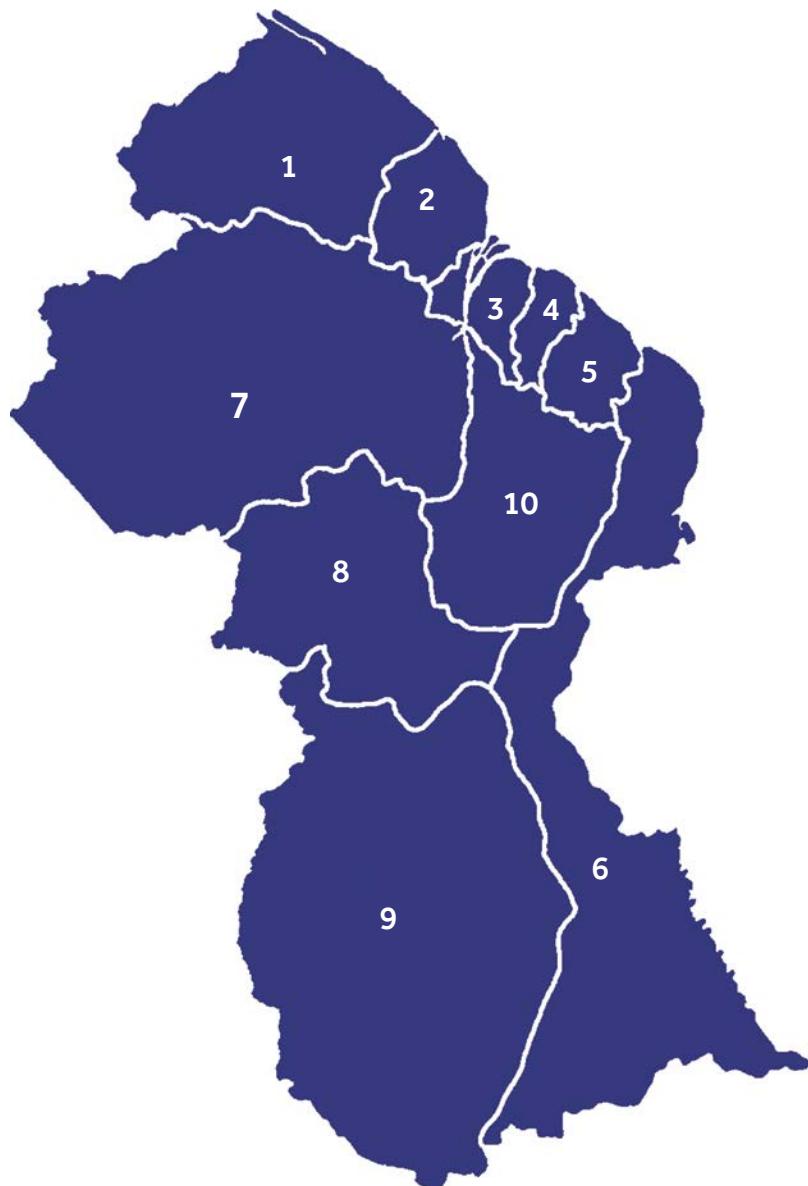
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Map of Guyana



| | |
|-----------|--|
| 1 | Barima - Waini |
| 2 | Pomeroon - Supenaam |
| 3 | Essequibo Islands – West Demerara |
| 4 | Demerara – Mahaica |
| 5 | Mahaica – Berbice |
| 6 | East Berbice – Corentyne |
| 7 | Cuyuni – Mazaruni |
| 8 | Potaro – Siparuni |
| 9 | Upper Takutu – Upper Essequibo |
| 10 | Upper Demerara - Berbice |

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| AFC | Alliance for Change |
| ALP | Assembly of Liberty and Prosperity |
| APNU | A Partnership for National Unity |
| CARICOM | Caribbean Community |
| CCJ | Caribbean Court of Justice |
| CHOGM | Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting |
| COG | Commonwealth Observer Group |
| CSO | civil society organisation |
| ERC | Ethnic Relations Commission |
| FGM | Forward Guyana Movement |
| GDP | gross domestic product |
| GECOM | Guyana Elections Commission |
| GNBA | Guyana National Broadcast Authority |
| GPA | Guyana Press Association |
| International IDEA | International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance |
| LGBTQI+ | lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning, intersex and others |
| MP | member of parliament |
| OAS | Organization of American States |
| OLE | Official List of Electors |
| PEAM | Pre-Election Assessment Mission |
| PNC | People's National Congress |
| PPP | People's Progressive Party |
| PPP/C | People's Progressive Party/Civic |
| PUC | Public Utilities Commission |
| PWDs | persons with disabilities |
| ROPA | Representation of the People Act |
| TUF | The United Force |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| WIN | We Invest in Nationhood |

Letter of Transmittal

**Commonwealth Observer Group
Guyana General and Regional Elections**

1 September 2025

6 September 2025

Dear Secretary-General,

I am pleased to convey to you the final report of the Commonwealth Observer Group which you constituted to observe the General and Regional Elections that were held on 1 September 2025 in Guyana. It was an honour to chair this Group of eminent persons drawn from across our family of nations, each of whom brought a wealth of invaluable experience and expertise.

The Group observed these elections in accordance with its mandate and considered various factors impacting the administration of these elections. We also considered the broader political, social and historical context in which these elections took place.

We noted reports that elections in Guyana are often marked by ethnic polarisation that contributes to a charged political atmosphere. We observed that the fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and their supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been largely observed, and commend the calls made by the President, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and leaders of other political parties in the days before the elections for peace and national unity, noting also the peaceful conduct of the polls on Election Day. We attended and observed various political party campaign rallies in the pre-election period, polling at various stations in 7 of the 10 electoral districts and counting, announcement of results at polling stations, and tabulation at regional centres.

We commend the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and its staff for conducting these elections with professionalism, diligence and collegiality.

The Group has noted a number of shortcomings, including reports of a significant trust deficit with GECOM and its impact on the perceived credibility of the conduct of the electoral process. We

encourage the use of mechanisms to enhance the trust, credibility and integrity of future electoral processes. We also noted with concern the mistrust of some in the Official List of Electors (OLE) and the challenges in resolving its apparent inflated nature.

It is our hope that all electoral stakeholders, especially political parties, will play their respective roles to uphold the principles of the Constitution and strengthen Guyana's democracy. We have therefore encouraged all political stakeholders to exercise diligence in creating appropriate and inclusive domestic mechanisms to review and implement the recommendations of observers, and all relevant stakeholders to contribute to these processes.

The Group notes that these were the eighth elections observed by the Commonwealth since 1992, and that these elections occurred against the backdrop of a number of unimplemented recommendations from previous election cycles. Our Group makes recommendations for improving future elections in Guyana, in accordance with the Commonwealth's whole of election cycle approach, which we hope will be received in the spirit of mutual learning and co-operation. It is our sincere hope that, with appropriate Commonwealth support, in collaboration with international partners, we can encourage a positive response to observer recommendations, and that an appropriate domestic mechanism would be established to advance this aspiration.

At the time of finalising this report, we note that recounts of ballots are in the final stages, and that the official declaration of results by GECOM is imminent. As we depart Guyana, we trust that the peaceful tenor of the electoral process thus far will continue to prevail. We reaffirm our collective call on all political parties to continue to encourage their candidates, supporters and other stakeholders to work for national unity, peace and solidarity, and to pursue legal channels to resolve any disputes.

It was our honour to be present for these significant elections. We wish to acknowledge and commend the people of Guyana for their courage, resilience and determination, as they continue

their democratic journey. We wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the people of Guyana for the hospitality accorded to the Group throughout

our time in the country and for the co-operation extended by all stakeholders with whom we interacted.

Yours sincerely

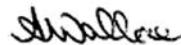

Mrs Fekitamoeloa Katoa-Utoikamanu

Chairperson

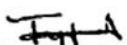
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Women's rights activist
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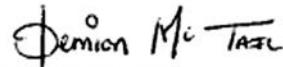
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Mr Darrell Bradley
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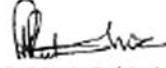
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Executive Summary

Following a Commonwealth Secretariat Pre-Election Assessment Mission, which took place from 19 to 26 July 2025, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon Shirley Botchwey, decided to deploy a Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) to observe the Guyana General and Regional Elections held on 1 September 2025. The Group was chaired by Mrs Fekitamoeloa 'Utoikamanu, former Foreign Minister of Tonga, along with nine other eminent members, supported by a seven-person Secretariat team.

The COG was present in Guyana from 23 August to 7 September 2025 and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including political leaders, electoral authorities, security forces, civil society, media, and international partners. Members observed campaign activities and election operations across seven regions.

The Group notes that the Commonwealth has provided high-level Good Offices and technical support for elections over the years, including the deployment in 2020 and 2025 of two senior electoral experts, Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, Former Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, and Dr Nasim Zaidi, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India, to support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).

The 2025 general and regional elections occurred in a context of rapid economic transformation, deep political polarisation, and evolving party competition. The discovery of major offshore oil reserves in 2015, which has transformed Guyana into one of the world's fastest-growing economies offered opportunities for national advancement and heightened political stakes. The 2025 elections were therefore seen as pivotal for the management of oil revenues, wealth distribution, and governance reforms. However, Guyana's relationship with Venezuela remains tense due to the long-standing territorial dispute over the Essequibo region, which is currently before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Though the pre-election environment was characterised by polarisation, mistrust in the electoral system, and emerging political fragmentation, the fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and their supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been largely observed. The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) developed a Code of Conduct to discourage hate speech and promote nonviolence. While most parties signed it, APNU and FGM declined due to concerns over enforcement. The Code aimed to reduce ethnic polarisation, a persistent challenge in Guyanese politics.

The Group commends the peaceful environment in which the 2025 elections took place. Election-related procedures were largely respected, as were calls for peace and national unity made by the President, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and leaders of other political parties, in the days leading up to the election.

Guyana's electoral and legal framework provides a sound foundation for democratic governance, anchored in constitutional and international principles. However, persistent challenges—notably GECOM's politicisation, outdated campaign finance laws, judicial delays, and uneven voter registration—continued to undermine public confidence. Strengthening institutional independence, transparency, and inclusivity is essential to consolidating electoral integrity ahead of future polls, and the Group also urges Guyana to implement recommendations to improve electoral credibility and transparency.

The Group lauds the Government's work on the harmonisation of legislation to update and clarify the legal framework for elections through the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 25 of 2022, and the National Registration (Amendment) Act, Act 26 of 2022.

While Guyana has a robust legal and institutional framework for inclusion, implementation remains uneven and lacking in sufficient data. Women's political participation advanced notably in 2025, with two female presidential candidates and three female prime ministerial candidates. Legal provisions under the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act (2000) require one-third of party lists to comprise women, and women now make up over 33% of Parliament. Despite progress, GECOM lacks sex-disaggregated data

for polling staff and candidates, limiting transparency and planning for inclusion. However, youth, PWDs, Amerindian peoples, and civil society remain underrepresented. Strengthening data transparency, inclusive policy enforcement, and civic engagement is essential to realising equitable participation in future elections.

The campaign environment was shaped by Guyana's oil-fuelled economic boom and lingering tensions from the 2020 elections. Six political parties contested the polls — PPP/C, APNU, AFC, WIN, ALP, and FGM — reflecting both continuity and new entrants in the political landscape. Parties used a mix of traditional mobilisation and policy-driven messaging, focusing on transparency in oil revenue management; anti-corruption; constitutional reform and equitable economic development. While campaigning was active and mostly peaceful, observers noted unequal access and treatment among parties, and there were allegations that the governing party dominated visibility through access to state resources. The Group recommends the establishment of a binding code of conduct for political stakeholders, promoting issue-based campaigning and fair competition.

While peaceful and vibrant, the overall campaign environment was characterised by uneven access to resources and media; persistent ethnic and partisan divides; weak regulation of campaign finance and online information and structural imbalance in state-media relations.

Media pluralism in Guyana remains uneven, with the state-owned Chronicle and National Communications Network (NCN) seen to be favouring the governing party, while private media face financial pressures and sometimes self-censorship due to political intimidation and advertising dependence. The Group recommends the development of a media code of conduct for election coverage in collaboration with the Guyana Press Association (GPA) and GECOM. Social media played a transformative role in the 2025 elections, with an estimated 96% of Guyanese online. Smaller parties relied heavily on digital campaigning, which provided new avenues for participation but also spread misinformation and disinformation.

To strengthen electoral integrity and fairness, Guyana should consider institutionalising issue-based campaigning; ensuring media independence and transparency, and build digital resilience through monitoring, regulation, and civic education.

The Group commends GECOM for significant updates and for ensuring generally transparent and well-managed procedures throughout the electoral process. On Election Day, polling staff demonstrated professionalism, courtesy, and preparedness. Information desks, signage, and voter materials were effectively used to guide voters, though inconsistencies in signage were noted. Security was also well coordinated.

The 2025 voting, counting, and tabulation processes were peaceful, transparent, and generally well managed. GECOM's updates to electoral manuals and decentralisation of counting represented major improvements since the previous elections. The Group noted significant improvements in transparency and accuracy, particularly with the introduction of simultaneous electronic posting of polling station results.

The Group notes that some areas would require improvement for future elections, including accessibility for persons with disabilities; uniform application of procedures and signage; enhanced training for polling staff, and further streamlining of closing and tabulation processes.

Overall, the COG found that the 2025 elections reflected a maturing electoral process in Guyana, underpinned by professionalism, good security arrangements, and increased procedural transparency.

For future elections, the Group recommends improved implementation of recommendations proposed in previous elections by observer missions. We encourage all political stakeholders to give priority to the establishment of a robust post-electoral domestic mechanism that may, in short order, produce the legislative and constitutional reform needed for the conduct of credible, transparent and inclusive elections in the future.

Recommendations

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|
| Chapter 3: Legal Framework and Electoral Administration | | | |
| 1 | <i>A review of the legislation around the composition of GECOM should be undertaken to include other stakeholders to increase its impartiality and effectiveness in decision-making</i> | • GECOM | • Legal/Regulatory • Policy |
| 2 | <i>The Group recommends the reform and regulation of campaign financing, including working closely with CARICOM for a regional charter on campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency and accountability.</i> | • GECOM | • Legal/Regulatory • Policy |
| 3 | <i>The Group recommends GECOM prioritise adoption of biometric technology early in the next election cycle to enhance integrity, efficiency and credibility in the electoral process.</i> | • GECOM | • Political • Administrative/Technical |
| 4 | <i>The registration card of Commonwealth citizens should clearly identify the name of the Commonwealth country of citizenship.</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 5 | <i>GECOM should publish disaggregated data on the number of registered electors from Commonwealth countries, stating the respective countries and number of electors</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 6 | <i>More robust and consistent public education/awareness is needed by GECOM on the eligibility of voters, including Commonwealth citizens.</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 7 | <i>The Group recommends legislative amendments to clearly establish statutory time limits for resolving election disputes expeditiously.</i> | • National Assembly | • Legal/Regulatory • Policy |
| 8 | <i>The Group recommends urgent permanent appointments of a chancellor and chief justice of the judiciary and subsequent review of the appointment mechanisms in line with global good practice to ensure timely and substantive independent appointments free from political influence.</i> | • Judiciary | • Political |
| 9 | <i>The Group recommends improving legal clarity on the campaign silence period addressing all forms of campaigning – physical and digital – including an enforcement mechanism with penalties for violations, to ensure compliance.</i> | • GECOM | • Legal/Regulatory |

(Continued)

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|---|--|---|---|
| 10 | <i>It is recommended the post of legal adviser in GECOM be filled through a politically independent process as a matter of priority.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Administrative/Technical • Political |
| 11 | <i>An enumeration exercise should be conducted, following which geographical seats should be more equitably distributed among electors to ensure the principle of equal suffrage.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GECOM • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 12 | <i>An independent and impartial body should be established to draw the geographical and top-up constituencies so that voters are represented in the legislature on a more equal basis (2020).</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy |
| 13 | <i>Early in the new election cycle, consideration should again be given to the adoption of biometric voter registration and verification technology.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 14 | <i>The time of day at which political parties will present themselves to undertake the nomination process should be scheduled and the schedule disseminated to all political parties for greater clarity and fairness.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 15 | <i>Consider extending the early voting facility to other essential services workers.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical • Policy |
| 16 | <i>GECOM should enhance collaboration with party stakeholders through regular communications across the whole election cycle.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 17 | <i>The Group recommends that, as part of its post-election review, GECOM consider planning for regular meetings with all stakeholder groups across the whole election cycle.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 18 | <i>GECOM should consider adopting an evidence-based approach to continue strengthening the delivery of voter information throughout the next election cycle.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| Chapter 4: Participation and Inclusion | | | |
| 19 | <i>Political parties should take stronger action to promote genuine inclusion and political participation of women.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political parties • Policy | |

(Continued)

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|-----|--|-------------------------|---|
| 20 | <i>Revise the legislation to ensure at least 33 per cent of elected MPs are women, not just on paper but in actual representation</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Administrative/Technical • Political |
| 21 | <i>Include binding and enforceable quotas for women in parliament with associated compliance mechanisms.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political |
| 22 | <i>Disaggregation of data should be mainstreamed in GECOM's operations to include collecting disaggregated data on sex, age and disability across the spectrum of activities.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 23 | <i>GECOM should engage and encourage civil society as an important mechanism for transparency, accountability and democracy.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Administrative/Technical |
| 24 | <i>GECOM is encouraged to strengthen its voter information outreach to diverse communities, utilising all methods of communication to ensure maximum participation and inclusion.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 25 | <i>Appointment to GECOM should be guided by the principles of inclusivity and should prioritise gender considerations in the nomination of election commissioners.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political |
| 26 | <i>Adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of youth, thus facilitating their political participation</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Legal/Regulatory |
| 27 | <i>Engage young people in the development of material to provide relevant and targeted voter information for young electors.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 28 | <i>Collect and disseminate disaggregated data on electors and candidates to assess youth engagement in the electoral process.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 29 | <i>GECOM and political parties should adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of PWDs, thus facilitating their political participation.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy |
| 30 | <i>GECOM should collect data on disability during elector registration to enable early mapping of polling stations and ensure access and accommodation for PWDs and the elderly with kerbside voting as an alternative</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Administrative/Technical |

(Continued)

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|--|---|--|---|
| 31 | <i>GECOM should provide stencils or tactile ballot papers to facilitate the voting of people who are blind or visually impaired.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Administrative/Technical • Political |
| 32 | <i>GECOM, political parties and CSOs should provide voter education tailored for PWDs.</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 33 | <i>Revise ROPA and introduce safeguards to prevent the misuse of proxy voting, including penalties for violation. Include biometric verification or digital tracking of proxy voters and their representatives.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Legal/Regulatory |
| 34 | <i>Political parties should adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of Amerindian people, thus facilitating their political participation.</i> | • Political parties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political |
| 35 | <i>GECOM should have more direct engagement with Amerindian people to enhance participation and inclusion.</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 36 | <i>GECOM should deliver voter information, in appropriate formats and all spoken and written languages, directly to Amerindian communities.</i> | • GECOM | • Administrative/Technical |
| 37 | <i>The government should increase internet connectivity in Amerindian areas to support equitable access to information and services</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political |
| 38 | <i>The government should engage with the National Toshao Council and other appropriate structures to ensure Toshao actively uphold and protect the rights of Amerindian people to self-determination, and the full free participation in the political life of the state.</i> | • National Assembly • National Toshao Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political |
| Chapter 5. Campaign and the Media | | | |
| 39 | <i>As a part of a post-election review, consideration to be given to the creation and implementation of a code of conduct for relevant electoral stakeholders that integrates issue-based campaigning.</i> | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Political |
| 40 | <i>Encourage the revival of presidential debates that are nationally televised and regionally broadcast to encourage issue-based campaigns.</i> | • GECOM • Political parties | • Political |

(Continued)

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 41 | <i>Consider reform and regulation of campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency and accountability.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Administrative/Technical • Political |
| 42 | <i>Consider legislation to provide equitable access to the media for all candidates and political parties.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy |
| 43 | <i>Strengthen and enforce rules on the use of public resources, to facilitate a more level playing field for all parties, and reduce the abuse of state resources through the power of incumbency.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political |
| 44 | <i>A full review should be carried out of the Cybercrime Act 2018 to ensure alignment with constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and international and Commonwealth standards</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political |
| 45 | <i>Parliament should consider reforming the Broadcasting Act 2011 to establish an inclusive process of appointment to the GNBA in consultation with the GPA.</i> | National Assembly | Legal/Regulatory |
| 46 | <i>The Guyanese media should lead a collaborative process to develop an election code of conduct involving the GPA, independent media practitioners and GECOM, to ensure a basis for self-regulation well in advance of the next election.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media houses • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political • Policy |
| 47 | <i>Parliament should consider legislation guaranteeing freedom and independence of the press, which should be enacted to enshrine press freedoms explicitly in law.</i> | • National Assembly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Legal/Regulatory • Political |
| 48 | <i>GECOM should revise its interpretation of ROPA and allow accredited journalists access to all aspects of the electoral proceedings, including election day.</i> | • GECOM | • Policy |
| 49 | <i>Civil society should establish independent media and social monitoring capabilities.</i> | • Civil society | • Administrative/Technical |
| 50 | <i>Civil society should establish an independent fact-checking mechanism to support democratic strengthening across the whole election cycle.</i> | • Civil society | • Administrative/Technical |

(Continued)

| No. | Recommendation | Targeted Stakeholder(s) | Type of Recommendation |
|---|---|-------------------------|---|
| 51 | GECOM should establish a social media monitoring unit in advance of the next elections. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Administrative/Technical • Political |
| 52 | GECOM should continue to enhance its online presence over the coming election cycle, including through verification of its Facebook page. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical • Administrative/Technical |
| Chapter 6: Voting, Counting and Tabulation | | | |
| 53 | Greater consistency should be achieved in the application of signage across all polling stations, for example signage related to the identification of polling staff. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 54 | Adhere to international good practice aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of PWDs. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy |
| 55 | Adopt the positioning of the booth suggested in the Official Manual for Presiding Officers across all polling stations; the ballot booth should be positioned such that there is no risk of compromising the secrecy of the ballot. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 56 | Consideration should be given to extending the number of training sessions for poll workers with more simulation training. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 57 | More emphasis should be given to the close of poll procedures in the training of poll staff. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 58 | GECOM is encouraged to continue streamlining the counting process to eliminate duplication and improve the timely delivery of results | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 59 | Continue to improve the tabulation process, to address delays in declaring results. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |
| 60 | Strengthen the capacity of party scrutineers and GECOM officials on the result resolution process as updated in the Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials, revised 26 March 2025. | • GECOM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical |

Table of 2025 Guyana COG Recommendations

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a summary of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) methodology and concludes with an overview of this methodology as applied to the 2025 Guyana general and regional elections. It provides readers with vital background information on the context in which COGs operate.

1.1. International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed more than 200 elections in 40 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including:

- promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process;
- deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud;
- enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results;
- diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation; and
- strengthening international standards on electoral best practices.

1.2. The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following:

1.2.1. COGs are independent, including of the Secretariat

'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'

1.2.2. Observers, not monitors

Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.

1.2.3. Taking forward COG recommendations

The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms', such as multi-stakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.

1.2.4. Whole-of-election-cycle approach

Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff and the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and crucially, through bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

1.3. The strength of COGs

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics:

1.3.1. Eminent observers

While COGs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts. The biographies of all observers can be found in Annex I.

1.3.2. Diversity and peer-to-peer learning

COGs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.

1.3.3. Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices

COGs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of a number of factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the *2019 Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation*. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the [Commonwealth Secretariat website](#).

1.4. Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the 2025 general and regional elections in Guyana

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a COG (or 'the Group', 'Group') for the general and regional elections held on 1 September 2025 in Guyana, following an invitation from the Honourable Hugh Hilton Todd, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

The Secretary-General's decision was informed by a Pre-Election Assessment Mission (PEAM) undertaken by the Secretariat staff team from 21 to 25 July 2025. The PEAM met with various key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the Attorney-General, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Commissioner of Police, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), the Women and Gender Equality Commission, contesting political parties – Alliance for Change (AFC), Assembly of Liberty and Prosperity (ALP), A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), Forward Guyana Movement (FGM), People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and We Invest in Nationhood (WIN) – civil society organisations (CSOs) focused on gender, youth and issues affecting other marginalised groups, government and private media agencies and the Guyana Press Association, the University of Guyana, Commonwealth diplomatic missions, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union Election Observer Mission.

1.5. Commonwealth Observer Group composition

The COG was led by Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Tonga. The Group comprised ten eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth. Experts brought together a diversity of experience in the fields of electoral management, civil society, law, politics, diplomacy, media, human rights and mediation, among others. A seven-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the Group. A full list of members can be found at Annex I.

1.6. Terms of Reference

The mandate and agreed terms of reference for the Group were as follows:

- *The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.*
- *The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.*
- *The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.*
- *The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It is also free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as may assist the holding of such elections.*
- *The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Guyana, the Chairperson of the Guyana Elections Commission and leaders of political parties, and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.*

Figure 1.1 Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group with Commonwealth Secretariat staff.



1.7. Activities

The Group was in Guyana from 23 August to 7 September 2025. The announcement of the COG was made prior to the Group's arrival on 20 August 2025 (Annex II).¹

The Group met with a broad range of stakeholders, including His Excellency President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, ministers of government, election candidates and representatives of political parties, GECOM, the police force, the ERC, several government and private sector agencies, indigenous communities, trades unions, the Commonwealth diplomatic community, international organisations, other international election observation missions, the media, religious organisations, women and youth organisations, academia and civil society. Members of the Group also observed campaign rallies in the lead-up to the elections.

¹ 2025 Guyana General and Regional Elections Arrival Statement by Fekitamoeloa Tupoupai Manuula Utoikamanu, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Tonga, Chair of the COG. https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-08/arrival-statement-guyana-cog-2025.pdf?VersionId=keR6q9kDxVhcNY.R54vZlt_7HcDYU9ys

The Chair of the Group met bilaterally with the President, candidates of the main political parties and the Chiefs of Election Observer Missions of the Organization of American States (OAS), CARICOM, the European Union and The Carter Center, as well as with the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative.

On 30 August, members of the Group were deployed to seven regions of the country: region 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam; region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara; region 4 – Demerara/Mahaica, region 5 – Mahaica/Berbice; region 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne; region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo; and region 10 – Upper Demerara/Berbice (Annex III). On deployment, members received further briefings from GECOM, local officials and the police. Members of the Group on deployment observed voting, counting, transmission of results from polling stations in those areas and tabulation at the regional level.

On 3 September, the COG Chair delivered an Interim Statement (Annex IV) presenting the Group's preliminary findings and observations. In the Statement, the Group thanked the people of Guyana and commended GECOM, polling staff, political parties, civil society and the media for their respective roles in ensuring the successful conduct of the elections.

The Group proposed recommendations, which included the creation of a robust post-electoral domestic mechanism for legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure credible, transparent and inclusive elections; a regulatory framework for political party campaign finance; and the promotion of greater civic participation in the electoral process.

The Group's report was completed in Georgetown before the members' departure on 7 September 2025, for transmission to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

2. Political background

This chapter provides the political context for the 2025 general and regional elections in Guyana. In assessing the elections and offering recommendations, which appear in subsequent chapters, the COG considered the country's political landscape and factors that have shaped its 59 years of independence and the political processes leading to the elections on 1 September 2025.

2.1. General context

History

Guyana is a parliamentary republic and a multiparty democracy. Its capital is Georgetown. It was a Dutch colony in the 17th Century, before being passed to the British in 1815. Guyana gained independence in 1966 and is the only English-speaking country in South America. It has an English model common law system with some Roman-Dutch civil law elements.

People

Guyana has an ethnically diverse population of approximately 836,869 people.² These include, according to the last published Census (of 2012): Indo-Guyanese (39.8%), Afro-Guyanese (29.3%), Indigenous Amerindians (10.5%), persons of mixed race (19.9%) and other (0.5%), which includes Chinese, European and Portuguese. Guyana also has a diaspora population of approximately 1,500,000 of first- and second-generation Guyanese, largely residing in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom and throughout the Caribbean. The population in Guyana is concentrated in the northeast and in the capital, with larger concentrations along the Berbice River. The remaining territory is sparsely populated.

Administrative regions

Guyana has ten regions: Barima-Waini, Cuyuni-Mazaruni, Demerara-Mahaica, East Berbice-Corentyne, Essequibo Islands-West Demerara, Mahaica-Berbice, Pomeroon-Supenaam, Potaro-Siparuni, Upper Demerara-Berbice and Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo.

Economy

The discovery of significant oil reserves in 2015 transformed the political and economic life of Guyana. Guyana has one the world's fastest-growing economies, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaging over 40 per cent annually since 2020, with GDP per capita rising from US\$6,477 in 2019 to above US\$21,284 at the end of 2024.³ The country has been classified by the World Bank as a high-income country since 2025.

In 2025, real GDP is projected to grow by around 10.3 per cent,⁴ driven mainly by continued expansion of oil production, but supported by robust growth in non-oil sectors such as agriculture and mining. Additional oil fields coming online are expected to sustain double-digit growth rates for several more years. This continued economic growth made the 2025 elections particularly critical.

Venezuela

Guyana has a strained relationship with its neighbour, Venezuela, which effectively claims two-thirds of Guyanese territory, in Essequibo region. This controversy arises from the Venezuelan rejection of the Arbitral Award of 1899 and the related territorial demarcation, which went uncontested for decades.

² United Nations Population Fund.

³ World Bank (nd) 'The World Bank in Guyana.' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guyana/overview> (accessed 15 September 2025).

⁴ IMF (nd) 'Guyana'. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/GUY> (accessed 15 September 2025).

Venezuela recently held a national referendum over the territory and created administrative units to manage the disputed region. The matter of the validity of the 1899 Award and related territorial demarcation is now before the International Court of Justice. There is cross-party consensus and a united Guyanese opposition to Venezuela's challenge to Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Figure 2.1 The Observer Group being briefed by The Honourable Bharrat Jagdeo, Vice-President of Guyana and Secretary-General of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C).



2.2. Electoral politics from 1950 to 2015

Guyana has a unicameral National Assembly with 65 seats. The presidential candidate of the party or coalition gaining the most votes forms the Government and appoints their prime minister and cabinet.

History

- 1 January 1950: The People's Progressive Party (PPP), Guyana's first modern political party, was founded. Forbes Burnham was appointed Chair, Cheddi Jagan as Second Vice Chair and Janet Jagan as Secretary-General.
- 1953: The PPP won 18 of 24 seats in the first popular elections. Cheddi Jagan became leader of the house and minister of agriculture.
- 9 October 1953: The British government suspended the Constitution and deployed troops, accusing the PPP of communist plans. This led to a PPP split in 1955; Forbes Burnham broke away to form what became the People's National Congress (PNC) in 1957.
- 1957: Cheddi Jagan won the national elections, with 48 per cent of the vote.
- 1961: Cheddi Jagan won the elections again, with 43 per cent of the vote.
- December 1964: Election results were PPP: 46 per cent, PNC: 41 per cent, The United Force (TUF): 12 per cent. TUF supported Burnham, who became prime minister.
- May 1966: Guyana gained independence.
- 23 February 1970: Guyana became a republic.
- December 1964–August 1985: Forbes Burnham led Guyana, first as prime minister, then as president after the 1980 Constitution was set up. This period involved accusations of election irregularities and authoritarianism.

- July 1979: Jesuit priest and journalist Bernard Darke was the victim of political assassination.
- June 1980: Historian and Working People's Alliance leader Walter Rodney was the victim of political assassination.
- August 1985: Forbes Burnham died; Prime Minister Hugh Desmond Hoyte succeeded him as president.
- December 1985: Hoyte was formally elected president, moving towards a market economy and freedoms of press and assembly.
- 5 October 1992: in the first credible post-independence elections, the PPP/Civic (PPP/C) won.
- 9 October 1992: Cheddi Jagan was sworn in as president.
- March 1997: President Cheddi Jagan died; Prime Minister Samuel Hinds took over.
- December 1997: Janet Jagan, Cheddi's widow, was elected president.
- 1997: The PNC rejected the election results, sparking violent demonstrations.
- Mid-January 1998: CARICOM brokered the Herdmanston Accord between the PPP/C and the PNC to require an election audit and constitutional reform.
- 1998: The CARICOM audit confirmed the election results with minor variations. Violent demonstrations resumed; a settlement in July led to the PNC taking seats in parliament.
- August 1999: President Janet Jagan resigned after a heart attack; Finance Minister Bharrat Jagdeo succeeded her.
- 2000: The Constitutional Reform Commission's proposals were enacted, establishing a permanent elections commission (the Guyana Elections Commission – GECOM) and new national ID cards.
- March 2001: The general elections saw the PPP/C win 34 seats and PNC-Reform 27 seats.
- Post-March 2001: The Opposition staged violent demonstrations disputing the election results.
- April 2001: Jagdeo and opposition leader Hoyte initiated dialogue on constitutional and electoral reform.
- March 2002: Dialogue broke down owing to disagreements between the PPP/C and the PNC-Reform.
- Late August 2002: The Commonwealth Secretary-General appointed Sir Paul Reeves as special envoy to facilitate dialogue.
- 2003: Constructive dialogue resumed between Jagdeo and opposition leader Robert Corbin; parliamentary opposition returned.
- 2004: Dialogue wavered; the opposition resumed its boycott but later engaged selectively.
- August 2006: Peaceful elections took place; the PPP/C won 36 seats (54.6%), PNC Reform-One Guyana coalition 22 seats (34%) and the Alliance for Change (AFC) 5 seats (8.1%).
- 28 November 2011: National and regional elections were held; Donald Ramotar (PPP) was elected president, though the PPP held a minority in parliament.
- 2012–2014: Opposition coalition APNU (A Partnership for National Unity) + AFC held a one-seat majority in parliament.
- November 2014: President Ramotar suspended the National Assembly; he dissolved it three months later.
- 20 January 2015: President Ramotar announced elections.
- 2015 elections: The APNU+AFC coalition won 33 seats; the PPP/C won 32 seats.
- 16 May 2015: Retired Brigadier David Granger was sworn in as president.

Figure 2.2 Aubrey Norton, leader of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) alliance, briefs the Observer Group.



2.3. The 2020 general election controversy

The 2020 elections were overshadowed by allegations of fraud. Following a recount and a series of court rulings, the PPP/C was ultimately declared the winner over the incumbent coalition, APNU.

On 21 December 2018, President Granger lost a no-confidence vote by a narrow margin of 33 to 32. The government had held a one-seat majority since the 2015 election, but one of its members of parliament (MPs), Charandas Persaud, voted with the opposition. The governing party challenged the no-confidence vote in court, contending that 34 votes – not 33 – were required to pass the motion and that Persaud was ineligible to vote owing to his dual citizenship. This precipitated a constitutional crisis, which was ultimately resolved by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), which upheld the validity of the no-confidence vote.

On 23 September 2019, the Commonwealth Secretary-General issued a statement urging the prompt restoration of constitutional order in Guyana and the immediate setting of an early election date in accordance with the country's Constitution. Subsequently, on 30 September 2019, President Granger announced that elections would be held on 2 March 2020.

Nine parties contested the presidential and parliamentary elections for the 65 National Assembly seats. While election day and the initial vote count were generally deemed credible, the returning officer for Region 4 utilised a spreadsheet rather than the statutorily mandated Statement of Poll, subsequently reporting inflated numbers in favour of the governing party. This irregularity resulted in the APNU+AFC coalition appearing to lead over the opposition PPP/C. Former Jamaican Prime Minister and head of the OAS election observer mission Bruce Golding remarked, "I have never seen a more transparent set-up to alter the results of an election."

On 6 March 2020, the High Court granted an injunction preventing the formal declaration of the overall results pending trial, thereby halting attempts to reinstate David Granger as president. Following intervention by CARICOM, Granger agreed to a recount, which revealed that the PPP/C had secured the most votes, achieving a one-seat majority. The APNU+AFC coalition subsequently pursued legal challenges to annul the recount results. However, on 2 August 2020, shortly after the Guyana Court of Appeal ruled in favour of using the recount results as the official outcome, PPP/C leader Mohamed Irfaan Ali was sworn in as president.

2.4. Political environment and key issues for the 2025 elections

In 2025, the immediate pre-election period was characterised by a highly polarised political climate, with a vigorous campaign dominated by the incumbent PPP/C led by President Ali and the traditional opposition coalition, APNU.

A significant development was the emergence of the third-party movement, We Invest in Nationhood (WIN), whose presidential candidate, a controversial businessperson, challenged the PPP/C's dominance.

The elections itself served as a referendum on the management of the country's oil boom, with the opposition focusing on renegotiating oil contracts and concerns over corruption and wealth distribution, while the government highlighted its extensive infrastructure and social development programmes funded by the oil revenue.

Guyana's turbulent electoral history and the controversy surrounding the 2020 elections contributed to widespread mistrust in state institutions, the electoral system and particularly in GECOM leading up to the 2025 elections.

A major point of contention and focus for international observers ahead of the elections was the integrity of the electoral process and the institutions managing it. Despite legislative and administrative changes enacted since the disputed 2020 elections – including reforms to decentralise tabulation and improve transparency – concerns persisted regarding the Official List of Electors (OLE) (the voter list) and the inherent political alignment of GECOM.

Most political parties declared that they were participating under protest, believing the elections to be compromised. New parties voiced dissatisfaction with GECOM's decision not to incorporate biometric technology and questioned the integrity of the OLE. Both AFC and the Assembly for Liberty and Prosperity (ALP) publicly expressed doubts about GECOM's readiness for the elections, formally calling for the polls to be postponed.

The pre-election political dynamic saw a significant shift in the opposition, characterised by the emergence of a potent new challenger. While the traditional opposition alliance, APNU, contested the elections under the leadership of Aubrey Norton, the new party, WIN, quickly established itself as a major political force. Launched in June 2025 by businessperson Azruddin Mohamed, WIN successfully disrupted the historically ethnically polarised two-party system by drawing support from young and lower-income voters with pledges of direct cash transfers and wealth distribution. This fracturing of the opposition was a critical development, as the rivalry between the PPP/C, APNU and WIN intensified in the months leading up to the elections.

For the 2025 elections, seven political parties initially registered by Nomination Day on 14 July 2025. However, GECOM later ruled the Horizon and Star Parties ineligible to contest, citing constitutional requirements that parties must participate in multiple districts. Consequently, six political parties contested the elections. These parties complied with legal mandates, including the requirement that one-third of candidates be women, and that they compete in at least six of the ten regions. The PPP/C, APNU, WIN and AFC competed in all ten regions, while Forward Guyana Movement (FGM) ran in seven regions and ALP in

Figure 2.3 The Observer Group following a meeting with Azruddin Mohamed, leader of the We Invest in Nationhood (WIN) party and members of the party leadership.



Figure 2.4 Amanza Walton-Desir, leader of Forward Guyana Movement (FGM), briefs the Observer Group.



six. A total of 2,424 candidates contested the general and regional elections. For the National Assembly, 771 candidates stood (half of whom were women) to compete for 65 seats. Among the six presidential candidates, two were women.

The participation of six political parties contributed to a dynamic political environment. There was a marked rivalry between the incumbent PPP/C, seeking a second term under President Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and the main opposition party, APNU, aiming to return to power following its 2020 defeat. Additionally, the growing popularity of WIN, led by Azruddin Mohamed, added a new dimension to political competition, with some observers suggesting this signalled a shift away from traditional ethnically based political divides.

US sanctions on the WIN presidential candidate

In June 2024, the United States Government sanctioned WIN's presidential candidate, Azruddin Mohamed, with the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control freezing his assets in the United States and prohibiting related financial transactions. Following the approval of WIN's candidate list in July 2025, three local commercial banks closed personal accounts belonging to approximately 40 WIN candidates, party members and associates. Several candidates also reported being dismissed from private sector employment because of their association with WIN. The banks and businesses justified these actions by citing fears of secondary sanctions and concerns about jeopardising correspondent banking relationships with the United States.

Ethnic Relations Commission

The ERC was established to foster ethnic harmony and goodwill among all Guyanese. The ERC possesses the authority to investigate complaints of ethnic discrimination and to recommend to the police that individuals found guilty of inciting violence or hate speech be barred from contesting elections.

For the 2025 elections, the ERC drafted a Code of Conduct for political parties. Representatives of AFC, ALP, the PPP/C and WIN signed the Code on 5 August 2025, while APNU and FGM declined, citing insufficient clarity regarding enforcement mechanisms. The Code of Conduct called on parties to respect their political rivals, candidates, agents and the media; to oppose all forms of violence, ethnic or racial discrimination, and intimidation; and to avoid any behaviours likely to exacerbate racial or ethnic tensions, including the use of hate speech.

Figure 2.5 Nigel Hughes, leader of Alliance for Change (AFC), briefs the Observer Group.



Election security

Although concerns had been raised about potential election-related tensions, the 2025 polls passed without significant security incidents.

Guyana's security forces operated under a Joint Services Protocol, allowing the police to receive support from other security agencies. The police held a briefing with international observers and the diplomatic community, confidently outlining their preparedness. They informed the observers of a community engagement programme intended to strengthen relations between law enforcement and the public. Additionally, unarmed police officers equipped with body cameras were deployed to all polling stations to assist presiding officers. The observers noted that the police conducted themselves with professionalism, restraint and a supportive attitude in their election security role. Further details on security arrangements are provided in Chapter 6.

3. Legal framework and electoral administration

3.1. Legal framework

The overall legal framework governing elections in Guyana comprises the Constitution, statutory law, case law, and international treaties and standards, supplemented by administrative guidelines and codes of conduct.

Domestic laws comprise the following:

- Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana 1980
- Representation of the People Act (ROPA) 1964, amended in 2022 and 2025
- National Registration Act 1967
- Local Authorities (Elections) Act 2015, amended in 2022
- Local Democratic Organs Act 1998
- National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act 1998
- Election Laws Act 1998, amended in 2000
- National Registration (Amendment) Act 2022
- Guyana (General Elections) Observers Act 1990
- Racial Hostility Act, as amended by the Racial Hostility Amendment Act 2002

In addition to legal instruments, the ERC has authored a code of conduct for political parties.⁵

Guyana's international and regional commitments for the conduct of elections include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)
- Commonwealth Charter (2012)
- Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation (2005)
- Commonwealth Revised Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries, endorsed at CHOGM in 2018

⁵ The AFC, ALP, the PPP/C and WIN signed the Code on 5 August 2025, while APNU and FGM declined, citing insufficient clarity regarding enforcement mechanisms.

The Group lauds the harmonisation of legislation to update and clarify the legal framework for elections through the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 25 of 2022, and the National Registration (Amendment) Act, Act 26 of 2022.

The legal framework upholds the rights and enforces the obligations of the people, political parties, candidates and the media to elect and be elected. It also deals with election administration, voter registration and registers, equal treatment before the law, placing candidates or parties on the ballot, equal treatment by and access to the media, and the protection of electoral rights.

Articles 59–64, and 159–163 of the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana mandate the electoral system, which is universal suffrage for any Guyanese citizen aged over 18 years (domiciled and abroad) and for Commonwealth citizens (domiciled lawfully for more than a year). GECOM is constitutionally an independent body to oversee all elections.

According to the laws in Guyana, members of the National Assembly are elected based on proportional representation, using party lists. Elections are to be held every five years and within three months of the dissolution of parliament. Where there are two or more presidential candidates, and more votes are cast in favour of a list on which a person is designated as a presidential candidate than in favour of any other list, that presidential candidate is deemed to be elected as president.

Figure 3.1 The Observer Group with the Chairperson of GECOM, Justice (ret'd) Claudette Singh, S.C., C.C.H., and Vishnu Persaud, Chief Elections Officer.



3.2. Legal issues

The 2020–2025 electoral cycle was dominated by the following significant legal issues:

1. Composition of GECOM
2. Campaign financing
3. Biometric voting process
4. Voting rights of Commonwealth citizens
5. Representation of women
6. Election dispute resolution
7. Campaign silence period

The Group took note of several legal and procedural issues that arose during this electoral cycle.

Composition of GECOM

The Constitution of Guyana envisioned that GECOM be an independent and impartial supervisory body to govern elections in the country. A chair and six commissioners constitute GECOM, and the institution is accountable to the National Assembly.

However, the Group notes that the structural composition has proven a source of persistent gridlock and political tension. The equal representation of commissioners, where three are nominated by the president and three by the opposition leader, while seemingly balanced, has resulted in entrenched positions along party lines. The chair, who is appointed by the president from a list provided by the opposition, is intended to serve as a neutral arbiter; in practice, the chair is perceived as aligning with one side or the other, depending on the political climate and the nature of decisions being made. This perception erodes public trust and fuels accusations of bias, particularly when the chair casts a tie-breaking vote.

The Group heard concerns from several stakeholders of a significant trust deficit with GECOM and of its impact on the perceived credibility of the conduct of the electoral process.

This issue was raised by the COG and other international observer groups in 2020.

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| Recommendation | <i>A review of the legislation around the composition of GECOM should be undertaken to include other stakeholders to increase its impartiality and effectiveness in decision-making.</i> |
| Status | Recommendation forming part of a larger set of electoral reforms proposed by the 2020 COG, as well as other international observer missions. |

Campaign financing

The Group found campaign financing was a key issue impacting public trust in the democratic process. Addressing campaign financing is critical to ensure the accountability and transparency of political parties and avoid any future conflict of interests between politicians and interest groups. Given Guyana's growing economic prosperity, there is a risk of a close nexus of political leadership and business developing that could compromise public governance and accountability. The risk is of elite capture and policy distortion where business interests and influence will supersede that of the electorate and overall public interest.

The Group was concerned about allegations of the use of state resources for campaigning. The Group received reports of practices blurring the distinction between the legitimate functions of the state and partisan political activity. This raised concerns over the alleged erosion of principles of fairness and equal opportunity.

The Group also found campaign financing rules to be weak, outdated and unenforced. The existing legislative provisions in ROPA are insufficient to provide effective oversight of campaign financing. ROPA makes provision for the declaration of expenses, with the current limit on expenses ranging from GY\$25,000 to GY\$50,000, or the equivalent of US\$125–250. This is evidently outdated. In addition, it is worth noting that this provision of the law has never been enforced. The Anti-Money Laundering Act 2009 lists political party officials as 'politically exposed persons', but this measure alone is not sufficient to provide guidance to the regulation of political party finance and expenditure.

The country may consider working closely with CARICOM for a regional charter on campaign financing. There are examples of other legal systems⁶ within the region that have legislated more robust laws in this regard.

⁶ Electoral Commission of Jamaica (nd) 'Campaign Financing'. <https://www.ecj.com.jm/resources/campaignfinancing/> (accessed 15 September 2025).

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Recommendation | <i>The Group recommends the reform and regulation of campaign financing, including working closely with CARICOM for a regional charter on campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency and accountability.</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended in 2020 by several observer missions, including the COG. |

Biometric voting process

Section 9(1) of the National Registration Act governs biometric registration, which authorises GECOM to implement a biometric voting system. The Data Protection Act 2023 safeguards the use of data collected by the government. However, infrastructure for data protection and governance may not be robust enough. GECOM has acknowledged the benefits of the biometric voting process but has called upon the government to legislate to facilitate the process.

The Group notes that, during preparations for these elections, GECOM acknowledged the need for a biometric voting system but did not implement it, citing various legislative obstacles.

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| Recommendation | <i>The Group recommends GECOM prioritise adoption of biometric technology early in the next election cycle to enhance integrity, efficiency and credibility in the electoral process.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Voting rights of citizens of any Commonwealth country

Articles 59 and 159 of the Constitution of Guyana grant citizens of Commonwealth countries who are domiciled and residents of Guyana for at least one year the eligibility to vote.

This entitlement is reflected in the information and communication materials developed by GECOM as well as their training manual for polling officials.

The Group notes that this entitlement is common in many Commonwealth member countries. However, there remains insufficient public awareness of this in Guyana and the Group noted the issue created confusion and negative reactions among some members of the public. Further, the registration card currently mentions 'Commonwealth' as nationality instead of the distinct country the voter is from. Stating the country would enhance transparency of the OLE.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Recommendation | <i>The registration card of Commonwealth citizens should clearly identify the name of the Commonwealth country of citizenship.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |
| Recommendation | <i>GECOM should publish disaggregated data on the number of registered electors from Commonwealth countries, stating the respective countries and number of electors.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |
| Recommendation | <i>More robust and consistent public education/awareness is needed by GECOM on the eligibility of voters, including Commonwealth citizens.</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended in 2020 by several observer missions, including the COG |

Women's political participation

The participation of women as electoral candidates remains constrained.

ROPA S. 11 B (5) provides for a 33 per cent quota for women in the submission of party lists at nomination. Additionally, S.11B (8) requires submission of information on the proportion of women in the electorate. This, however, is not a binding commitment that necessarily translates into at least 33 per cent of elected officials being women.

The Group notes that this provision is not implemented as the list of electors used at the polling station is not disaggregated by sex.

The Group commends the high participation of women in the political process, which was at 39 per cent of candidates in the 2020 cycle and 50 per cent of candidates in the 2025 elections.

Election dispute resolution

Article 163 of the Constitution of Guyana gives the High Court exclusive jurisdiction to determine whether an election has been conducted lawfully. GECOM can review the electoral process to identify weaknesses within the system. However, as it is not a judicial body, it cannot adjudicate any election irregularity or dispute.

Section 140 (1 & 2) of ROPA restricts judicial review of GECOM's actions even if it exceeds the statutory or constitutional mandates. But its powers can be reviewed by the court if it acted unlawfully.

The Group notes, although the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act S. 5(1) establishes a period of 28 days for the presentation of an election dispute after publication of results, this does not explicitly require that the petition be resolved within this period. This has led to cases remaining unresolved for years, beyond the term of the contested office. The 2020 COG also raised this issue, but it remains unaddressed. The Group notes that a balance needs to be maintained between the constitutional status of GECOM and judicial scrutiny of the lawfulness of elections.

The Constitution of Guyana Article 163 vests the High Court with exclusive jurisdiction to determine the validity of elections. This includes questions of whether the elections were lawfully conducted and whether the results were affected by any unlawful acts or omissions.

The High Court therefore has jurisdiction to order fresh elections wholly or partially. The judicial process can progress through appeals to the Court of Appeal and ultimately to the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Under Article 127 of the Constitution, the appointment of the two highest judicial officers – namely, the chancellor and the chief justice – requires agreement between the president and the leader of the opposition. The Group notes that, similar to the appointment process of GECOM commissioners, this requirement has led to the politicisation of these judicial officers. The lack of consensus between the president and the leader of opposition has led to the situation where, for over two decades, since the departure of Chancellor Desiree Bernard in 2005, there have been acting chancellors and chief justices.

The Group notes that this prolonged leadership vacuum in the judiciary stands in stark contrast to the executive and legislative branches, where leadership transitions occur through clear constitutional mechanisms and are not subject to indefinite delay. Acting appointments are inherently more vulnerable to political pressure. The lack of permanent appointments in the judiciary leadership raises serious concerns about institutional stability, accountability and public confidence.

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| Recommendations | <i>The Group recommends legislative amendments to clearly establish statutory time limits for resolving election disputes expeditiously.</i> |
| | <i>The Group recommends urgent permanent appointments of a chancellor and chief justice of the judiciary and subsequent review of the appointment mechanisms in line with global good practice to ensure timely and substantive independent appointments free from political influence.</i> |
| Status | The 2020 COG also raised these issues, but they have remained unaddressed |

Campaign silence period

There is ambiguity in the cut-off limits, if any, of campaign activity before election day. The law does not stipulate a period of 'election silence' before election day, which leaves it to the political parties to determine when to cease campaigns. There is no clarity or consensus on when campaign activities should stop. In practice, GECOM may encourage parties and candidates to respect a "period of reflection" before voting, but this is not backed by a specific legal provision.

While the Group noted that the campaign silence period was generally observed on the streets, the absence of legal provision has continued to create confusion regarding campaigning online on electronic media. In an increasingly digital-first environment, the lack of clearly stipulated election silence periods, whether physical or online, may lead to inconsistent interpretations and practices that can heighten tensions and undermine electoral fairness.

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| Recommendation | <i>The Group recommends improving legal clarity on the campaign silence period addressing all forms of campaigning – physical and digital – including an enforcement mechanism with penalties for violations, to ensure compliance.</i> |
| Status | Recommended by the 2020 COG |

3.3. Election administration

Guyana Elections Commission

The legal authority and responsibility for the conduct of elections is established under Section 161 of the Constitution. GECOM's mandate includes the responsibility to conduct and maintain a voter registration list, and the administration of all elections at the national, regional and local levels of government in Guyana.

Composition

According to the Constitution, GECOM is composed of seven members. The chair is appointed by the president and must be a person who holds or has held office as a judge of a court. Of the remaining six members, three are appointed by the president and three by the president acting in accordance with the advice of the leader of the opposition.

In the lead-up to these elections, notwithstanding the numerous operational improvements made by GECOM and diligent efforts by its staff, the Group was informed that its composition had led to regular deadlock in GECOM votes and a reliance on the chair's deciding vote to advance the electoral preparations.

The Group notes GECOM staff's delivery of the elections in an operationally sound manner, in spite of this challenge. The Group also notes that, although the split within GECOM commissioners presented challenges, this was also a manifestation of a degree of pluralism within the Commission structure. The Group notes that it is important that any future reforms to GECOM's composition process protect the institution's independence from the executive.

The Group was also informed that the structure of appointments to GECOM was intended to be a temporary stopgap that was implemented based on the 1992 political landscape.

Permanent secretariat

The Constitution Article 161 (A) provides for a permanent secretariat under the authority of GECOM. The secretariat is headed by a chief election officer, who is on a fixed-term contractual assignment. Elections in each of the country's ten regions are co-ordinated and administered by returning officers, who are appointed by the Commission. The Commission also benefits from a public relations officer.

The Group notes that GECOM lacked the support of a substantive legal adviser in the months leading up to and on election day, which some stakeholders said may have contributed to reduced public confidence in GECOM.

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| Recommendation | <i>It is recommended the post of legal adviser be filled through a politically independent process as a matter of priority.</i> |
| Status | Recommendation based on recent developments |

Candidacy

Presidential elections

Guyanese legislation prescribes that a person shall be qualified to contest for election as president if the person:

1. is a citizen of Guyana and is Guyanese by birth or parentage (provided that the parents did not have diplomatic immunity, or is an enemy of Guyana, or has affiliation to a perceived enemy of Guyana);
2. is residing in Guyana on the date of nomination for election and was continuously residing therein for a period of seven years immediately prior to the date of nomination;
3. is otherwise qualified to be elected as a member of the National Assembly.

The president is the head of state, head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president is elected separately from National Assembly MPs, during the same election, as per the Constitution.

National Assembly elections

Legislation prescribes that a person shall be qualified to contest for election to the National Assembly if the person:

1. is a citizen, but not a dual citizen, of Guyana;
2. is at least 18 years old;
3. Must be registered as an elector
4. is able to speak, and unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, can read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable them to take an active part in the proceedings of the Assembly, subject to the following:
 - a. is not by virtue of their own act under any acknowledgement of allegiance, obedience or adherence to a foreign power or state;
 - b. is not certified to be insane;
 - c. is not otherwise adjudged to be of unsound mind under any law enforced in Guyana;
 - d. is not under sentence of death imposed by a court or serving a sentence of imprisonment exceeding six months or substituted by an authority for some other sentence imposed by a court or under a suspended sentence of imprisonment;
 - e. holds or is acting in a Constitutional Office;
 - f. is involved in the conduct of an election or voter registration where they have interests in government contracts (made with an officer, department or the government of Guyana);
 - g. holds offices or appointments prescribed by parliament;
 - h. belongs to the armed forces of Guyana;
 - i. belongs to the Police Force of Guyana.

The law establishes a proportional representation system for the election of members of the National Assembly. Elections are to be held every five years and within three months of the dissolution of parliament.

The National Assembly has 65 members: 25 are elected from the ten geographical constituencies and 40 are awarded at the national level on the basis of block votes secured. The 65 elected members of the National Assembly are elected using closed-list proportional representation.

The prime minister is chosen by the members of the National Assembly and acts as the leader of government business but is not the head of government. Guyana operates a system of continuous voter registration.

Boundary delineation

For electoral purposes, Guyana is divided into ten polling regions, with 25 regional seats in the National Assembly. The number of voters in these regions varies significantly, as seen in the table below, and therefore negatively impacts the equality of suffrage.

Regions/electoral districts of Guyana

| No. | Region | Registered voters | Seats | Voters per seat | Polling stations |
|-----|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Barima-Waini | 24,453 | 2 | 12,227 | 113 |
| 2 | Pomeroon-Supenaam | 42,596 | 2 | 21,298 | 158 |
| 3 | Essequibo Islands-West Demerara | 116,875 | 3 | 38,959 | 408 |
| 4 | Demerara-Mahaica | 323,437 | 7 | 46,206 | 1,088 |
| 5 | Mahaica-Berbice | 50,796 | 2 | 25,398 | 193 |
| 6 | East Berbice-Corentyne | 111,554 | 3 | 37,185 | 435 |
| 7 | Cuyuni-Mazaruni | 17,846 | 2 | 8,923 | 98 |
| 8 | Potaro-Siparuni | 9,192 | 1 | 9,192 | 58 |
| 9 | Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo | 22,481 | 1 | 22,481 | 91 |
| 10 | Upper Demerara-Berbice | 38,460 | 2 | 19,230 | 148 |

Table 3.1. Regions/electoral districts of Guyana

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|-----------------------|---|
| Recommendation | <i>An enumeration exercise should be conducted, following which geographical seats should be more equitably distributed among electors to ensure the principle of equal suffrage.</i> |
| Status | The 2020 COG recommended a comprehensive reform of the voter registration system, with a fresh registration to be undertaken subsequently. This issue of the equitable distribution of geographical seats had also been recommended by the 2020 COG |
| Recommendation | <i>An independent and impartial body should be established to draw the geographical and top-up constituencies so that voters are represented in the legislature on a more equal basis (2020).</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended by the 2020 COG |

Voter registration

Right to vote

The legislation prescribes that, to vote in a general election, one must be a citizen of Guyana and at least 18 years old. Commonwealth citizens resident in Guyana for a period of at least one year are also eligible. These provisions are subject to not being certified insane or judged of being of unsound mind under any law enforced in Guyana, and not having been convicted by a court of any electoral offence by the High Court in the five years prior to the qualifying date.

Responsibility for the registration of electors is attributed to GECOM under the Constitution (S. 162), ROPA (Ch.1) and the National Registration Act. According to the law, voters are required to cast their ballots in their region of registration. Voter registration occurs across two annual periods: January to May and July to November. Each registration cycle concludes with a period in June and December for producing the Preliminary List of Electors and conducting "claims and objections" processes.

Claims and objections process

According to the National Registration Act (19:8), the public has the right to scrutinise the preliminary voter list. GECOM conducted a claims and objections exercise from 16 to 22 June 2025, processing 6,563 claims and four objections. According to the law, the resulting OLE remains valid for six months following certification, which took place on 29 July 2025. This list is accessible on GECOM's website with searchable functionality, alongside public display across all ten regions. The publication of the OLE online was an important step by GECOM that facilitated transparency and access to information.

Concerns regarding the size of the OLE

The OLE was the subject of considerable speculation throughout the election process. Stakeholders repeatedly cited the alleged "bloated" character of the list, which stands at 757,690 electors in comparison with a population estimated in United Nations population projections as roughly 826,353.⁷ There were multiple causes of the mismatch between the size of the OLE and population projections; however, the reasons for the mismatch between the size of the list and the projected size of the population were not always widely understood.

The government conducted a Population and Housing Census in 2022, though results remain unpublished. Some stakeholders suggested that the availability of this data would have contributed to improving perceptions of transparency in the electoral system. In addition, notwithstanding legal impediments to modifying the OLE, some suggested that publication of this data could have been a useful aid in efforts towards scrutiny, audit and deduplication.

One reason for the mismatch between the estimated population and the names on the OLE relates to Guyana's significant diaspora population. There are currently no legal provisions for diaspora voting, and proxies can be appointed only in very specific circumstances. Court decisions prevented the removal of registered voters on the grounds of non-residency under existing legislation.

Stakeholders reported that records from the Registrar of Births and Deaths were shared with GECOM, which enabled the removal of names of voters who are deceased from the list. Legal safeguards limit the degree to which GECOM can remove names from the list through other pathways. Interlocutors reported that operationalising legislation to allow for death reports received from the commissioner of police and chief medical officer to be interrogated by means of excluding deceased persons from the list has yet to be finalised.

No evidence of leveraging voter roll inflation for electoral manipulation has been substantiated to date. Positively, GECOM responded to concerns relating to the list and eligibility to vote through public information; however, these efforts could have been strengthened with a greater evidence basis for GECOM communications.⁸

⁷ WHO (nd). "Guyana. <https://data.who.int/countries/328> (accessed 15 September 2025).

⁸ DPI Guyana (2025) "Bangladeshi, Other Commonwealth Citizens Can Vote If Legally Eligible – GECOM". <https://dpi.gov.gy/bangladeshi-other-commonwealth-citizens-can-vote-if-legally-eligible-gecom/>

Biometric voter registration and verification

Biometric voter registration is a system that uses unique physical characteristics such as fingerprints or facial features to verify the identity of electors. The 2025 elections did not involve the use of biometrics to check voter identities. In advance of the election, multiple stakeholders, including some political parties, called on GECOM to introduce a biometric voting system, which would involve the verification of voter identity at the polling station.

In response to these calls, GECOM stated that it faced technical, legislative and administrative challenges and was unable to employ biometric verification for electors in these elections. However, the Commission has indicated that it will look at the feasibility of initiating biometric voter registration over the post-election period.

Stakeholders noted moves towards introducing biometric voter registration may require significant legal reform through an inclusive and transparent process. The Group notes that any such reforms should pay particular attention to the needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and other vulnerable groups.

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| Recommendation | <i>Early in the new election cycle, consideration should again be given to the adoption of biometric voter registration and verification technology.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation. |

Pre-election preparations

The Guyanese president has the sole authority to, at any time, dissolve parliament and call an election (Constitution Article 70(2)). Although some stakeholders suggested that delays in receiving decisions from GECOM circumscribed preparation times, it is notable that stakeholders had a total of five years to prepare for these elections, with Article 70(3) of the Constitution noting that parliament will sit for a maximum period of five years unless dissolved within this period. On 25 May 2025, President Ali called the election for 1 September 2025, with Article 60(1) of the Constitution of Guyana noting that an election must take place within three months of the dissolution of parliament.

In accordance with Article 222(a) of the Constitution, GECOM was allocated a budget of GY\$7.3 billion by the government, approved by the National Assembly's Committee of Supply, to cover election expenses for the 2025 general and regional elections. Although the Group was informed that delays in receiving decisions from GECOM constricted some timelines, such as procurement timelines, the Group notes the presence of all necessary election materials at polling stations on election day (see Chapter 6). The Group further notes that all aspects of the electoral operations as required under law had been delivered by election day, indicating that the existing preparatory timescales defined in law are adequate for the effective delivery of elections in Guyana.

Recruitment and training of election workers

According to ROPA, GECOM is responsible for the recruitment and training of polling workers. GECOM first advertised for the presiding officer, assistant presiding officer, poll clerk, ballot clerk/counting assistant and information clerk positions via a press release on 11 February 2025. Application forms were also made available in GECOM registration offices and were required to be submitted by 30 March 2025.

Training manuals for both returning officers, supernumerary returning officers and other election officials, and presiding officers and other polling day officials, were prepared by the GECOM secretariat and had input from parliamentary political parties for scrutiny and feedback. Both manuals were made publicly available on the GECOM website. Numerous stakeholders noted an improvement in the quality of electoral materials provided by GECOM, as compared to 2020, partly thanks to the collaboration of donors.

The ten selected returning officers and supernumerary returning officers were administered their oaths of office by GECOM Chair Justice (Ret'd) Claudette Singh on 23 June 2025. A press release advised that the supernumerary returning officers would have responsibility for sub-districts in districts 3, 4 and 6, as per ROPA.

Election workers received three training sessions, including a simulation of election day. GECOM trained more individuals than would be required for election day, which ensured it was able to rely on adequate staffing. The effectiveness of this training was underscored by the highly positive assessment of Commonwealth observers relating to election day procedures (see Chapter 6). GECOM established 2,790 polling stations across the country, and on 1 September these were fully outfitted and staffed for the opening of the poll (see Chapter 6).

Nomination of candidates

On 14 July 2025, the chief election officer received lists of candidates from representatives of political parties contesting the elections for each of the ten geographical constituencies and regional democratic councils. At the close of nominations, the following six parties were nominated to contest the elections:

- People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C)
- We Invest in Nationhood (WIN)
- A Partnership for National Unity (APNU)
- Forward Guyana Movement (FGM)
- Alliance for Change (AFC)
- Assembly for Liberty and Prosperity (ALP)

Concerns were expressed by some stakeholders pertaining to GECOM's management of Nomination Day on 14 July 2025 regarding procedural issues such as the order of candidate submissions and the consent process for nominators. GECOM maintained that the process was smooth, transparent and compliant with the legal framework.

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| Recommendation | <i>The time of day at which political parties will present themselves to undertake the nomination process should be scheduled and the schedule disseminated to all political parties for greater clarity and fairness.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Disciplined forces voting

Members of the disciplined forces (comprising the Guyana Defence Force, Guyana Police Force and Guyana Prison Service) who were over 18 years old by 30 June 2025, and listed on the Disciplined Forces Roll, voted on 22 August 2025. Although the Group did not directly observe this process, it notes reports of its peaceful and largely technically well-managed conduct. The Group further notes greater inclusion could have been facilitated through the expansion of eligibility for early voting.

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| Recommendation | <i>Consider extending the early voting facility to other essential services workers.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Stakeholder engagement

GECOM was required and mandated to engage with a broad variety of stakeholders to facilitate effective delivery of the election process. The COG notes that, as a result of divisions within GECOM, the Commission was not always able to engage stakeholders with one voice, impeding access to information about the electoral process.

Although GECOM reportedly tried to ensure all parties had access and opportunities to communicate with its staff, the Group was informed that they were not afforded equal communication opportunities. The Group received claims of an inequitable distribution of electoral information, including the OLE. The lack of a regular, dedicated meeting between GECOM and political parties was a lost opportunity to ensure a high level of procedural understanding among parties.

Following the nomination process, the parties were required to submit the names of their appointed polling agents to GECOM. Though it was alleged that information submitted for the appointment of agents from AFC, ALP, FGM and WIN political parties was incomplete and they failed to submit the completed applications before the deadline of 25 August 2025, these applications were subsequently approved by GECOM. The Group commends GECOM for the decision to grant these approvals, despite these parties missing the statutory timeline for the submission of those applications. This contributed to the integrity of the electoral process.

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| Recommendation | <i>GECOM should enhance collaboration with party stakeholders through regular communications across the whole election cycle.</i> |
| Status | Recommendation based on developments in the lead-up to the 2025 elections |

The Group commends existing collaborations between GECOM and civil society, for example on the provision of voter education to PWDs. The Group also notes efforts by GECOM in the final few months preceding the elections to improve its communication with stakeholders, including the wider public. The Group notes the important support provided by donors to this end, and further encourages that these efforts be continued into the next election cycle.

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| Recommendation | <i>The Group recommends that, as part of its post-election review, GECOM consider planning for regular meetings with all stakeholder groups across the whole election cycle.</i> |
| Status | Recommendation based on developments in the lead-up to the 2025 elections |

Voter information

The Constitution and ROPA accord GECOM the responsibility of communicating information to voters. This is complemented by the Access to Information Act 2011, which defines the right to "secure access to information under the control of public authorities in order to promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government and public authorities". According to GECOM, the means used to communicate information to voters included information sessions, radio broadcasts and community voter education in local markets.

GECOM also conducted voter information online, including on Facebook, a dedicated YouTube channel hosting political education video resources and a user-friendly website. With donor support, GECOM established a dedicated WhatsApp channel to provide voter information. GECOM should continue to use these resources throughout the coming election cycle to continue building an audience for voter information well in advance of the next elections (see Chapter 5 on social media).

On election day, observers noted that the clear explanations of polling staff to electors helped respond to queries regarding voting operations (see Chapter 6). However, the Group notes enhanced voter information provision could have responded to these concerns at an earlier stage. In addition, the Group notes that an evidence-based approach, rooted in an understanding of which areas voters most need support on, can enhance the delivery of voter information. The mission further notes that, despite commendable work by GECOM in conveying online voter information, the expansion of these efforts can help bring important insight to electors in the next election cycle (see Chapter 5 on social media).

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| Recommendation | <i>GECOM should consider adopting an evidence-based approach to continue strengthening the delivery of voter information throughout the next election cycle.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Election dispute resolution

Article 163 of the Constitution of Guyana has given the High Court exclusive jurisdiction to determine whether an election has been conducted lawfully. GECOM can review the electoral process to identify weaknesses within the system. Section 140 (1 &2) of ROPA restricts judicial review of GECOM's actions even if it exceeds the statutory or constitutional mandates. However, its powers can be reviewed by the court if it acted unlawfully.

4. Participation and inclusion

This chapter summarises the observations of the COG with respect to citizen participation and inclusion in the 2025 electoral processes. As experienced in past elections, racial division and political polarisation dominate political discourse in Guyana. The entrance of new political parties in this election cycle provided alternatives to electors. For the first time, Guyana saw women leading political parties, with two of the six party leaders being women, and three female ministerial candidates.

Stakeholders shared with the Group that the following issues had arisen during the 2025 elections: disaggregation of elector data, veracity of the OLE, lack of census data, the option for prisoners to vote and the use of data captured during the cash grant distribution prior to the elections.

Guyana has several constitutional and statutory commissions with mandates in this area, including the Ethnic Relations Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Indigenous People's Commission and the Women and Gender Commission. Guyana has demonstrated a commitment to the principles of participation and inclusion as signatories to regional and international conventions. Efforts to address structural barriers have been addressed through the ratification of instruments, which include:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966
- Plan of Action of the Inter-American Commission of Women 1986
- Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 1986
- Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1999
- CARICOM Plan of Action 2003
- Commonwealth Plan of Action 2005
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006

Guyana has not signed or ratified the 1989 Indigenous Tribal and Peoples Convention, but adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

While some gaps exist, these international understandings are largely incorporated into the Constitution of Guyana and in the following national legislation:

- Representation of the People Act 1964
- National Registration Act 1967 (as amended)
- Equal Rights Act 1990
- Prevention of Discrimination Act 1997
- The Amerindian Act 2006
- Persons with Disability Act 2010

4.1. Women

Political leadership, participation, and voter turnout

ROPA Section 11B, Articles 5-7, requires political parties to have “*the total number of females on each party’s national top-up lists and the lists for geographical constituencies, taken together, being at least one-third of the number of persons on those lists.*” The stated objective is commendable, and, though the law sets no quota for women to be allotted seats in the National Assembly, representation remains above 33 per cent. The 2025 election saw the emergence of new political parties, with two of the six political parties led by women, who were presidential candidates. Women candidates were prevalent in both the general and the regional elections and included three prime ministerial candidates.

GECOM is currently all-male with the exception of the chair. However, women were well represented among GECOM staff on election day (returning officers, presiding officers, assistant presiding officers, poll clerks). GECOM was not able to provide sex-disaggregated data on the composition of the polling staff on election day.

GECOM shared with the Group the official electors’ data disaggregated by sex. This indicated that, of the total of 757,690 registered electors, 49.72 per cent were male and 50.28 per cent were female. GECOM did not provide an analysis of other aspects, such as age or disability. The disaggregated data was also not publicly available on GECOM’s website. The Group notes that information about sex, age and disability is collected by GECOM as part of the registration process. Analysis of this information could enhance transparency and also enable GECOM to plan more effectively to accommodate disability, as well as in tailoring outreach and communications.

Composition of the electorate by district by sex

Table 4.1. Composition of the Guyanese electorate by district by sex.

| District # | Male | Female | Total | Male share | Female share |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | 12,948 | 11,505 | 24,453 | 52.95% | 47.05% |
| 2 | 21,528 | 21,068 | 42,596 | 50.54% | 49.46% |
| 3 | 58,024 | 58,851 | 116,875 | 49.65% | 50.35% |
| 4 | 158,125 | 165,312 | 323,437 | 48.89% | 51.11% |
| 5 | 25,228 | 25,568 | 50,796 | 49.67% | 50.33% |
| 6 | 55,621 | 55,933 | 111,554 | 49.86% | 50.14% |
| 7 | 9,560 | 8,286 | 17,846 | 53.57% | 46.43% |
| 8 | 5,052 | 4,140 | 9,192 | 54.96% | 45.04% |
| 9 | 11,655 | 10,826 | 22,481 | 51.84% | 48.16% |
| 10 | 18,962 | 19,498 | 38,460 | 49.30% | 50.70% |
| TOTAL | 376,703 | 380,987 | 757,690 | 49.72% | 50.28% |

Source: GECOM Report: Summary of OLE (July 2025).

The Group also notes that GECOM does not collect disaggregated data on candidates competing in the elections. Data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and any other relevant categories would help identify patterns of participation and inform targeted interventions by political parties, civil society and other actors, to promote equity.

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| Recommendations | <i>Political parties should take stronger action to promote genuine inclusion and political participation of women.</i> |
| | <i>Revise the legislation to ensure at least 33 per cent of elected MPs are women, not just on paper but in actual representation</i> |

| | |
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| | <i>Include binding and enforceable quotas for women in parliament with associated compliance mechanisms.</i> |
| | <i>Disaggregation of data should be mainstreamed in GECOM's operations to include collecting disaggregated data on sex, age and disability across the spectrum of activities.</i> |
| Status | All previously recommended by 2020 COG |

4.2. Civil society

Civil society engagement in the political process was not evident. GECOM did not have a planned schedule of engagement with stakeholders – from the media to political parties and civil society - as part of its electoral operational plan. There was no deliberate outreach by GECOM or other stakeholders to ensure civil society was meaningfully engaged in the preparations for, and lead-up to, the general and regional elections. Information on citizen observers was also not publicly available or provided to the Group by GECOM.

The Group heard concerns about perceived shrinking civic space and the alleged punitive environment in which CSOs now operate, which further raised concerns about the labelling of CSOs as "anti-government."

The Group did receive reports of outreach by some CSOs to encourage stakeholders (albeit without success), including government and other institutions, to proactively engage in the political process. The Group also heard of voter information initiatives undertaken via social media by CSOs in the LGBTQI+ community⁹.

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| Recommendations | <i>GECOM should engage and encourage civil society as an important mechanism for transparency, accountability and democracy.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM is encouraged to strengthen its voter information outreach to diverse communities, utilising all methods of communication to ensure maximum participation and inclusion.</i> |
| | <i>Appointment to GECOM should be guided by the principles of inclusivity and should prioritise gender considerations in the nomination of election commissioners.</i> |
| Status | Recommendations previously suggested by 2020 COG |

4.3. Youth

The National Youth Policy 2015 defines youth as people under the age of 35. In 2021, it was estimated that two-thirds of the population in Guyana were young people. While the most recent Guyana Population and Housing Census was conducted in 2022, it has yet to be published.

There are currently no quotas, reserved seats or other temporary special measures to facilitate youth participation in political life. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in the 2020 parliament there was one female MP under the age of 30 and 20 MPs between the ages of 31 and 40.¹⁰ GECOM does not collect data disaggregated by age on electors or electoral candidates.

The Group observed that young people were well represented among both polling staff. However, the exact number of young officials was not available from GECOM, as this data is not collected. The proportion of young people voting varied by region.

The Group recognises that many parties have youth in their leadership. However, AFC was the only party to explicitly prioritise the participation of youth in governance and the economy in its campaign. The Group was also informed that the Guyana National Youth Council had hosted a voter symposium with representatives from the political parties contesting the 2025 general and regional elections.

The Group was informed that, while there is a need for greater respect for differing views, young people are increasing their participation in political discourse. It was found that the "traditional" way of voting –

⁹ <https://demerarawaves.com/>

¹⁰ Guyana | National Assembly | IPU Parline: global data on national parliaments

supporting the political party of previous generations in the family – was beginning to decline. Young people reportedly had relative ease accessing the campaigns of political parties and general information about voting but found the latter was disseminated late and was not particularly engaging. The Group noted concerns about misinformation and disinformation on social media.

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|-----------------------|---|
| Recommendation | <i>Adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of youth, thus facilitating their political participation</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended in 2020 |
| Recommendation | <i>Engage young people in the development of material to provide relevant and targeted voter information for young electors.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |
| Recommendation | <i>Collect and disseminate disaggregated data on electors and candidates to assess youth engagement in the electoral process.</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended by 2020 COG |

4.4. Persons with disabilities

The Persons with Disabilities Act 2010 sets the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a guiding principle. Section 26 stipulates that all national television stations provide sign language interpretation or subtitles for at least one daily newscast and for coverage of nationally significant events. Sub-Part IX references proxy voting provided for under the ROPA. Sub-Part IX also allows for voting with an assistant to be permissible, and states that polling stations should be barrier-free or provisions should be made for PWDs.

*The Disability Manifesto for Implementation to Continue the Fulfilment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Guyana 2025–2030*¹¹, produced by the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities, calls for election legislation to be "reviewed and amended to remove discriminatory clauses to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate in the electoral process independently"; for the modification of building codes to ensure "all buildings that are for public access are fully accessible to all persons with disabilities"; and for material for public consumption to be made accessible to all PWDs.

The Group was informed that an international organisation had facilitated a partnership between GECOM and a CSO focused on PWDs. This had enabled outreach to regions where poll workers were engaged on the specific needs of this community. In addition, the Group was informed that the Guyana Council for Persons with Disabilities had directly engaged with 300 PWDs, providing information on voting.

The Group was informed that one political party – FGM – had a candidate with a disability. However, GECOM itself does not collect disaggregated data on disability for electors or electoral candidates.

The Group was informed that proxy voting and assisted voting had compromised the secrecy of the ballot. It also received reports of proxy voting being used to target people in vulnerable situations. While GECOM allows proxy votes for PWDs, this is not expressly mentioned in the law, which opens the door to inconsistent application and potential fraud and abuse. While ROPA has provisions on impersonation and fraud (S132–134), it does not specifically address proxy documentation or misuse of proxy voting for people in situations of vulnerability.

The Group observed voters with disability at polling stations. However, the Group noted that most polling stations were not structurally accessible and entry to the polling station was dependent on physical assistance by family members, poll workers and voters. Disaggregation of voter information would mitigate this issue and help GECOM make appropriate accommodations. The Group notes the statement by the GECOM public relations officer, who admitted to the lack of ramps at polling stations, which impacted access for PWDs.

¹¹ <https://gcopd.org/disability-manifesto-2025-2030/>

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Recommendations | <i>GECOM and political parties should adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of PWDs, thus facilitating their political participation.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM should collect data on disability during elector registration to enable early mapping of polling stations and ensure access and accommodation for PWDs and the elderly with kerbside voting as an alternative.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM should provide stencils or tactile ballot papers to facilitate the voting of people who are blind or visually impaired.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM, political parties and CSOs should provide voter education tailored for PWDs.</i> |
| | <i>Revise ROPA and introduce safeguards to prevent the misuse of proxy voting, including penalties for violation. Include biometric verification or digital tracking of proxy voters and their representatives.</i> |
| Status | With the exception of the latter recommendation related to ROPA, all others previously recommended by the 2020 COG |

Figure 4.1 Representatives of groups advocating for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) with the Observer Group.



4.5. Amerindian people

Nine Indigenous Nations – the first people to inhabit Guyana – live across the ten regions of Guyana. They are identified as Amerindians in the legislation of Guyana. The 2021 Census found that this was the fourth largest ethnic group in Guyana, comprising 10.5 per cent of the population. Amerindian people largely live in regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9, and they are the majority ethnic group in regions 1 and 9.

The Group was informed that information on the election was primarily available online and did not serve Amerindian people living outside of the capital with limited or no access to the internet. It noted the need for voter education at the community level, along with an increase in digital literacy and connectivity. The Group was informed that there was local government training at the village level. CSOs have been lobbying for awareness and education (particularly on changes to ROPA) to be provided in the same way. However, there is resistance in some communities to this training. This could be because of insufficient awareness and understanding.

The Group heard concerns relating to alleged proxy voting and the targeting of the elderly in Amerindian communities, resulting in their identities being used for others to vote. Despite these concerns, the Group received no formal reports or verified instances of proxy voting or misuse of elderly voters' identities in these communities. The Group was also informed of long walking distances to polling stations, particularly in region 8, a mountainous area.

The Group notes, with concern, the alleged partisan behaviour of some Toshao (village chiefs), who had prevented some political parties and candidates from meeting with Amerindian people in their communities. In some regions, however, each party reportedly has a representative Amerindian community. The Group notes that it is important that all communities' rights to freely access political information, engage in the democratic processes and make informed electoral choices are respected and enforced.

The Group notes concern around alarming issues raised, including victimisation of individuals and CSOs, perceived to be higher than in previous elections. This reportedly resulted in a fear of expressing political opinions, particularly those that diverge from the positions of the governing party. The Group was informed of what were deemed to be violations of rights to self-determination, access to information and free prior informed consent.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Recommendations | <i>Political parties should adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of Amerindian people, thus facilitating their political participation.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM should have more direct engagement with Amerindian people to enhance participation and inclusion.</i> |
| | <i>GECOM should deliver voter information, in appropriate formats and all spoken and written languages, directly to Amerindian communities.</i> |
| | <i>The government should increase internet connectivity in Amerindian areas to support equitable access to information and services</i> |
| | <i>The government should engage with the National Toshao Council and other appropriate structures to ensure Toshao actively uphold and protect the rights of Amerindian people to self-determination, and the full free participation in the political life of the state.</i> |
| Status | With the exception of the first recommendation related to political parties and inclusion, which was recommended by the 2020 COG, all others are new. |

Figure 4.2 Members of the Amerindian community with the Observer Group.



5. Campaign and the media

5.1. Campaign

Campaign environment

The discovery of oil off the shore of Guyana has transformed the country's economic outlook (see Chapter 2) and raised the stakes of the 2025 electoral campaign. In addition, the 2020 general election controversy (also covered in Chapter 2) contributed to an environment of apprehension around the 2025 election and the validity of the count, tabulation and announced results. The overall assessment of the Commonwealth Secretariat PEAM deployed in July 2025 was that, despite a charged political atmosphere, ethnic divisions and criticism regarding aspects of Guyana's electoral process, the forthcoming elections were widely expected to be conducted peacefully.

Figure 5.1 The Supporters of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) gather at a campaign rally in the capital.



On 22 May 2025, President Ali announced that Guyana's general and regional elections would take place on 1 September 2025, marking the start of political campaigns. Eight political parties – including three new political parties (AFC, FGM and WIN) – showed an interest in competing for the leadership of Guyana. On 18 July 2025, at a special meeting of GECOM, a list of candidates for six political parties was approved to contest in the general and regional elections in keeping with the legal requirements.

During the campaign period, all approved political parties (AFC, ALP, APNU, FGM, the PPP/C and WIN) actively campaigned nationwide in a generally peaceful environment, although some confrontations at public meetings, heated rhetoric and incidents of party flags being removed and replaced were reported.^{12,13}

While all six parties contested in the general elections, APNU, AFC, the PPP/C and WIN submitted lists to contest in all ten electoral districts in the regional elections. ALP contested in districts 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10 in the regional elections, and FGM contested in the regional elections in districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. In the final year of its term, the Government issued cash grants – announced in October 2024 – of GY\$100,000.

¹² The Carter Center (2025) "Guyana Preelection Statement". 19 August. <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2025/guyana-081925.html>

¹³ Guyana Times (2025) "PPP Activists Slam Intimidatory Attack on Party Flag by WIN Thugs." 15 August. <https://guyanatimesgy.com/ppp-activists-slam-intimidatory-attack-on-party-flag-by-win-thugs>

The Group received reports that the data from the registration system for these cash grants was used to contact recipients and encourage them to vote for the PPP/C.

While parties conducted campaign activities ranging from large rallies to smaller meetings and with widespread display of campaign materials, the Group received reports that there was unequal treatment of political parties. For example, the Group received reports that delays in police approval for campaign events affected newer parties, and the WIN presidential candidate was reportedly denied domestic airline services for campaign travel and access to local public venues for meetings. WIN campaign managers and nine supporters in district 9 were reportedly locked up for nine hours, forcing the party to cancel campaign rallies.

Opposition and new political parties alleged an atmosphere of intimidation and victimisation of public servants, business owners, community members and media that included loss of employment, transfers to remote locations and loss of contracts if they showed support for opposition parties. The Group was also informed that, while a code of conduct had been produced by the ERC, two political parties (APNU and FGM) did not sign it.

Figure 5.2 We Invest in Nationwood (WIN) party supporters cheer during a campaign rally in the capital.



The Group found that, while there is no law in this regard, political parties generally ended their campaigns two days before election day, although some online political advertising continued through to, and even during, election day.

The Group was informed that elections were often marked by ethnic polarisation, which contributed to a charged political atmosphere. The Group notes the difference in perceptions on this issue; some stakeholders insisted that there was no ethnic delineation, as people in Guyana are "all mixed up now"; others held the view that political parties and the people supporting them were still divided on this basis. Added to this is the familial pattern of voting for the same political parties through successive generations.

The Group received reports that the playing field was not level. GECOM was perceived by some political parties as favouring the PPP/C, and FGM took it to court for exclusion from the ballot in districts 4, 7 and 9. Political parties reported that the PPP/C used state resources to make it difficult for people to support their campaigns.

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|-----------------------|--|
| Recommendation | <i>As a part of a post-election review, consideration to be given to the creation and implementation of a code of conduct for relevant electoral stakeholders that integrates issue-based campaigning.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation, though the issues of the mechanisms and enforcement of Codes of Conduct were previously highlighted by the 2020 COG |

Campaign strategy

The 2025 general and regional elections presented a platform for political parties and candidates to contest in a rapidly evolving political and economic landscape in Guyana. There was a blend of traditional mobilisation techniques and policy-driven messaging aimed at addressing Guyana's economic and social challenges, which set a new tone for electoral competition beyond historic ethnic divides.

The main campaign issues revolved around the transparent use of revenues from the booming oil and gas sector, addressing corruption and promoting equitable development and social services. While political parties campaigned on a variety of issues, constitutional reform and economic growth, particularly transparent and equitable use of oil revenues, were popular themes.

Figure 5.3 Anticipation as A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) supporters rally in the capital ahead of the polls.



The Group noted the disparity in visibility between the large and small parties. Political parties displayed flags and posters of presidential and regional candidates in different regions of the country, indicating strongholds of specific political parties. The Group observed limited visibility of the smaller parties, a reflection of the limited resources that were available to them. Parties held campaign rallies and displayed convoys of vehicles decorated with different party colours.

The Group received reports of allegations of the misuse of state resources. These include the use of state-owned vehicles for campaign purposes, the exploitation of "10-day workers" in campaign activities and opening ceremonies being held for public infrastructure projects featuring public officials wearing full governing party attire.¹⁴ The government announced during the campaign period that it would promote over 2,800 Guyana Police Force officials,¹⁵ and on 24 March the government issued a declaration that bridge crossings would become free from 1 August.¹⁶ While there is no legal prohibition of this, the timing of the announcement of these measures blurs the line between state and the party, giving the governing party an unfair advantage in the elections.

| | |
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| Recommendation | <i>Encourage the revival of presidential debates that are nationally televised and regionally broadcast to encourage issue-based campaigns.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

¹⁴ <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2025/guyana-081925.html>

¹⁵ <https://dpi.gov gy/largest-police-promotions-in-commonwealth-history-president-ali/>

¹⁶ <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2025/03/24/news/guyana/ali-announces-free-bridge-crossings-from-august-1/>

Figure 5.4 WIN party supporters gather as they await the start of the rally.



Campaign finance

The Group was concerned about allegations of the use of state resources, including state media, law enforcement and money, for campaigning. The Group also found that campaign financing rules were outdated and unenforced (see Chapter 3).

The Group received reports of the closure of bank accounts, at multiple commercial banks, held by WIN party's candidates and supporters. It was reported that this action was taken in accordance with the risk frameworks of the banks. The account closures reportedly restricted campaign activities, including the use of social media advertising – an important alternative for newer parties with limited access to traditional media.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Recommendation | <i>Consider reform and regulation of campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency and accountability.</i> |
| Status | Similar recommendation made in 2020 |
| Recommendation | <i>Consider legislation to provide equitable access to the media for all candidates and political parties.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |
| Recommendation | <i>Strengthen and enforce rules on the use of public resources, to facilitate a more level playing field for all parties, and reduce the abuse of state resources through the power of incumbency.</i> |
| Status | Similar recommendation given in 2011 and 2015 |

5.2. The media

Overview

Guyana's media landscape comprises both private and public media houses, alongside several smaller media outlets across the country's ten regions. Media houses include print, television, radio and online media. Although social media is a significant source of information for much of the population, radio and television continue to play a role, including in the most remote regions.

The traditional media environment is characterised by cable, television and radio broadcasters. According to the regulatory body, the Guyana National Broadcast Authority (GNBA), there are 7 cable broadcasters, 23 television broadcasters and 22 radio broadcasters holding various licences.

Figure 5.5 PPP/C party supporters assemble in anticipation of the rally's start.



The principal newspapers include the state-owned Chronicle and the Official Gazette of the Government of Guyana, as well as privately owned newspapers such as Stabroek News, Kaieteur News, the Catholic Standard and the Guyana Times. Each of these operates an online version. Guyana also has many smaller regional blogs, often serving as sources of local information.

Figure 5.6 Etheleene Cummings, among Guyana's oldest and longest-serving newspaper vendors, at her newsstand.



There has been a shift in information consumption in Guyana towards social media, which has prompted traditional media houses to strengthen their online presence. This shift, supported by increased internet connectivity nationwide, has altered how information is accessed. This was manifested in the growing reach of social media influencers during the 2025 election campaign.

The increased use of social media corresponds with greater mobile phone access and internet availability. According to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) of Guyana, mobile subscriptions rose from 652,338 in 2020 to 987,974 in 2024, while fixed internet subscriptions increased from 79,760 in 2020 to 130,109

in 2024.¹⁷ The PUC's 2024 report on Guyana's telecommunications sector highlights the rollout of 4G LTE networks, wireless broadband and fibre-optic internet from 2015, making high-speed connections more widespread.

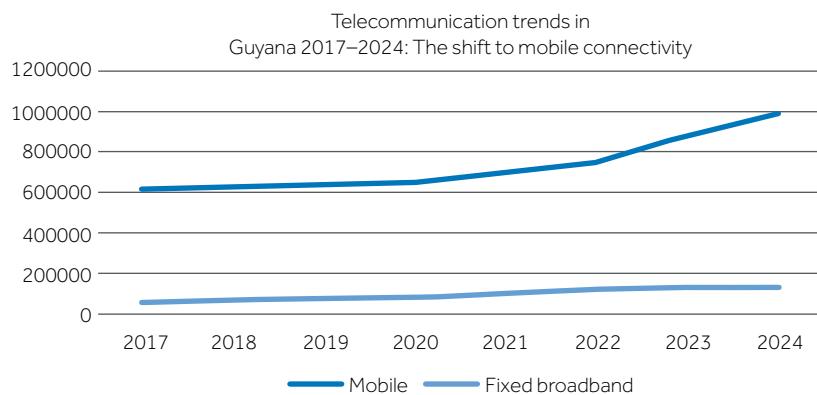
By 2024, market offerings included 5G internet access, a factor that has facilitated the country's media transformation. From 2025, satellite internet service Starlink has provided enhanced connectivity, including to more rural parts of Guyana. These trends indicate the increasing role the online domain is playing in Guyana, and this is likely to continue across the coming electoral cycle.

Figure 5.7 Media cover the Commonwealth Observer Group's final press conference on the preliminary statement.



Telecommunications trends in Guyana 2017–2024: the shift to mobile connectivity

Figure 5.8 Telecommunication trends in Guyana 2017–2024.



Source: PUC (2024) "Telecoms Sector".

Guyana's press freedom ranking has improved in recent years, with the country moving from 77th place in 2024 to 73rd out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index.¹⁸ Nevertheless, some stakeholders raised concerns about press freedom, noting a climate of self-censorship.

¹⁷ PUC (2024) « Telecoms Sector. » <https://puc.org.gy/pucdocs/Telecoms/TelecomsSectStats.pdf>

¹⁸ World Press Freedom Index 2025: Guyana: <https://rsf.org/en/country/guyana>

Private media outlets rely predominantly on revenues from advertising and promotions, whereas state media benefits from government funding in addition to advertising income. The Guyana Press Association (GPA) has noted a need for greater transparency in the placement and distribution of publicly funded advertisements.¹⁹

GPA is the principal press organisation in Guyana. It promotes self-regulation within the media sector. This independent body has approximately 140 members.

Media legal framework

Freedom of expression in Guyana is guaranteed under Article 146 of the Constitution. The legal framework relating to the media is completed by relevant provisions of the Defamation Act 1959 (amended 1990), the Access to Information Act 2011, the Cybercrime Act 2018 and the Data Protection Act 2023. Although there is no constitutional protection specifically for the freedom of the press, the constitutional protection on freedom of expression has historically been interpreted as guaranteeing media freedom.

A number of provisions in Guyanese law generate an uncertain environment for journalists and are at odds with constitutional protections on freedom of expression and international standards. The Cybercrime Act 2018's prohibition on "knowingly false" claims (19: 3) that cause ridicule or harm reputations leaves significant room for interpretation and its penalty of up to three years in prison does not facilitate an environment of free expression for the press or wider public. Furthermore, Guyana's criminalisation of defamation is at odds with international good practice.²⁰

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| Recommendation | <i>A full review should be carried out of the Cybercrime Act 2018 to ensure alignment with constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and international and Commonwealth standards.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation. The 2020 COG had also highlighted criticism from international organisations such as Reporters Without Borders and the International Press Institute, as well as national stakeholders, that this legislation undermined press freedom |

The right to access information, guaranteed under the Access to Information Act, is an essential enabler of the media that grants both the media and the public the right to access information from public bodies. This is an important component of scrutiny of issues spanning legal reform, campaign finance and election management. However, stakeholders reported inadequate implementation of this act, and noted the absence of a culture of filing and responding to freedom of information requests.

The Broadcasting Act establishes the GNBA to regulate the media. The GNBA has established Broadcasting Guidelines to implement this legislation.²¹ Pertinent to media coverage of elections, the GNBA Political Programmes and Election Period Standards provide guidance to broadcasters on news and current affairs coverage, respect for privacy, political broadcasts and content restrictions.²²

Several media practitioners and political parties have expressed concerns regarding the GNBA's impartiality. Criticism centres on the composition of the Authority, all members of which are named by the president. Additionally, questions have been raised about the GNBA's apparent inaction regarding verbal attacks by certain politicians on media professionals and outlets. Consequently, some stakeholders called for the GNBA to be reformed into an independent body.

¹⁹ Guyana Standard (2024) "GPA Calls for Political Code of Conduct Ahead of Election; Warns Against Pulling of Ads from Independent Media". 25 October. <https://www.guyanastandard.com/2024/10/25/gpa-calls-for-political-code-of-conduct-ahead-of-election-warns-against-pulling-of-ads-from-independent-media/>

²⁰ See Human Rights Committee (2011) "Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression". General Comment No. 34. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>

²¹ GNBA Board (2017) "Guidelines for Broadcasters". <https://gnba.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/GUIDELINES-FOR-BROADCASTERS.pdf>

²² GNBA (2025) "GNBA Advisory: Election Period". <https://gnba.gov.gy/gnba-advisory/>

The Association has a formal code of conduct enshrined in its constitution and other guidelines for its members,²³ and it has endorsed specific codes of conduct for media coverage during elections, including those in 2001, 2005, 2006 and 2015. However, a recurring issue, notably in 2020 and continuing in 2025, is the absence of an agreed code of conduct for the media during elections.

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| Recommendation | <i>Parliament should consider reforming the Broadcasting Act 2011 to establish an inclusive process of appointment to the GNBA in consultation with the GPA.</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended by the 2020 COG and other international observers, noting that "the GNBA should be appointed by parliament as an independent agency" and that "the process for recruiting board members should be transparent, with positions openly advertised and selection based on candidates' applications and experience" |
| Recommendation | <i>The Guyanese media should lead a collaborative process to develop an election code of conduct involving the GPA, independent media practitioners and GECOM, to ensure a basis for self-regulation well in advance of the next election.</i> |
| Status | Previously recommended by the 2020 COG. |
| Recommendation | <i>Parliament should consider legislation guaranteeing freedom and independence of the press, which should be enacted to enshrine press freedoms explicitly in law.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

The ability of the media to play its full role in reporting on the election was impeded by GECOM's non-authorisation of journalists within 200 yards of polling stations. In implementing this provision, GECOM noted Section 79 of ROPA. This interpretation impeded the media's ability to adequately cover the election. Although 79 (1) (b) allows presiding officers to exclude anyone except members of several categories of person, which does not include the media, ROPA does not explicitly exclude the media from entry. Likewise, the 200-yard rule defined in Section 78 of ROPA excludes certain categories of behaviour, and this does not include legitimate reporting on the election itself.

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| Recommendation | <i>GECOM should revise its interpretation of ROPA and allow accredited journalists access to all aspects of the electoral proceedings, including election day.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Media coverage of the elections

The print and electronic media provided extensive coverage of the 2025 election campaign. From full-page political advertisements to GECOM's paid announcements offering voter education, as well as news articles, opinion pieces and editorials, the media presented reportage from multiple perspectives throughout the election campaign period.

The media landscape was politicised along party lines and there was disproportionate coverage for the governing party. Campaign coverage in print and broadcast media was largely unregulated, diminishing the opportunity for voters to access balanced information. The Group received reports that journalists were verbally attacked by party officials and their followers at public events and harassed on social media for their professional stance and challenging questions.

The Group did not undertake a comprehensive programme of media monitoring. However, stakeholders noted that coverage of parties other than the PPP/C was markedly limited, particularly on the publicly funded National Communication Network, which has the widest reach in the country, and the Guyana Chronicle. This situation had implications for the pluralism of perspectives shared in the media.

²³ GPA (nd) "Guidelines". <https://pressassociation.gy/guidelines/> (accessed 15 September 2025).

This imbalanced coverage was influenced by the legally defined role of the state in the media landscape. The state-owned Guyana Chronicle is operated by Guyana National Newspapers Limited, which is funded from the state budget. Stakeholders consistently communicated that the Chronicle did not offer equitable coverage of different parties.

Some stakeholders noted reports of inequitable coverage across the media, including disproportionate coverage of the ruling PPP/C at the expense of smaller parties. However, the mission notes that a thorough analysis of the media landscape is impeded by a lack of independent data.

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| Recommendation | <i>Civil society should establish independent media and social monitoring capabilities.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Notable coverage was observed from media houses with both traditional and online platforms, including entities such as Newsroom and Demerara Waves. Media companies faced the challenge of balancing political revenue opportunities against maintaining relationships with their key advertisers.

Media stakeholders highlighted challenges, such as the implications of the Cybercrime Act of 2018, restrictions preventing journalists from covering elections within certain distances of polling stations and reports of intimidation directed at media personnel by political leaders, as well as issues of self-censorship.

Figure 5.9 Vendor Etheleene Cummings and a reader engage with the day's headlines at her newsstand.



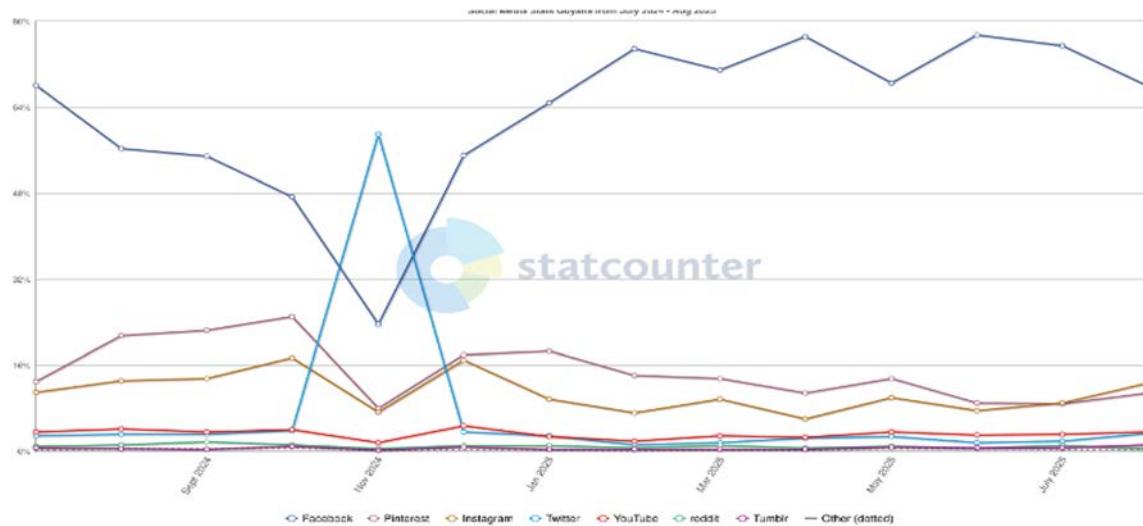
Social media context

The 2025 elections in Guyana signified a shift in political engagement and campaign strategies marked by the growing influence of social media. Although estimates vary, according to the ad planning tools of social media companies, upwards of 96 per cent of Guyanese use social media.²⁴

²⁴ Kemp, S. (2025) "Digital 2025: Guyana". <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-guyana>

Social media statistics for Guyana, July 2024–August 2025

Figure 5.10 Social media use statistics for Guyana, July 2024–August 2025.



Source: Statcounter.

All political parties leveraged social media platforms. The Group was informed that the newer parties, at times with limited access to some traditional media, depended heavily on online campaigns. The Group recognises the democratising role of social media in disseminating information, but we note with concern that social media was used to spread misinformation and disinformation.

The significant reach of the state in traditional media was also reflected online. The Guyana Chronicle's vast online reach, with more than 226,000 Facebook followers, rendered the outlet a potentially highly effective vehicle for access to information about elections. However, the separation between public service media and party media was unclear, and stakeholders suggested this was reflected in the Chronicle's online content.

Figure 5.11 Facebook followings and pages of the standing parties.

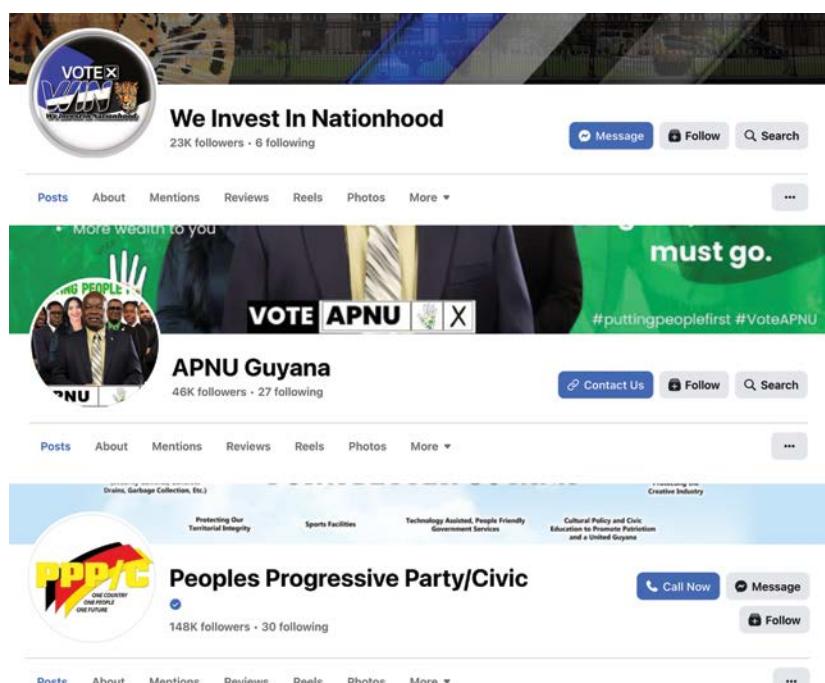
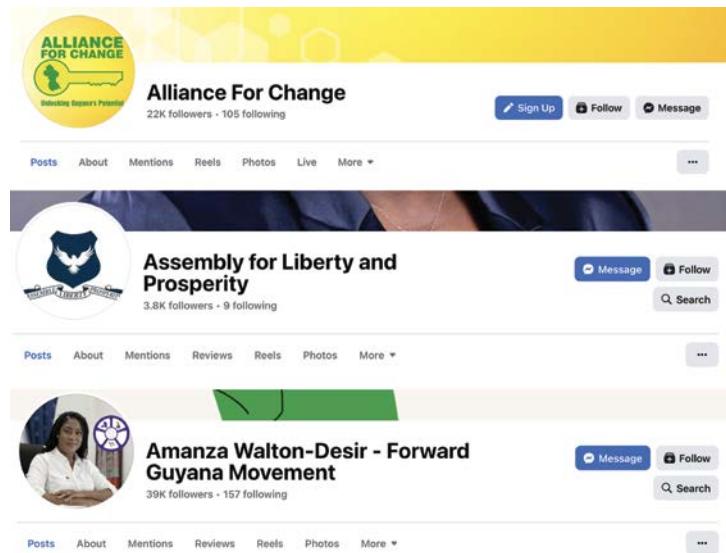


Figure 5.11 (Continued)

Information integrity

The Group notes with concern that social media was used to spread misinformation and disinformation. Efforts to rebut claims were impeded by a lack of adequate data, with no independent CSO undertaking comprehensive social media monitoring. Positively, the ERC hosted a media and social media monitoring unit for four permanent staff, and three temporary support staff over the electoral period.

This reflected a broader trend in which platforms did not provide adequate data about campaigns run on their platforms. Ongoing restrictions on platform APIs, which enable researchers to analyse data from social platforms, make it almost impossible for researchers to conduct meaningful analysis on the spread of disinformation in the Guyanese elections, impeding scrutiny of campaign finance and information integrity online. Stakeholders reported that, regrettably, attempts to implement an e-monitoring tool were impeded by restrictions on data access.

Despite these impediments, efforts were made to rebut alleged misinformation, including by GECOM:

Figure 5.12 GECOM Press Release on 1 September 2025.

GECOM Rejects the Publication of Fake Statement of Poll

1st September, 2025 GEORGETOWN – The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) has noted the abhorrent publication of a fake Statement of Poll at one (1) minute past the scheduled close of poll.

GECOM wishes to make it abundantly clear that it is impossible for the counting of the ballots at any Polling Station to have even commenced.

Regrettably, civil society support to these efforts was limited by the absence of any independent fact-checker in Guyana. Evidence suggests fact-checking can play a role in decreasing the believability of false claims, particularly when accompanied by targeted communications strategies and an evidence basis that identifies sources of trust.

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| Recommendation | <i>Civil society should establish an independent fact-checking mechanism to support democratic strengthening across the whole election cycle.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

Online advertising

Although Guyana lacks a legal framework specifically for online advertising, it is signatory to the United Nations Convention on Corruption, which calls on states to "adopt measures that enhance transparency in the funding of candidates and political parties." Furthermore, the GNBA's Guidelines for Broadcasters, which interpret the Broadcasting Act 2011, though designed for traditional media, require that advertising be clearly identified as such. In addition, international good practice has accorded that all rights enjoyed offline apply equally online.

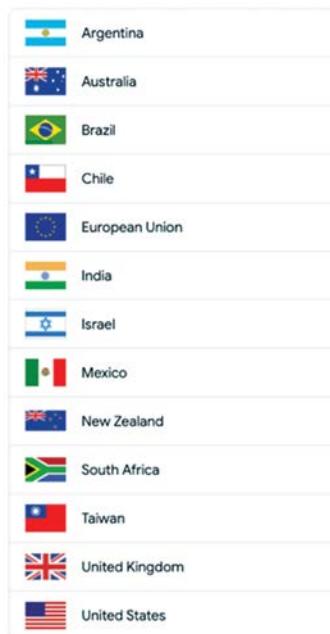
Despite these provisions, the level of transparency provided for online advertising during the campaign was variable between platforms. Over this election cycle, Meta has made significant progress in rolling out ad transparency tools across the globe. However, there is a notable difference in the level of transparency provided to Guyanese electors compared to measures undertaken elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

Similarly, Google has not rolled out to Guyana features it readily provides elsewhere. Although Google accepts political advertising from Guyana, it does not list Guyana as a "supported country" for enhanced political advertising transparency.

Figure 5.13 Supported regions for political advertising on Google.

Political advertising on Google

Select a supported region



Source: Google.

Summary of platform policies on advertising transparency in Guyana

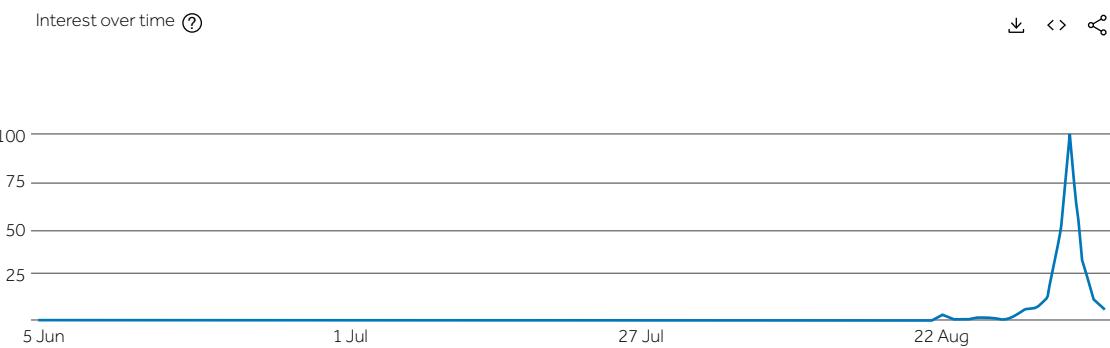
| Platform | |
|--|---|
| Meta (Facebook & Instagram) | Political ads are permitted subject to advertiser authorisation and a verified "paid by" disclaimer. Meta offers its global Ad Library capabilities in Guyana; however, there appears to be limited functionality compared with the features it has rolled out in other Commonwealth jurisdictions. Meta also releases political advertising data reports for Guyana. |
| YouTube & Google Ads | Google has permitted political ads from Guyana and offers some data on individual ads, but this is limited compared to what it offers in some other jurisdictions. In addition, Google has not rolled out its main ad transparency features to Guyana. |
| TikTok | Paid political advertising is banned globally on TikTok so there is no political ads library. TikTok has been accused elsewhere of failing to provide adequate levels of ad transparency. |

Paid ads were run during the campaign across the political spectrum, including by the PPP/C, APNU and WIN. Ads were run across platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Google. The size of Guyana's population ensured that relatively little expenditure was required for ads to reach large portions of the electorate.

Online communications of GECOM

Throughout the election cycle, Guyanese sought out information about the election online, with the data showing the search volume for "GECOM" throughout the year. This indicates a market for which GECOM online communications can be harnessed to promote voter information across the whole election cycle. Alongside this continual volume, data from Google shows that searches in Guyana around the topic of GECOM grew exponentially over the final two weeks of the campaign.

Figure 5.14 Google trends search data for GECOM - 2025.

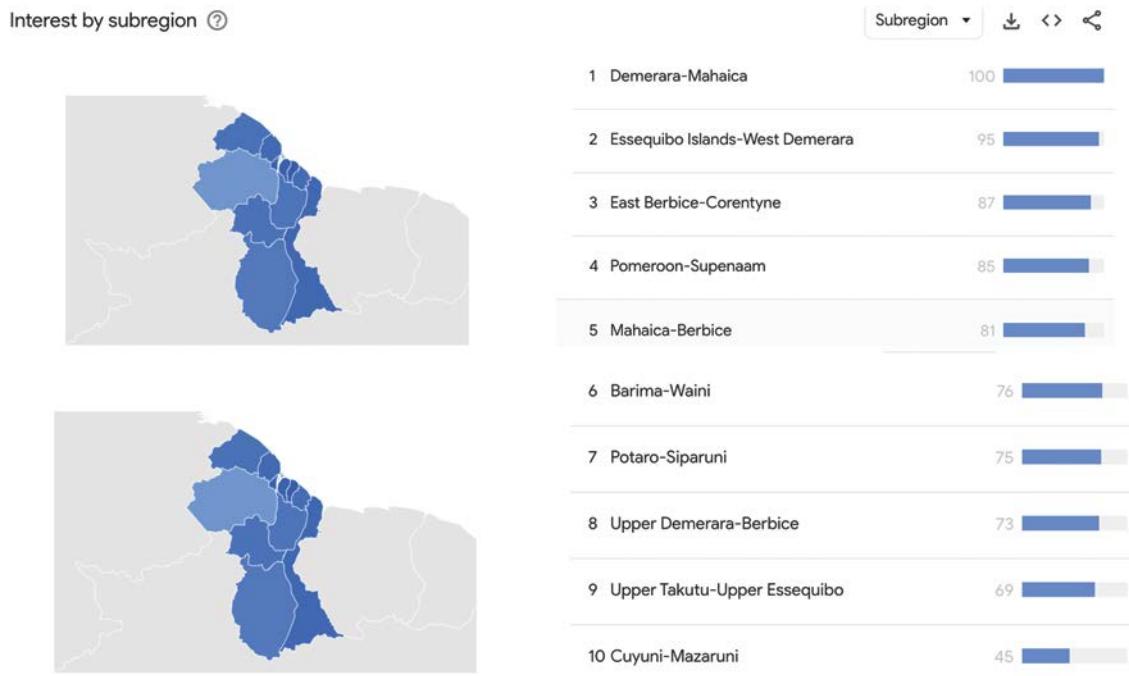


Source: Google.

Commendably, and in alignment with this increased search interest, GECOM established a range of communications capabilities, including a crisis communications centre around the election. The above data provides insight that GECOM can use to target the timing of its messaging over the next election cycle to maximise timely access to information.

Data from Google also shows that the regions with the highest search volumes for GECOM as a proportion of total searches in that region across the year to election date were East Berbice-Corentyne, Mahaica-Bernice and Pomeroon-Supenaam. This indicates that, moving forward, GECOM may have particular capability to reach these regions through its online outreach.

Figure 5.15 Google trends search data by Region for GECOM - 2025.



Source: Google.

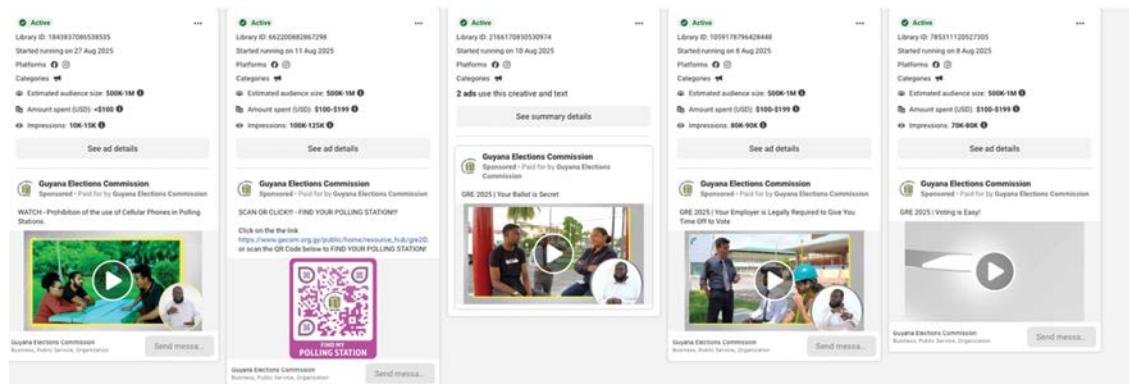
In addition, GECOM has used online advertising to promote voter information across the past year, but concentrated particular advertising around the electoral period. Its ads on Meta's platforms, which include Facebook and Instagram, received more than 800,000 impressions in August alone, and this was achieved at relatively low cost. On Google/YouTube, GECOM ran around 30 different ads. These promoted messages on, for example, how to find your polling station, and the fact that everyone is entitled to time off to vote, and a video explainer on how to vote.

The Group commends these efforts to strengthen access to information on the electoral process. However, the Group notes that, if GECOM had established a social media monitoring unit, it would have been better placed to deploy timely, evidence-based responses to misinformation.

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| Recommendation | GECOM should establish a social media monitoring unit in advance of the next elections. |
| Status | New recommendation, with targeted focus on social media. The 2020 COG proposed the revival of a media monitoring unit that had been implemented for the 2015 elections |

Selection of GECOM ads on Meta

Figure 5.16 GECOM advertising through Meta platforms.



The mission further notes the Commission's Facebook page, which had in excess of 71,000 followers. This represented a captive audience for voter information and was used by GECOM to communicate factual messaging regarding the election. GECOM should continue to grow this following over the coming election cycle.

GECOM's Facebook page

Figure 5.17 GECOM Facebook page header.



One drawback of GECOM's online presence is that it has not taken measures to verify its Facebook page. Verification displays a badge that helps ensure electors know the information originates from an official source, reducing risk of impersonation.

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| Recommendation | <i>GECOM should continue to enhance its online presence over the coming election cycle, including through verification of its Facebook page.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation |

6. Voting, counting and tabulation

The procedures for voting, closing of the polls and tabulation of election results are provided for in ROPA and are detailed in manuals prepared by GECOM. The manuals include The Official Manual for Returning Officers, Supernumerary & Other Election Officials (revised 25 March 2025) and the Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials (revised 26 March 2025).

The Group notes the significant amendment to the manuals and commends GECOM for the detailed information contained.

Guyana is divided into ten electoral districts, which coincide with the ten administrative regions. Guyana's general and regional elections were held at 2,970 polling stations in the ten regional administrative districts. For these elections, districts 3, 4 and 6 were subdivided and each sub-division was managed by a supernumerary returning officer.

Figure 6.1 Robinah Rubimbwa, a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group, at a polling station on Election Day.



6.1. Pre-poll arrangements and procedures

Polling stations were primarily set up in public spaces such as schools, health centres and tents. Private residences and buildings were also used, where unavoidable. The number of electors in each region was subdivided and assigned to polling stations, with a limit of 500 voters per polling station.

Polling officials, candidates, accredited party agents and national and international observers were allowed to be present inside polling stations.

We observed polling staff undertaking pre-poll procedures, including the display of empty ballot boxes and the creation of a unique polling station identifying number. All pre-poll procedures were generally adhered to.

GECOM staff

The conduct of the elections in each polling station was managed by a presiding officer with an administrative team, which included an assistant presiding officer, poll clerk(s) and ballot clerk(s) who also functioned as counting assistant(s). The presiding officer also had authority for the 200-yard area around the polling station. Additionally, at least one police officer equipped with a body camera was stationed at each polling station.

GECOM and polling staff were courteous and hospitable. They worked with professionalism, diligence and collegiality.

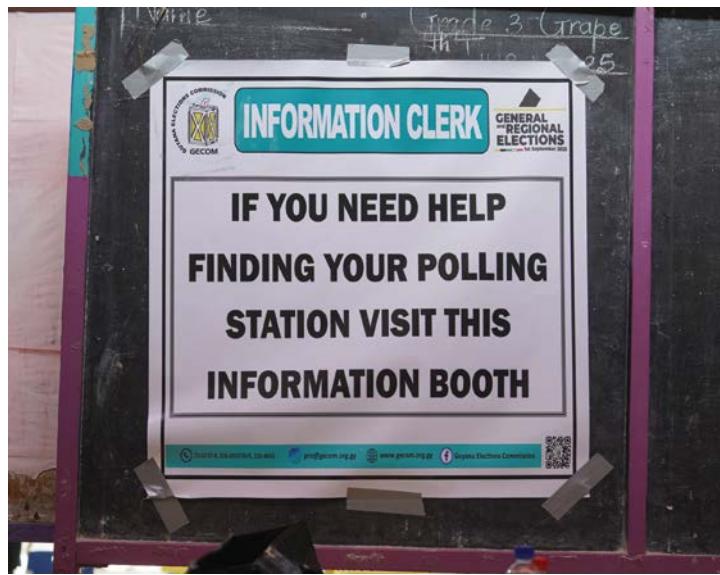
Voter information and signage

The OLE for a polling station, the list of party candidates and instructions on how to vote were posted in prominent places outside all polling stations observed. Additionally, there were signs indicating that mobile phones were not allowed in the polling booth. The Group observed that the prohibition was well enforced by means of the provision of a location and/or receptacle for mobile phones.

Where there were several polling stations in one location, GECOM established an information booth where a poll clerk was assigned to direct electors to their respective polling station. We commend GECOM for providing an information desk, materials and signage in and around polling stations that generally were very effective in guiding voters. The presence of information clerks greatly facilitated voters in locating their assigned polling station. The Group noted, however, that there were variances in the signage across polling stations.

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| Recommendation | Greater consistency should be achieved in the application of signage across all polling stations, for example signage related to the identification of polling staff. |
| Status | A new recommendation. |

Figure 6.2 Sign indicating an information desk at a polling station.



Opening of the poll

Before the commencement of the poll, in accordance with ROPA, and as provided in the Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials, poll clerks and party agents were provided with the OLE, as well as folios containing the photographs and other registration details of the electors for the polling station.

The presiding officer and team set up the polling station. Polling staff determined the six-digit number, unique to the polling station, to be stamped on each ballot paper in order to validate it. In the presence of party agents, officials and observers present, the ballot box was emptied of its contents and shown to all to be empty; the box was then sealed.

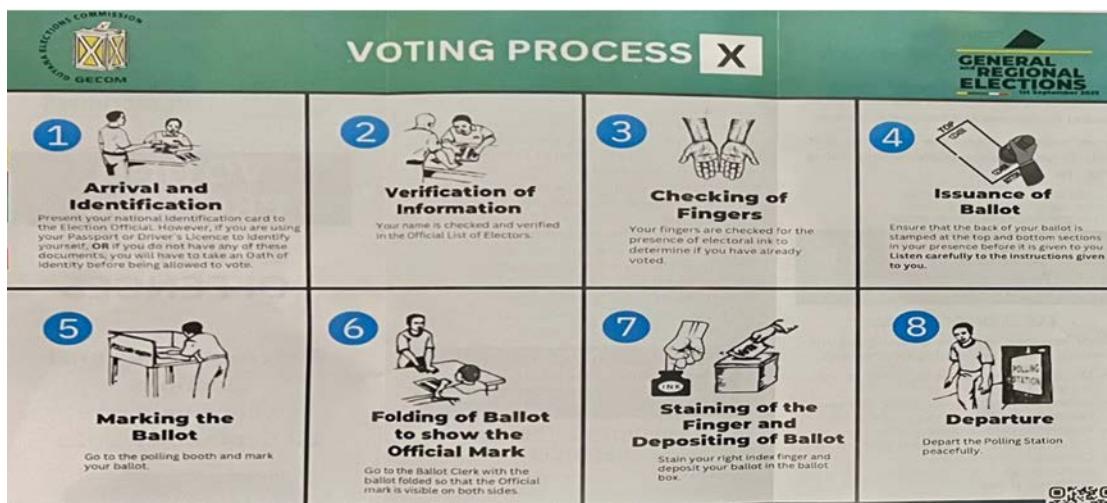
The Group observed that, generally, the polling station set-up was completed before the opening of the poll, the polling stations were well organised and, for the most part, were opened promptly at 06:00 with the full complement of staff and with the polling materials.

6.2. Voting

Upon arrival at the polling station, voters presented their national ID card to the polling clerk, who checked for the name on the OLE and placed a tick next to the serial number of the voter on the list. Where a voter did not have the ID card, the photograph on the folio provided to polling staff and party agents was used to verify their identity. In addition, voters without ID cards were asked to swear an oath of identity. The poll clerk announced the name and serial number of the elector so that the other poll staff and party agents could select the name on their list.

To ensure a voter had not previously voted, the voter's fingers were examined for indelible ink, before a ballot paper stamped with the unique number of the polling station on the general ballot and on the regional ballot with the unique number of the polling station was issued. The voter was instructed on how to mark and fold the two-part ballot paper and directed to the voting booth to mark the ballot paper. The poll clerk placed a tick to the left of the elector's serial number on the list to indicate that a ballot was issued and directed the other clerks and agents to do the same. Once the ballot was marked, the voter was directed to insert the folded ballot paper into the ballot box with the left hand, while dipping the right index finger into the indelible ink; thereafter, the voter collected his/her personal items, including their ID card, and exited. The Group also observed polling staff casting their vote during periods when there were no electors at the polling station.

Figure 6.3 Voting Process.



Source: GECOM voter education materials

Queue management: The Group commends the management of voters by GECOM. It was observed that there were varying lengths of queues at polling stations, but the queues were managed, with voters being patient and largely tolerant of the time it took to be processed.

Public understanding of the electoral process: The Group found that, in general, the public displayed a good understanding of the electoral process and the presiding officers clearly explained procedures, as required.

Participation and inclusion: The Group noted that women and youth were well represented among both polling staff and voters. Further, the Group commends the practice that gave pregnant women, older persons and PWDs priority in voting.

Proxy voting was permissible for designated categories of electors with advance registration and appropriate certification. This category included PWDs. PWDs who presented at the polling station to cast the ballot, including the blind, and who required assistance in voting, had the option of having a companion of choice, who must have been registered to vote at the same polling station, or assistance from the presiding officer. An assisting companion was required to complete an oath on the prescribed form and was not permitted to help more than two electors. The presiding officer was allowed to issue up to two replacement ballot papers for spoilt ballots.

Figure 6.4 An elderly voter after casting her ballot.



The Group notes with concern that many polling stations remained inaccessible (regarding ramps, widened doorways, accessible washrooms and designated disability parking spaces) and that many polling stations were accessible only by stairs. This may have resulted in some PWDs not being able to vote.

The Group was also concerned that blind voters did not have the option to vote independently with tactile ballot papers. Although PWDs have the option to cast a proxy vote, these stakeholders highlighted that the proxy deprived them of the secrecy of the vote.

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| Recommendation | <i>Adhere to international good practice aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of PWDs.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation, building on previous recommendations by the 2020 COG (and other international observers) about the need for improved accessibility for PWDs, including the need for careful consideration for the selection and layout of polling stations |

Party agents: The Group observed that, while the party agents of the governing party were present at the polling stations, the other parties were not always represented.

Citizen and international observers: Citizen and international observers were present at polling stations. The Group commends GECOM for encouraging the participation of citizen observers. The Group applauds their engagement and encourages a wider participation by civil society in future elections.

Secrecy of the ballot: The ballot booth was generally located a short distance away from the ballot box. In some stations, the booth was positioned with its back to the persons in the polling station and in others it was positioned facing forward. It was observed that the forward-facing positioning of the booth risked compromising the secrecy of the ballot.

Figure 6.5 Female polling staff on Election Day.



Figure 6.6 Voter at the polling booth (voting compartment).



Ballot boxes: Along with the bottle of indelible ink, the ballot box was stationed on a desk between the presiding officer and the ballot clerk, who kept their hand on the box, opening the slot at the top for the insertion of the voter's completed ballot and closing it thereafter.

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| Recommendation | <i>Adopt the positioning of the booth suggested in the Official Manual for Presiding Officers across all polling stations; the ballot booth should be positioned such that there is no risk of compromising the secrecy of the ballot.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation, based on circumstances for these elections |

Security: The Group commends the robust security arrangements. The Guyana Police Force employed the Joint Service Protocol to ensure adequate resources were available to uphold law and order. Police officers wearing body cameras were present within the polling stations from the opening of the polls until all processes were completed, and generally their presence was neither intimidatory nor intrusive.

Assessment of opening and conduct of poll: The general environment of election day was peaceful, with polling generally opening on time. Though polling procedures were largely respected, in some cases there were minor inconsistencies in their application by polling staff.

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| Recommendation | <i>Consideration should be given to extending the number of training sessions for poll workers with more simulation training.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation. The 2020 COG recommended that GECOM strengthen its capacity-building programmes for polling officials, covering all stages of the electoral process |

Figure 6.7 Voter casting her ballot.



6.3. Closing of polls and vote counting

The stated procedures for the closing of the polls, contained in ROPA and the Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials revised 26 March 2025, requires that the poll be closed at 18:00. It further requires that voters standing in the queue at the closing of the poll are allowed to vote.

The Group observed that there were few queues at the end of poll and, where there were voters in line, they were allowed to vote.

The presiding officer is permitted to allow party agents and observers in the room for the closing of the polls, and we observed the presence of both groups of stakeholders.

When the last voter is processed, the presiding officer and polling staff are required to rearrange the room for the purposes of vote counting. Thereafter, the presiding officer will count spoilt and tendered ballot papers (if any), and place these in special envelopes provided and write the number of spoilt and tendered ballot papers counted on the outside of the envelope. The envelope is then sealed and set aside.

The presiding officer will identify the number of ballots received and the number of voters who participated on the day according to records held by the polling clerk, and complete the reconciliation process on the ballot per account.

The Group found that this process was undertaken but generally took quite some time to be completed.

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| Recommendation | <i>More emphasis should be given to the close of poll procedures in the training of poll staff.</i> |
| Status | New recommendation. The 2020 COG recommended that GECOM strengthens its capacity-building programmes for polling officials, covering all stages of the electoral process |

Counting

As soon as practicable after the closing of the poll, the presiding officer is required to open the sealed ballot box and then count and record the total number of ballots cast. This is followed by the sorting of the two-part ballot paper into respective piles for the national and regional elections, by tearing the ballot along a perforated line.

Starting with the general election, the ballot is examined and the party for whom the vote was cast is announced, the officer then shows the ballot to the counting clerks and polling agents, who record each vote on a tally sheet; one polling agent records the vote on a blackboard that is visible for everyone. The ballots are then stacked according to the party for which they are cast. The votes are recorded with strokes of five for ease of tallying. Once the total number of votes for each party has been established and recorded, the process is repeated to arrive at the result for the regional elections.

The Group observed that counts at polling stations were generally conducted in a transparent manner. The Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials (revised 26 March 2025) provides illustrations and detailed instructions for preparing and conducting the count after the poll, which were followed. Decentralisation of vote counting in Guyana's three most populous districts (3, 4, 6) was implemented, where supernumerary returning officers would oversee tabulation at the sub-district level. The law also requires the simultaneous electronic posting of polling station results and their online publication, with stiff penalties for officials who fail to comply. Political party agents' rights to observe all stages of the process have also been reinforced.

Once the vote counting process for both the general and the regional elections was completed, all party representatives and polling staff signed the tally sheet. The presiding officer then produced a Statement of Poll document. A carbon copy of this document was given to each political party representative present and was also posted in a prominent place outside each polling station.

The Statement of Poll was then transmitted to GECOM through a returning officer, or a supernumerary returning officer in districts 3, 4 and 6. This document is the basis upon which GECOM announces results. A copy of the Statement of Poll is also sent directly to the chief election officer at GECOM in Georgetown.

Polling officials are also required to fill out a number of other administrative forms and pack up all materials received for election day.

Assessment of closing of the polls and counting

Overall, our assessment was that the closing procedures were generally well managed, with polling stations closing promptly where there were no voters in a queue.

The Group notes the enhanced counting process and the detailed instructions provided in the revised manual and commends GECOM for these improvements. Further, the Group notes the number of administrative forms that make up this process and the time taken for completion.

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| Recommendation | <i>GECOM is encouraged to continue streamlining the counting process to eliminate duplication and improve the timely delivery of results</i> |
| Status | New recommendation. |

Tabulation

In each of Guyana's ten electoral districts, there is a returning officer who has overall responsibility for the conduct of the elections in their district. The returning officers in districts 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 collate the results using the Statements of Poll from the polling stations in the district and populate the District Tabulation Form. The supernumerary returning officers of districts 3, 4 and 6 collate the results using the Statements of Poll from the polling stations for the respective sub-districts and prepare a Sub-District Tabulation Form. The returning officers in these districts use the Sub-District Tabulation Forms to prepare the District Tabulation Form.

The returning officer then publicly declares the results for the district. A counting agent for a district or sub-district, or a duly appointed candidate, can request a limited or full recount. This request must be made to the respective returning officer by 12:00 the next day, following the declaration of results.

The returning officer of each district and the supernumerary returning officer of each sub-district delivers a certified copy of the District Tabulation and the Sub-District Tabulation Forms to the CEO. The CEO then uses the District Tabulation Form from each returning officer to ascertain the total number of valid votes cast for each of the candidates who contested the elections.

In tabulation centres visited by the Group, the tabulation and verification process was generally conducted in a transparent manner. The improvements made to the system worked well, as those who were eligible, such as political party agents and observers, were able to check the summary results as called out from the GECOM-prepared spreadsheets with those that were reflected on the Statement of Polls held by party agents and observers.

The Group notes and commends GECOM for improvements to the overall counting and tabulation process, which allowed for greater transparency. The Group heard of requests for recounts in districts 4, 5 and 8. While the recounts of districts 4 and 5 were granted, the request for a recount in district 8 were rejected which has led to frustration by the political parties.

| | |
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| Recommendations | <i>Continue to improve the tabulation process, to address delays in declaring results.</i> |
| | <i>Strengthen the capacity of party scrutineers and GECOM officials on the result resolution process as updated in the Official Manual for Presiding Officers & Other Polling Day Officials, revised 26 March 2025.</i> |
| Status | New recommendations |

Annex I. Composition and Biographies of the Group

Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Honourable Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu (Tonga)

Honourable Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and senior diplomat of Tonga. She served as Tonga's Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 2005 to 2009. She was appointed as the United Nations High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States from 2017 to 2021. She also served as the Deputy Director General of the Pacific Community.

Observers

Alicia Wallace (The Bahamas)

Alicia A. Wallace is a queer black feminist, gender specialist, and research consultant from and based in The Bahamas. She is the Director of Equality Bahamas which promotes women's and LGBTQI+ people's rights as human rights. She writes a weekly column in *The Tribune* (one of two national daily newspapers in The Bahamas) on sociopolitical issues. In 2017, she co-led a national campaign to encourage voter registration and advocate for electoral and campaign finance reform in The Bahamas, and she served on the committee for the Future of Democracy Conference at the University of The Bahamas. Alicia is currently leading the participatory process to develop a people's agenda ahead of the 2026 general election in The Bahamas.

Shahriar Sadat (Bangladesh)

Shahriar Sadat is the Deputy Executive Director of the Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ) at BRAC University. He is one of the founding team members of CPJ from 2016 to 2019. His portfolio also includes the Refugee Studies Unit (RSU) in Cox's Bazar. Shahriar is an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and an accredited mediator and master trainer on mediation. Prior to joining CPJ in 2021, he was the Head of the Programme of Human Rights and Legal Aid Services (HRLS) at BRAC (2019-2021). Shahriar is a mediator of The World Bank Accountability Mechanism, Global Mediation Panel of the United Nations, Compliance Advisor Ombudsman of the World Bank Group and Independent Redress mechanism of Green Climate Fund. He is also a panel mediator and master trainer at the Bangladesh International Arbitration Centre (BIAC). Shahriar was a partner and course coordinator of London College of Legal Studies (South), an institution which provides teaching support for qualifying law degree under English law. He had been an adjunct faculty of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and the University of Dhaka. He was the Academic Coordinator and Research Manager of the South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies (SAILS).

Angela Taylor (Barbados)

Angela Taylor held the post of Chief Electoral Officer of Barbados for 20 years, from 1 February 2005 until 30 March 2025. She is the holder of a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree in Accounting and a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Project Management; she is also a Certified General Accountant (CGA) and a Fellow Certified General Accountant (FCGA). As Chief Electoral Officer, Angela Taylor was responsible for the overall management of the Electoral and Boundaries Commission – Electoral Department, which included undertaking the functions assigned by the Electoral and Boundaries Commission and those assigned by the parent Ministry to which the Electoral Department reported. She was responsible for the Electoral Department's financial management, human resource management and operations management which included management of the continuous national and electoral registration systems. Most importantly, she was responsible for management of the conduct of elections. During her tenure, Angela Taylor spearheaded the computerisation of the national and electoral registration systems, and the subsequent upgrade of the

systems in 2017. She also managed the registration for, as well as the production and issue of, Barbados's new smart ID card, which is called the Trident ID card. She managed the conduct of general elections in 2008, 2013, 2018, 2022 and by-elections in 2011 and 2020. Since her retirement she provided consultancy services to the Electoral and Boundaries Commission for the by-election held in May 2025.

Darrell Bradley (Belize)

Darrell Bradley is a politician, attorney, educator, mentor and consultant. He is a partner at Bradley Ellis & Co. Law Firm and tutors at the University of the West Indies (Open Campus) in Belize. He does consultancy work for government and civil society organisations, and is a frequent panellist and speaker. He regularly appears as a television commentator. Darrell served as President of the Belize Senate, Mayor of Belize City, Chairman of the Social Security Appeal's Tribunal, President of the Belize Mayor's Association, Vice-president of the London-based Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Vice-president of the Belize Bar Association and a member of the Board of Directors for the Central Bank of Belize. Darrell is currently pursuing his doctorate degree in political science at York University, Toronto, Canada.

Ademola Abayomi Adeeko (Nigeria)

Ademola Adeeko is a digital media communications professional with over 10 years of experience in digital communications, writing, social media community management, content creation/curation, public perception management, and public relations. He has worked as a Communications Consultant, providing media support to several organs and divisions of the African Union, including the Africa CDC, the African Governance Architecture, the African Peer Review Mechanism, the African Union Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, and the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights. He also led the Digital Communications team and provided Social Media Community Management support for the Africa CDC. He's an excellent writer. He writes on various types of content ranging from social, political, creative, and economic topics.

Demion McTair (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

Demion McTair is a communication lecturer, and award-winning journalist with extensive experience in communication, and journalism across the Caribbean. As the Founder of One News SVG, Demion is recognised for innovative leadership, impactful storytelling, and a commitment to youth development and a passion for amplifying underrepresented narratives.

Terry Dale Ince (Trinidad and Tobago)

Terry Dale Ince is a development specialist, consultant, rights advocate, founder and convener of CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. Her experience includes the energy, public and technology sectors where she designed and implemented solutions for medium and large businesses and government agencies. As a human rights advocate, she contributes to the practical promotion of women's economic and political empowerment, development and gender equality, the inclusion of young people, marginalised communities, and environmental sustainability. She lectures on the practical application of CEDAW and serves on several boards of national and international boards. She also holds a master's degree in Applied Behavioural Science and Project Management certification. She is a recipient of the Trinidad and Tobago national medal for the Development of Women (Gold).

Robinah Rubimbwa (Uganda)

Robinah Rubimbwa is a professional educationist, communications specialist, feminist, gender activist, and peace practitioner. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Coalition for Action on 1325 (COACT), an alliance of organisations working to enhance the peace and human security of women and girls. With extensive expertise in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and conflict transformation, she pioneered Uganda's localisation of UNSC Resolution 1325, gaining international recognition. An international consultant on WPS frameworks, she has developed Regional and National Action Plans for the ICGLR, Burundi, and Rwanda, and, as a UN Women Consultant, led the development of Uganda's globally lauded Third National Action Plan on WPS.

She is Chair of UN Women's East and Southern Africa Regional Civil Society Advisory Group and serves on Uganda's National Steering Committee for the NAP on WPS. A trained mediator, she is a member of FEMWISE Africa and the Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth, and is active in several global women peacebuilding networks. She holds an MSc in Management, Graduate Diplomas in gender, peace and development, and a BA in English Language and Literature.

Ben Graham Jones (United Kingdom)

Ben Graham Jones is an analyst specialising in emerging challenges to election integrity. He has led three election expert missions, and served on more than 40 election observation, assistance, and advisory missions. Ben has worked across five continents for organisations including the Carter Center, European Union, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, where he advises on emerging technologies. Ben has served as a policy adviser to the Cabinet Office in the United Kingdom. Ben holds degrees from the University of Cambridge and King's College London's Department of War Studies, and is a Fellow of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. He speaks English and French. Ben has contributed widely to media coverage of elections and politics, including in the Telegraph, Deutsche Welle, and the BBC.

Commonwealth Secretariat Support Staff

Linford Andrews (Staff Team Leader)

Adviser and Head, Electoral Support Section

Professor Michelle Scobie

Adviser and Head, Good Offices and the Caribbean and the Americas Political Sections

Anita Collins

Political Adviser, Good Offices and the Caribbean and the Americas Political Sections

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Interim Adviser, Office of the Assistant Secretary-General

Temitope Kalejaiye

Public Relations and Engagement Officer

Olakunle Oredein

ICT Support Specialist

Commonwealth Secretariat Remote Support Staff

Jordan Neal, Mr Abubakar Abdullahi, Mukhtar Adesunkanmi, Tomiwa Olorundare, and Emmanuel Anie-Akwetey from the Good Offices and the Caribbean and the Americas Political Sections provided remote support from London, UK.

Annex II. Arrival Statement



2025 Guyana General and Regional Elections

**Arrival Statement by Mrs Fekitamoeloa Tupoupa Manuula Utoikamanu,
former Foreign Affairs Minister of Tonga
Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group**

26 August 2025, Georgetown, Guyana

The Commonwealth observed Guyana's 2020 General and Regional Elections and, as part of its mandate, provided recommendations to enhance future electoral process.

One of the recommendations was the implementation of electoral reforms to restore public confidence in future elections. Specifically, the COG then suggested that the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) reform to ensure its independence and ability to command the confidence of Guyanese stakeholders.

The 2020 COG recommended that, to boost public confidence, they may wish to consider, "the timely publication of procedures, decisions and other information of public interest, as well as regular meetings on electoral issues with key stakeholders". The Commonwealth deployed two of the most respected Commonwealth Electoral Experts to support GECOM in the period immediately preceding the elections. This is aligned with the whole-of-election-cycle approach, as endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018, in London.

Today, my colleagues and I from the Commonwealth are here to observe and assess these elections to be able to report on the nature of the elections, and to offer recommendations that may serve to improve future election processes and institutions.

The Commonwealth has a long-standing commitment to strengthen electoral democracy, and this year marks a notable milestone – 45 years of observing elections across its member countries. Commonwealth electoral support has contributed to promote credible, transparent, and inclusive elections throughout the Commonwealth family.

I consider this an incredible honour, together with these ten eminent observers from across the Commonwealth, to be here in Guyana to observe these important elections.

Our 11- member Observer Group was constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon Shirley Botchwey following an invitation from the Guyana Elections Commission to observe the poll.

Members have been drawn from across the Commonwealth, representing a wealth of experience, and include experts in law, politics, election administration, human rights, media and civil society.

The Group is supported by a staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat led by Linford Andrews, Adviser and Head of Electoral Support at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

According to our mandate, the Commonwealth Observer Group has no executive role; its function is not to interfere with, but to observe, the process as a whole and to make recommendations accordingly.

We will observe the pre-election environment, polling day activities and the postelection period, in particular we will consider whether the conditions exist for credible elections, including a fair election environment; whether public media has been impartial; the transparency of the entire process; whether voters are free to express their will; and whether the counting and results process is transparent.

We will then report on whether the elections have been conducted in accordance with the standards to which Guyana has committed itself, including its national law, regional and international commitments.

In conducting our duties, we will be guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, objectivity and independence. As we are here in our individual capacities as responsible and experienced Commonwealth citizens, our assessment will be our own, and not that of any member government.

Before election day, we will be meeting stakeholders including the Guyana Elections Commission, government representatives, political parties, security agencies, civil society groups, citizen and international observer groups, diplomats, and the media.

We will deploy our observers in small teams from 30 August across various parts of the country to meet with stakeholders and observe the pre-election environment.

On Election Day, we will observe the opening, voting, closing, counting and the results management processes.

We will issue an interim statement on our preliminary findings on the 3rd of September, before members of the Group depart Guyana.

A final report will then be prepared and submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, subsequently shared with relevant stakeholders and made publicly available.

As you are aware, this is a crucial period. It is my hope that our presence here affirms the support of the Commonwealth to this country and its democratic processes.

As the people of Guyana express their will at the polls, may peace and national unity prevail above all. We enjoin all political parties and their supporters to ensure a peaceful and credible electoral process.

Thank you!

Annex III. Deployment Plan

| Team No. | Deployment Location | Name |
|----------|--|--|
| 1 | Region 2 – Pomeroon / Supenaam | Alicia Wallace Ben Jones |
| 2 | Region 3 & 4 – West Demerara / Essequibo Islands, Demerara / Mahaica | Fekitamoeloa 'Utoikamanu Linford Andrews Temitope Kalejaiye |
| 3 | Region 4 – Demerara/Mahaica | Michelle Scobie Darrell Bradley Rosemary Daniel Anita Collins |
| 4 | Region 5 – Mahaica / Berbice | Shahariar Sadat Nancy Kanyago |
| 5 | Region 6 – East Berbice Corentyne | Angela Taylor Ademola Adeeko |
| 6 | Region 9 – Upper Takatu / Upper Essequibo | Robinah Rubimbwa Demion McTair |
| 7 | Region 10 – Upper Demerara / Berbice | Terry Dale Ince Olakunle Oredein |

Annex IV. Interim Statement



Interim Statement by

Mrs Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu
Former Foreign Affairs Minister of Tonga

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG)
3 September 2025 Georgetown, Guyana

INTRODUCTION

Good morning to you, the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, members of the diplomatic corps, fellow observers, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for joining us at this Commonwealth Observer Group Press Conference, where I will now present the interim assessment of the electoral process by the Commonwealth Observer Group.

The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited by the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to observe these significant elections.

This is an interim statement that provides an initial assessment of our findings. The final report of this Commonwealth Observer Group, with our full findings on the entire process and our recommendations, will be submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General in the coming months.

BACKGROUND

1. The Commonwealth Observer Group (the COG) was constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon Shirley Botchwey, following an invitation from the Government of Guyana to observe the 2025 General and Regional Elections.
2. The Group notes the strong history of Commonwealth engagement with Guyana. This is the eighth consecutive election that the Commonwealth has been invited to observe in Guyana since 1992.
3. The Commonwealth has provided high-level Good Offices and technical support for elections over the years, including the deployment in 2020 and 2025 of two senior electoral experts, Dr Afari-Gyan, Former Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, and Dr Zaidi, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India, to support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).
4. The Group's mandate is to offer an independent, informed, and impartial assessment of the entire electoral process; to consider the factors contributing to, or affecting the credibility of the electoral process; and to determine whether the elections have been conducted according to standards for democratic elections set out in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, and in the 2018 Revised Guidelines on Commonwealth Election Observation to which Commonwealth member countries are committed.
5. Our teams were deployed to seven electoral districts across Guyana: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10.

Let me begin with the pre-election environment.

THE PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

6. **Stakeholder Meetings.** The Group met with the President, the Vice President, Ministers of Government, representatives of political parties, candidates, GECOM, the Police Force, the

Ethnic Relations Commission, several government and private sector agencies, representatives of indigenous communities and of trade unions, the Commonwealth diplomatic community, representatives of international organisations, other election observation missions, the media, religious, women and youth organisations, academia and civil society.

7. **The Context.** We were informed that elections are often marked by ethnic polarisation that contributes to a charged political atmosphere. The Group commends the calls made by the President, GECOM and leaders of other political parties in the days before the elections for peace and national unity and hopes that this message would continue to resonate in the post-election environment.
8. We note that this election occurred in the context of significant GDP growth which has grown fivefold over the past five years to \$26bn (USD). This election also has seen the emergence of new political parties such as Assembly of Liberty and Prosperity (ALP), Forward Guyana Movement (FGM) and We Invest in Nationhood (WIN).
9. **Appointments of Party Agents.** We commend GECOM for the approval of the appointment of Agents from the Alliance for Change (AFC), ALP, FGM and WIN political parties on 30 August, despite these parties missing the statutory timeline for the submission of those applications. This contributed to the integrity of the electoral process.
10. **Perceptions of Fairness.** The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and their supporters to assemble and campaign appear to have been largely observed. We note with concern complaints from some of the newer parties on what they perceived as delays or refusal of permissions to hold rallies or travel to locations outside of Georgetown for campaign purposes.
11. **Allegations of Intimidation.** The Group was made aware of allegations of intimidation of public sector workers, local business owners, members of civil society groups and community members, who reportedly feared losing employment or economic opportunities if they failed to demonstrate support for a particular party.
12. **Election Legislation.** The Group applauds the Government's work on the harmonisation of legislation to update and clarify the legal framework for elections through the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, Act 25 of 2022, and the National Registration (Amendment) Act, Act 26 of 2022.
13. **Early Voting.** The Group applauds the peaceful and largely technically well managed conduct of the Disciplined Forces Voting that took place on 22 August. We recommend the consideration of extending this facility to other essential services workers.
14. **Civil Society.** The Group found that the role of civil society- an important mechanism for transparency, accountability and democracy in Guyana- could be significantly strengthened.
15. **The Media.** Coverage of the election was provided across television, radio and print media. However, there were concerns raised about the disproportionate coverage of the governing party by the state media. We recommend legislation to provide equitable access for all candidates and political parties. We also note with concern that some members of the private media have reportedly self-censored for fear of victimisation.
16. **Social Media.** All political parties leveraged social media platforms. The Group was informed that the newer parties, at times with limited access to some traditional media, depended heavily on online campaigns. The Group recognises the democratising role of social media in disseminating information, but we note with concern that social media was used to spread misinformation and disinformation.
17. **Dis/Misinformation.** The Group heard that misinformation/disinformation, a challenge to democracy, was prevalent in the media and in public discourses during the campaign period. We recommend the establishment of an independent fact checking mechanism to support democratic strengthening in Guyana.

18. **GECOM.** The Group notes with concern reports of a significant trust deficit with GECOM and its impact on the perceived credibility of the conduct of the electoral process. Several stakeholders expressed concerns about the need for greater transparency in the electoral administration and the level of preparedness of GECOM.
 - 18.1. **Composition.** The Group recommends a review of the legislation around the composition of GECOM; the present composition compromises its ability to effectively operate and excludes important political stakeholders from deliberations and decision making.
 - 18.2. **The official list of electors (OLE).** We note with concern the perceptions of mistrust by some in the OLE and the challenges in resolving its apparent inflated nature. We recommend that measures to address this, including for example, an enumeration exercise be undertaken. We note the absence of disaggregated data on the number of women, youth and persons with disabilities and recommend that this be collected and published.
 - 18.3. **Biometrics.** We note that in response to complaints about the non-adoption of biometric verification technologies, which help verify voter identity, GECOM stated that it faced technical, legislative and administrative challenges and was unable to employ biometric verification for electors in these elections. We recommend that, early in the new election cycle, consideration be again given to the adoption of this technology.
 - 18.3.1. **Data.** The 2022 Population and Housing Census data was not published. Some stakeholders suggested that the availability of this data may have contributed to improving perceptions of transparency in the electoral system.
 - 18.4. **Communication and the Media.**
 - 18.4.1. The Group is encouraged by the efforts by GECOM in the last few months to improve its communication, supported also by the UNDP and others, and recommends further strengthening its engagement with all stakeholders.
 - 18.4.2. We recommend measures to foster greater inclusion and support for the smaller and newer parties to enable them to better participate in the electoral process.
 - 18.4.3. We note the value of the adoption of media codes of conduct, as used in past elections, to encourage good practices by the media. We recommend a code of conduct be drafted in consultation with relevant media stakeholders. We further recommend that GECOM improves and has more regular interaction with the media.
 - 18.5. **A GECOM Legal Adviser.** The Group noted that GECOM lacked the support of a substantive legal adviser in the months leading up to and on the election day, which some stakeholders said may have contributed to reduced public confidence in GECOM. We recommend that this post be filled as a matter of priority.
19. **Implementation of Observer Recommendations.** The Group noted with concern the very limited implementation of the recommendations of observer groups over the years. The Group encourages all political stakeholders to give priority to the establishment of a robust postelectoral domestic mechanism that may in short order produce the legislative and constitutional reform needed for the conduct of credible, transparent and inclusive elections.
20. **Campaign Financing.** The Group was concerned about allegations of the use of state resources for campaigning. The Group also found that campaign financing rules are outdated and unenforced and recommends, the reform and regulation of campaign financing to promote fairness, transparency, and accountability.
21. **Access to Information.** We note with concern allegations of dissatisfaction with the lack of access to public information, including from the Office of the Commissioner of Information. We recommend the adequate resourcing and empowerment of a mechanism to efficiently respond to public information requests that will promote public transparency and accountability around elections.

THE ELECTION DAY

22. The Group noted a relatively peaceful atmosphere prior to election day.
23. **Pre-Poll Procedures.** We found that polling staff largely adhered to the stipulated pre-poll procedures, including showing empty ballot boxes to party agents and observers prior to the opening of the polls.
24. **Opening and Conduct of Poll.** The general environment of the election day was peaceful, with polling generally opening on time. Though polling procedures were largely respected, in some cases there were minor inconsistencies in their application by polling staff.
25. **Voting information and signage.** The Group commends GECOM for providing an information desk, materials and signage in and around polling stations, that generally were very effective in guiding voters. We recommend a greater consistency in the application of signage across all polling stations, including for example signage related to the identification of polling staff.
26. **Public understanding of the electoral process.** We found that in general the public displayed a good understanding of the electoral process, and that the Presiding Officers clearly explained procedures as required.
27. **GECOM Staff.** GECOM staff and polling staff were courteous and hospitable. They worked with professionalism, diligence and collegiality, also in managing cases of challenges with ballot reconciliation. The procedures for conducting the count ensured trust in the process. We observed that polling staff also were also afforded an opportunity to vote.
28. **Party Agents.** Party Agents were present at polling stations to count and undersign the Statements of Poll with Polling Agents and Counting Agents. This practice is commended. We noted that the Party Agents from at least three parties were present at most of the polling stations we observed.
29. **Citizen and International Observers.** Citizen and international observers were present at polling stations. We commend GECOM for encouraging the participation of citizen observers. We applaud the engagement of citizen observers in these elections and encourage a wider participation by civil society in future elections.
30. **Secrecy of the Ballot.** The prohibition of the use of mobile phones at polling booths was enforced. The position of polling tables generally guaranteed the secrecy of the ballot, except in some instances where the layout risked compromising the secrecy of the ballot.
31. **Queue Management.** We commend the management of voters by GECOM, there were varying lengths of queues at polling stations, but voters were patient, and largely tolerant of the time it took to process them.
32. **Participation and Inclusion.**
 - 32.1. We commend the presence of two female presidential candidates and recognise that many parties have women and youth in their leadership. However, we were informed that cultural and financial barriers sometimes limit women's participation in leadership positions.
 - 32.2. We commend the registration of at least one political candidate who is a person living with a disability.
 - 32.3. We noted that women and youth were well-represented among both polling staff and voters.
 - 32.4. We commend the practice that gave pregnant women, older persons and persons with disabilities priority in voting.
 - 32.5. We note with concern, however, that many polling stations remained inaccessible to persons with disabilities (polling stations accessed by stairs, the absence of ramps, widened doorways, accessible washrooms, and designated disability parking spaces).
 - 32.6. We also noted that blind voters did not have the option to vote independently with tactile ballot papers.

- 32.7. Although persons with disabilities have the option to cast a proxy vote, persons living with disabilities highlighted that the proxy vote deprives them of the secrecy of the ballot.
- 32.8. We encourage greater adherence to international good practice aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These emphasise the right to inclusive, accessible, and nondiscriminatory electoral processes that uphold the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.
- 33. **Security.** We commend the robust security arrangements. The Police employed the Joint Services Protocol to ensure that adequate resources were available to uphold law and order. The police, wearing body cameras, were present within the polling stations from opening of polls until all polling processes were completed, and generally their presence was not intimidatory nor intrusive.
- 34. **Close of Polls and Tabulation.** Generally polling closed on time, allowing voters in the queue at 6:00 p.m. to cast their vote. We observed the counting of ballot papers. The new tabulation process for the Statements of Poll and District Tabulation Forms was followed and was well understood by party agents. The ascertainment of votes, results tabulation and verification were conducted with transparency and professionalism, and party agents were given copies of Statements of Poll. The Statements of Poll were uploaded to the GECOM website by the Returning Officers and the Group commends GECOM on these improvements from the 2020 elections, which can improve the accuracy and transparency of the results. While we applaud these significant improvements, we recommend the consideration of measures to further streamline the counting and tabulation process.

CONCLUSION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD

- 35. **Democracy.** We congratulate the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for demonstrating their steadfast commitment to democracy and for participating in an orderly manner in the exercise of their franchise. We commend GECOM, the polling staff, political parties, the police, and the media for their respective roles in the conduct of these elections.
- 36. **The Results.** We commend the work undertaken thus far. We encourage GECOM to continue to manage the tabulation and to conduct the announcement of the results with diligence and transparency.
- 37. **Peace.** We trust that the peaceful tenor of the electoral process thus far will continue as we await official results. We call on all political parties to continue to encourage their candidates, supporters and other stakeholders to work for national unity, peace and solidarity. We urge all parties, should any elections disputes arise, to follow the prescribed legal channels for their resolution.
- 38. **Implementation of Observer Recommendations.** We encourage all political stakeholders to exercise diligence in creating appropriate and inclusive domestic mechanisms to review and implement the recommendations of observers, to further strengthen democracy in Guyana. We also encourage all relevant stakeholders to contribute to these processes.
- 39. **The Commonwealth Family.** The Commonwealth is committed to accompanying Guyana's democratic strengthening. Democracy, in all nations, is a journey, and we encourage the broader Commonwealth family and international partners to continue to walk with this great nation as it charts a prosperous and inclusive future for all its citizens.
- 40. **Thank You.** Guyana is a wonderfully diverse and incredible country, with beautiful people and it was an honour for me and for my fellow Commonwealth Observers to serve on this mission. I would like to take this opportunity, to once again thank the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the access offered for our observation and for the warm hospitality and support accorded to me and to my fellow Observers during our stay.

I thank you once again.

Issued on 3 September 2025

Georgetown

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The Commonwealth provided Good Offices and technical support through successive election cycles to Guyana, including the following:

- 2002 and 2006 - supporting the Guyana constitutional reform project from 2002 to 2006 under the auspices of the late Sir Paul Reeves as Commonwealth Special Envoy.
- 2006 - supporting GECOM's mandate to administer peaceful and credible elections through assistance in the drafting of a media code of conduct.
- 2006 – by providing a resident senior electoral technical advice for the 2006 General Election.
- 2011- by providing technical support to the Elections Commission during the preparations for the 2011 election, including the training of staff and the deployment of technical experts.
- 2015 – by providing technical support to the media monitoring unit in 2015.
- 2020 and 2025 – by providing senior electoral experts to support GECOM for the 2020 elections. The same experts were redeployed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to support GECOM for the 2025 elections.
- Our teams were deployed to seven electoral districts across Guyana: Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10: Pomeroon/Supenaam; Essequibo Islands/West Demerara; Demerara/Mahaica, Mahaica/Berbice; East Berbice/Corentyne, Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo, and Upper Demerara/Berbice.

Annex V. Recommendations Planner

Status of 2020 COG recommendations as of 3 September 2025

Summary:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| • <u>Total recommendations</u> | 39 |
| • Fully implemented | 3 |
| • Mostly implemented | 3 |
| • Partially implemented | 11 |
| • Not implemented | 22 |

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|----------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| Electoral Framework | | | | |
| 1 | There is an urgent need to undertake a comprehensive inquiry into the elections held on 2 March 2020. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political | Fully | |
| 2 | We encourage Guyana to create a robust domestic mechanism to consider electoral and constitutional reforms, including the merits and demerits of the structure of the GECOM and the electoral system itself. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Political | Not Implemented | |
| 3 | In a measure to restore public confidence in future elections, we recommend total reform of GECOM to ensure it is independent and capable of commanding the confidence of Guyanese stakeholders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political • Policy | Not Implemented | |
| 4 | To contribute to public confidence, GECOM should introduce a range of measures to increase transparency and inclusiveness. These would include the timely publication of procedures, decisions and other information of public interest, as well as regular meetings on electoral issues with key stakeholders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy | Partially | |
| 5 | Aspects of the election law, including provisions in the Constitution, may need to be overhauled in such a way as to leave election officials, including commissioners, in no doubt as to the extent and limit of their authority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy | Not Implemented | |
| 6 | GECOM should exercise its statutory authority to make regulations for the conduct of elections. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory | Partially | <p>GECOM published revised election manuals for Returning and Presiding Officers.</p> |

(Continued)

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|--|
| 7 | The Government of Guyana should consolidate the different electoral laws with the objective of making the law clearer and more accessible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy | Partially | GECOM has a compendium of existing electoral laws online for public access |
| 8 | Campaign finance laws and regulations should be revised in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. The legislation should make provision for the disclosure and reporting and provide for effective enforcement mechanisms. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Political | Not Implemented | |
| 9 | A comprehensive reform of the voter registration system should be undertaken. A fresh registration should subsequently be undertaken to produce an up-to-date, clean, and inclusive voter register. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory | Not Implemented | |
| 10 | The schedule of polling stations should be finalised and published in accordance with relevant legislation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical | Implemented | GECOM launched an online search tool on 13 August 2025 to allow voters to locate their polling stations and GECOM published the comprehensive list of the 2970 polling stations on 25 August 2025. |
| 11 | Geographical seats should be more equitably distributed among electors to ensure the principle of equal suffrage. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Political | Not Implemented | |
| 12 | An independent and impartial body should be established to draw the geographical and top-up constituencies so that voters are represented in the legislature on a more equal basis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Political | Not Implemented | |
| Women's Participation and Representation | | | | |
| 13 | Guyana should consider adjustments to its legal framework and electoral system to increase the representation of women in parliament in line with its international commitments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy • Political | Not Implemented | |
| (Continued) | | | | |

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------|---|
| 14 | Political parties should take stronger action to promote genuine inclusion and political participation of women. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political | Not Implemented | |
| 15 | Political parties should establish gender-responsive policies and measures to prevent discrimination against and harassment of women in politics and elections. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Policy | Mostly | The 2025 Political Parties Code of Conduct covers condemnation of hate speech and incitement of violence, as well as respecting candidates. Though "the use of threatening language, or language which incites people of one group to violence against any Candidate", gender as its own specific topic is not covered. |
| 16 | Appointment to GECOM should be guided by the principles of inclusivity and should prioritise gender considerations in the nomination of Election Commissioners. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Legal/Regulatory | Not Implemented | |
| 17 | Gender should be mainstreamed in GECOM's operations to include collecting sex-disaggregated data across the spectrum of activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Policy | Partially | GECOM collected gender disaggregated data on registered voters but this information was not publicly available on its website. GECOM did not publish disaggregated data on the electoral candidates or on the voter turnout. |
| Diversity and Inclusivity | | | | |
| 18 | Political parties should adopt measures enhancing the inclusion of youth, Amerindians and persons with disabilities in party hierarchies, thus facilitating their political participation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy | Not Implemented | |
| 19 | GECOM should also undertake the early mapping of polling stations and ensure that there is step-free access for persons with disabilities and the elderly. If this is not possible, kerbside voting could be made available to these groups. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative/Technical | Not Implemented | |
| (Continued) | | | | |

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|--|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| 20 | The election management body should provide stencils or tactile ballot papers to facilitate blind voters to cast their vote independently and provide training to ensure polling staff know how to use them. | • Administrative/Technical | Not Implemented | |
| 21 | Stakeholders including the GECOM and political parties should consider how voter education can be tailored for people with a range of disabilities, including learning difficulties. | • Administrative/Technical | Not Implemented | |
| 22 | All polling staff should be encouraged to either vote by proxy or transfer their vote to the polling station where they are working to ensure they can exercise their vote but also fulfil their duties. | • Administrative/Technical | Partially | |
| Traditional, Digital and Social Media | | | | |
| 23 | State-owned media should have editorial independence and publicly undertake to provide equitable access to candidates and parties as part of their responsibilities to the public. | • Political • Policy | Not implemented | |
| 24 | The Guyana National Broadcasting Authority (GNBA) should be appointed by parliament as an independent agency, rather than being under the auspices of the President's office. The process for recruiting board members should be transparent, with positions openly advertised and selection based on candidates' applications and experience. | • Legal/Regulatory | Not implemented | |
| 25 | In consultation with a broad range of media stakeholders, the Code of Conduct should be updated and introduced for future elections. | • Policy | Not implemented | |

(Continued)

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|-----|--|---|--------------------------|---|
| 26 | Codes of Conduct should be signed immediately after nomination, with independent mechanisms in place to enforce them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Political | Not implemented | |
| 27 | Codes of Conduct for both parties and the media should explicitly address the use of social media, and signatories should make a commitment to moderate their platforms accordingly. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • Political | Partially | Issues around hate speech and rejecting provocative language use are covered in the 2025 Political Parties Code of Conduct, but social media is not specifically mentioned. |
| 28 | In 2015, a media monitoring unit in GECOM helped promote adherence to the Code of Conduct. An independent unit could be introduced for future elections and be given powers to sanction media for any violation of the Code of Conduct. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory | Not Implemented | |
| 29 | There should be greater transparency of paid-for political advertising both offline and on digital platforms. Policymakers could make it a requirement that sponsored political adverts clearly identify who paid for them, and for media companies to report contracts and payments for such advertisements to GECOM. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Political • Policy | Not Implemented | |
| 30 | GECOM may wish to consider contacting Facebook and other social media platforms for supporting flagging and removing false information, particularly that relating to election-related guidance and results. The company has worked with election management bodies in other Commonwealth countries to take down fake accounts, support third-party fact-checking, promote official information relating to elections and provide free training for election staff, all of which could be useful in the context of Guyana. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal/Regulatory • Policy | Partially | |

(Continued)

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| Voting, Counting and Tabulation | | | | |
| 31 | Manuals for Polling Officers and Returning Officers be prepared with greater written details, instructions and illustrations, to facilitate consistent practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical | Mostly | Manuals provided to Returning Officers were well produced and available in both hard and soft copies widely |
| 32 | Procedures pertaining to the set-up of a polling station should be put in place to ensure efficiency and should be uniformly enforced. Such measures can include increasing the number of voting compartments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical • Policy | Partially | |
| 33 | The selection of polling stations and the layout of these stations should take into careful account the needs of the elderly and voters with disabilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical | Partially | |
| 34 | GECOM should strengthen its capacity building programmes for polling officials, covering all stages of the electoral process, including polling, counting, packaging and transporting materials, and tabulation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical | Partially | |
| 35 | The planning and distribution of the number of ballot papers allocated to each polling station should make provision for the potential of spoilt ballot papers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical | Not implemented | |
| 36 | The law requires that copies of the Statement of Poll be produced. This should be done using carbonised paper so the Presiding Officer does not have to write multiple Statements. This will avoid error and ensure uniformity of figures for each polling station. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative/Technical • Legal/Regulatory | Mostly | |

(Continued)

| No. | 2020 COG Recommendations | Type of Recommendation | Status of Implementation | Comments |
|-----|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 37 | To maintain public confidence in the integrity of elections, Statements of Poll with full information (number of registered voters; voters who voted; rejected ballots; spoiled ballots; etc.) should remain displayed at a secure public place. GECOM should also make signed Statements of Poll available on their website in a timely manner. | • Administrative/Technical | Implemented | |
| 38 | Review legal provisions and procedures relating to the transmission of results and make necessary legislative reforms to promote transparency, accuracy and efficiency, including the effective use of technology where possible. | • Legal/Regulatory | Partially | |
| 39 | Consider the establishment of an election dispute resolution system to address electoral concerns in a timely manner throughout the electoral process. | • Policy • Legal/Regulatory | Not Implemented | Election Disputes |

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