

Electoral Observations in the Americas Series, No. 11

**Electoral Observation
in
Guyana
1997**



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OEA/Ser.D/XX
SG/UPD/II. 11
8 April 1998
Original: English

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General Secretariat
Organization of American States
Washington, D.C., 20006
1998

Design and composition of this publication was done by the Information and Dialogue Section of the UPD, headed by Caroline Murfitt-Eller. Betty Robinson and Judith Horvath-Rouco helped with the editorial review of this report and Jamel Espinoza and Macarena Castells with its production.

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Acknowledgments

The OAS Electoral Mission to Guyana wishes to thank the Governments of the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for their financial assistance and the Governments of Colombia and the United States for making available experienced personnel.

The Mission expresses its appreciation to the Inter-American Development Bank for providing office space, equipment, and services in its Guyana office and in particular for the invaluable support and cooperation of its representative Mr. Charles Greenwood and his staff.

The cooperation of the Government of the Republic of Guyana, the Elections Commission, the political parties, non-governmental agencies, and the people of Guyana in the functioning of the Mission is deeply appreciated.

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Preface

Democratic ideals and principles have always been present in the Inter-American System. In 1948, the Charter of Bogota proclaimed that "the solidarity of the American States and the high aims which are sought through it, require the political organization of those states on the basis of the effective exercise of representative democracy."

Forty years later, with the entrance into force of the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias in 1988, the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) decided to include among the essential objectives of the Organization, the promotion and consolidation of representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of non-intervention. This established a political and legal framework through which the member states demonstrated a renewed and strengthened commitment to the defense and collective promotion of democracy, as well as to the key role to be played by the OAS.

The next year in Washington, D.C., the General Assembly recommended to the Secretary General that he organize and send electoral observation missions to the member states that requested them. This was followed in 1990 with the request from the General Assembly in Asuncion to the Secretary General for the creation of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD).

In 1991, in Santiago de Chile, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1080 on "Representative Democracy." This measure instructed the Secretary General, in the event of a sudden or irregular interruption of the democratic process in any member state, to immediately request a meeting of the Permanent Council in order to assess the situation and take appropriate measures.

Finally, in December of 1992, an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly approved the Protocol of Washington in which the Charter of the OAS was amended to include a provision authorizing the suspension by a two-thirds majority of the right of a member state, whose government had been overthrown by force, to participate in the governing bodies of the OAS. The Protocol is pending ratification by a two thirds majority of member states.

On this wave of democratic momentum, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) of the OAS emerged as a key long-term mechanism for democratic development and consolidation within the Americas. Established on October 15, 1990 by Secretary General João Clemente Baena Soares, in conformity with the mandate of the 1990 General Assembly, the UPD provides "a program of support for democratic development which can respond promptly and effectively to member states, which in the full exercise of their sovereignty request advice or assistance to preserve or strengthen their political institutions and democratic procedures."

With this foundation, and only when requested by member states, the UPD undertakes projects in the areas of democratic education, and the strengthening of electoral and legislative institutions.

An additional key function is to organize electoral observation missions in those countries that request them.

Recent OAS electoral observation activities stem from the conviction that an effective and transparent electoral process is a fundamental element in both the achievement and consolidation of representative democracy. They are always organized under the guidance of the Secretary General, however, and in response to a request from a member state.

Based on this framework, electoral observation missions have the following objectives: a) to observe the electoral process and report to the Secretary General using the constitution and electoral norms of the country as a point of reference; b) to cooperate with government, electoral and party officials, and with the general public in order to assure the integrity, impartiality and reliability of the electoral process; c) to serve as an informal conduit for consensus-building and conflict resolution among the participants in this process; and d) to encourage respect for established laws and procedures, and promote the use of existing mechanisms of the electoral system in the search for solutions to problems that may arise throughout the electoral process.

Some missions, such as the one carried out in Costa Rica in 1990, or in Colombia in 1994, are short term and more symbolic in nature. These are composed of small and specialized group of observers that usually remain in the host country for a brief duration, commencing shortly before, and ending shortly after, election day. Other cases of electoral observation - such as those presented in this publication - entail missions arriving weeks, sometimes months, ahead of election day, allowing them to be present for the entire electoral process. Such missions are therefore long-term and far more complex endeavors. These more involved operations generally begin with the study of the electoral norms that underpin the entire process. The OAS then proceeds to observe the voter registration process, survey electoral organization and preparation, and monitor development during the campaign period. Other activities center around the observance of media accessibility, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and of association, the proper use of state resources, the designation and training of election officials, the production and distribution of electoral rolls and materials, and the implementation of security measures. In addition, these missions provide a comprehensive evaluation of voting and vote tabulation procedures at the individual voting precincts, including the dispatch and receipt of results, the compilation of electoral information, election verification, and any other post-electoral developments. Such long-term electoral observations usually conclude when the central electoral authority announces the final electoral results.

Electoral observation missions undertake a series of specific activities in order to fulfill these functions. These include meetings with candidates, political party representatives, electoral authorities, civic organizations and other relevant groups. The OAS also attends political meetings and rallies, monitors the media, receives and transmits to the proper authorities complaints about electoral rule violations, and carries out statistical projections (quick counts) on election day.

In other words, electoral observation missions focus on those aspects or mechanisms of the electoral and political process that could potentially create conflicts among the various parties or affect the integrity or transparency of the results. The above activities and analyses, therefore,

combined with electoral experience acquired by the OAS and other international organizations, enable missions to target weaknesses and formulate possible approaches and solutions.

Finally, it is important to mention that OAS missions of electoral observation are carried out by multi-disciplinary teams of international civil observers - experts in electoral systems, law, political science, education, information sciences, statistics, communications, logistics and other disciplines.

Often under a sensitive political climate, observers are placed throughout the host country in an effort to cover the electoral process in as many urban and rural districts as possible. In addition, advanced and independent communications, computer and transportation systems permit the OAS to keep track of voting trends and maintain constant contact among observers.

The purpose of the current publication is to provide the general public, as well as more specialized readers, with related material on some of the electoral observation missions carried out by the UPD. We hope that the study and analysis of these experiences will contribute to a better understanding of the countries of the region, and to the body of knowledge on democratic values and practices, as we approach the twenty-first century.

This report was produced under the technical supervision of Ambassador Joseph Edmunds, General Coordinator of the Electoral Observation Mission to Guyana, and with the assistance of Bruce Rickerson, Senior Specialist of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD).

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Context

“The effective exercise of representative democracy” has been one of the basic principles enshrined in the Charter of the Organization of the American States from its inception in 1948--the Charter of Bogotá. This was strengthened in the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias--the amendment to the Charter that entered into force in November 1988 and which proclaims that “representative democracy is an indispensable condition for the stability, peace and development of the region” and that its promotion and consolidation is among the essential purposes of the Organization. The Charter further provides that the Secretary General “may bring to the attention of the General Assembly or the Permanent Council any matter which in his opinion might threaten the peace and security of the hemisphere or the development of the Member States.”

Several General Assembly resolutions have developed further the theme of the promotion of democracy in this hemisphere. In November 1988, in San Salvador, the General Assembly mandated that the Secretary General organize Electoral Observation Missions to be sent to countries requesting them. In 1990, in Asunción, the General Assembly called for the establishment of a Unit for the Promotion of Democracy to support and respond to the needs of member states and their institutions in the exercise of democratic governance.

With a view to preserving and strengthening democratic systems in the hemisphere, the 1991 General Assembly, in Santiago, Chile, adopted Resolution 1080, “Representative Democracy,” which provides for certain actions to be taken by member states if there is a sudden or irregular interruption of the political institutional democratic process in any one country.

The Republic of Guyana became a member of the Organization in 1991 and has since then participated fully in the formulation of various resolutions contributing to the strengthening of the democratic institutional framework in many countries of our hemisphere.

The Observation Mission, reported on here, to the 1997 national and regional elections in Guyana, is in keeping with the principles of the Charter of the Organization and the various General Assembly recommendations over the years. It was undertaken in response to an invitation from the Government of the Republic.

It is hoped that the recommendations contained in this report will help to improve the electoral process in ensuing years and will contribute to the strengthening of democratic institutions in the country.

Executive summary

In September 1997 the President of Guyana, H.E. Samuel Hinds, requested the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Dr. Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, to send a mission to that country to observe the national and regional elections that were to take place on December 15. It was the first time that the OAS had been invited to observe elections in an English-speaking country.

The Secretary General accepted the invitation and dispatched an exploratory Mission to Guyana from September 28 to October 10, 1997, to seek agreement on the terms of the Mission and on privileges and immunities for the observers. These two agreements were signed on October 20, after which the Secretary General designated Dr. Joseph Edmunds as Chief of Mission. The Mission was further strengthened by the presence of Assistant Secretary General Christopher R. Thomas, who joined the Mission in Guyana on December 12, 1997.

The OAS Mission consisted of 28 observers from 20 countries. On election day, the Mission visited 457 polling stations, approximately 25% of the total number.

The Mission noted with satisfaction that the members of the Elections Commission worked together to assure that all eligible citizens of Guyana were given an opportunity to vote. It exercised considerable flexibility in the electoral process when required, before and during the election. On election day, while there were some areas of concern, caused in some cases by a lack of training, poor communications, and faulty logistics, the Mission observed no widespread hindrance to the balloting. Votes were cast for the most part in a climate of calm and freedom.

In contrast to the situation prior to the elections and during the voting, the Mission noted significant weaknesses in the organization, management, and administration of the collection, transmittal, verification, and announcement of results. This situation, coupled with significant delays in the announcement of results from key polling districts, created a climate in which some have questioned the electoral process and results.

Nevertheless, in spite of allegations of intentional manipulation of results and other objections to the process, no substantiated claims were brought to the attention of the OAS Mission. The final chapter of this report offers recommendations for improving the electoral system in Guyana.

CHAPTER I
Introduction

Background of the Mission

In a letter dated September 8, 1997, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Dr. Cesar Gaviria Trujillo, was invited by the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, H. E. Samuel Hinds, to send a team of observers to monitor the coming national elections in that country. The Secretary General accepted the invitation, which represented the first time that the Organization had been invited to observe national and regional elections in an English-speaking country.

An exploratory mission was sent to Guyana from September 28 to October 10, 1997, to plan the Observation Mission. Two agreements, signed on October 20, 1997, set out the parameters within which the Mission would operate (Appendices III and IV).

On October 31, 1997, the Secretary General designated Dr. Joseph Edmunds as the Chief of Mission. Dr. Edmunds had formerly served as the Ambassador of Saint Lucia to the OAS.

The general objectives of the Mission were as follows:

- To observe the preparations for the elections by the Guyana Elections Commission, the political campaign, the activity of the print and electronic media, and the conduct of elections officers and to review the transparency of the entire electoral process;
- To receive and transmit to elections officials the concerns of the political parties, non-governmental organizations, and citizens regarding the administration and conduct of the electoral process;
- To analyze and evaluate independently the information gathered during the observation;
- To observe the entire voting process, including the counting and tabulation of results on and after election day, until the winning candidates were announced;
- To observe the process of accumulating partial results following the election; and
- To prepare a final report on its observations for the Secretary General of the OAS.

Terms of reference

To delineate the operations of the Electoral Observation Mission, the Director of the OAS National Office, on behalf of the Secretary General, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana, on behalf of the Government, signed the Terms of Reference Agreement on October 20.

The terms of reference included a commitment to ensure that the Guyana Elections Commission provided OAS Mission members with all of the information required concerning the organization of electoral procedures before, during, and after election day. The observers were guaranteed access to all election-related records, polling stations, and locations at which votes were counted and later tabulated.

In addition, the terms of reference ensured access for observers to all aspects of the transmission of results and observation of procedures and matters relating to the securing of ballot papers before and after they were marked by the voters. It also stipulated the devising of a process for the Mission's transmittal of complaints to the Elections Commission before, during, and after election day.

CHAPTER II
Guyana

Historic overview¹

The area of the Guianas, bounded by the Orinoco, Amazon, and Negro rivers and the Atlantic Ocean, is believed to have been settled before A.D. 900 by Warrau Indians, and later by the Arawak and Carib tribes. Christopher Columbus sailed off the Guianas in 1489. The 1595 voyage of Sir Walter Raleigh to the New World led to subsequent accounts of El Dorado, the city of gold, which was believed to be in or around what is now Guyana.

Three settlements were established between 1616 and 1741. The Dutch established a settlement in Essequibo around 1616 and a second one in Berbice, east of the Essequibo, in 1625. A third settlement, Demerara, was established between those two in 1741. The three settlements were granted the status of colony by 1773. The Dutch imported African slaves to work on plantations during the early years of the colonies.

The British took control of the colonies in 1781, but their rule was short-lived and in 1782 the French and Dutch collaborated to seize control. The British retook the colonies in 1796 and held them almost continuously until 1966, except for a brief interruption from 1802 to 1803.

Slavery was abolished in British Guiana under the Emancipation Act in 1834. The British brought indentured laborers from Germany (1834), Portugal (1835), India (1838), and China (1853) to work on the plantations.

After a series of constitutional reforms brought about by the British, general elections were held on November 27, 1947, under limited adult suffrage. The first general elections under full adult suffrage were held in 1953. The People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Cheddi Jagan, won 18 of the 24 seats on the Legislative Council. Three of the representatives on the Council, Jessica Burnham, Janet Jagan, and Jane Phillips-Gay, were, the first women elected to the Legislature.

About six months later the British Government suspended the British Guiana Constitution and sent troops into the capital, Georgetown. The Governor, Sir Alfred Savage, installed an interim

¹ Drawn principally from A Guide to Guyana, by Cyril G. Rodrigues, Internet, August 20, 1997, rev. December 14, 1997.

government composed of a speaker, 3 ex-officio members, and 24 nominated members on January 4, 1954, under the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Order in Council 1953.

In 1955, Linden Forbes Burnham and his supporters split from the PPP. General elections were held in 1957, under a limited constitution, and the PPP group led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan won 9 of the 14 seats in the Legislative Council while Mr. Burnham's PPP faction won 3. The PPP group of Dr. Jagan formed the Administration with Dr. Jagan as the Chief Minister. The group led by Mr. Burnham renamed itself the People's National Congress (PNC) after the 1957 elections.

Constitutional talks held in London with the British Government in 1960 resulted in a new constitution in 1961 with internal self-government. The PPP, the PNC, and a third party, the United Force (TUF), led by Peter d'Aguiar, contested the general elections of 1961. The PPP was once again victorious and Dr. Jagan was appointed Premier.

Political unrest dominated the period from 1962 to 1964. In the December 1964 general elections, the PPP obtained the highest percentage of the votes, followed closely by the PNC, with the TUF running a distant third. The Governor, Sir Richard Luyt, called on Forbes Burnham, leader of the PNC, who was supported by the TUF, to form the Government. Mr. Burnham became Premier.

British Guiana became an independent state on May 26, 1966, within the British Commonwealth of Nations. The name it adopted, Guyana, is derived from an Amerindian word meaning "land of many waters." Forbes Burnham was appointed the first Prime Minister and Peter d'Aguiar became the first Deputy Prime Minister.

On the eve of the December 1968 general elections, the TUF ministers in the PNC-TUF coalition Government resigned. However, the PNC won the elections and Forbes Burnham continued as Prime Minister. On February 23, 1970, Guyana was proclaimed the Co-operative Republic of Guyana within the British Commonwealth of Nations. In the next few years, foreign-owned companies were nationalized, the office of Governor-General was abolished, and Arthur Chung was sworn in as the Ceremonial President of the Republic for a six-year term. He was re-elected for a second six-year term in 1976.

The PNC won the general elections held on July 10, 1973, and Forbes Burnham remained Prime Minister. In 1974 he announced the doctrine of Paramountcy of the Party, commonly known as the Declaration of Sophia, under which all organs of the state were considered agencies of the ruling PNC and subject to its control.

A group known as the Working People's Alliance (WPA) emerged in 1973 and later became a political party in 1979. The group included intellectuals and politicians from the major ethnic groups. Dr. Walter Rodney, who was informally identified as the leader of the party, was killed in a car explosion in July 1980.

The PNC Government postponed the general elections that were to be held before 1979. On July 21, 1978, the National Assembly passed a resolution that resulted in the preparation of the

Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and its approval by the Assembly on February 14, 1980. Under the new Constitution, the post of Ceremonial President was abolished and the Head of Government assumed the post of Executive President with supreme executive authority. The Republic was divided into ten regions under Article 72, paragraph (1). Each has an administrative body known as the Regional Democratic Council.

The PNC won the general elections held in 1980 and Forbes Burnham became the first Executive President of the Republic. After his death in 1985 he was succeeded by Desmond Hoyte. The general elections held in December 1985 were won by the PNC, and Desmond Hoyte continued as Executive President until the general elections of October 5, 1992.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic joint slate was victorious in the October 1992 general elections, which were monitored by international observers. Dr. Cheddi Jagan became the third Executive President and Samuel Hinds of the Civic component of the joint slate was sworn in as Prime Minister. Mr. Hinds became the fourth Executive President following the death of Dr. Jagan on March 6, 1997, and Janet Jagan was appointed Prime Minister.

The political system

The 1980 Constitution is the supreme law of Guyana. It proclaims that the country is an indivisible, secular, democratic, and sovereign state in the course of transition from capitalism to socialism. The Constitution also provides for the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals, regardless of race, place of origin, political opinions, color, creed, or sex. Guyana has an Executive President and a unicameral parliament (the National Assembly).

CHAPTER III
The electoral system

The President and the 65 members of the unicameral National Assembly are elected every five years by indirect general and secret ballot. The President appoints a Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet.

Election to the National Assembly is based on a three-tiered formula outlined in the 1980 Constitution. Fifty-three of the members are elected in a single national district in accordance with Guyana's system of proportional representation. The ten Regional Democratic Councils select ten additional members and the National Congress of Local Democratic Councils designates two more.

Guyana electoral procedures are governed by a large body of statutes and Constitutional provisions and by procedures ordered by the Elections Commission and the Chief Election Officer. The electoral system is based on the following laws:

- The Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana (1980) with amendments incorporated
- The Local Democratic Organs Acts 1980
- The National Assembly Elections Order 1980
- The Election Laws Amendment Act 1991
- The Representation of the People Act, Cap. 1:03
- The Representation of the People Amendment Act 1990
- The Election Laws Amendment Act 1996
- The Election Laws Amendment Act 1997
- The National Registration Act

The Constitution provides that anyone above the age of 18 who is either a citizen of Guyana or a Commonwealth citizen domiciled and resident in Guyana, and registered as an elector, is entitled to vote unless he or she is certified insane or adjudged to be of unsound mind or has been convicted by a court of any offense.

Under provisions of the Constitution, the President dissolves the Parliament and sets a date for national and regional elections. At that point, the Commissioner of Registration becomes the Chief Election Officer. He then appoints regional Returning Officers and Deputy Returning Officers to conduct the elections.

The Guyana elections commission

The powers, privileges, and authority of the Elections Commission and the authority of its Chairman are set out in the Constitution, and its additional functions are outlined in the Representation of the People Act. The term of the Elections Commission expires three months after each national election.

A 1995 Constitutional amendment provides that the Chairman of the Elections Commission shall be appointed by the President from a list of six persons submitted by the Minority Leader after consultation with the political parties in the National Assembly to which the President does not belong. There are six members in addition to the Chairman--three appointed by the President and three on the advice of the Minority Leader after consultation with the political parties to which the President does not belong.

Registration of citizens and electors

Guyana has a civil registry, called the National Register, under provisions of the National Registration Act, which collects birth and death information and issues civilian identification cards. Registration in the National Registry is mandatory for all persons over the age of 14 at the time the census is taken. Under Guyanese law, the responsibility for civil registration rests with the Commissioner of Registration.

However, in 1997 the Elections Commission decided on a separate collection of data on all persons over 14 with the intention of using that information exclusively for producing a voter identification card. The registration of electors falls under the general direction and supervision of the Elections Commission. The Commissioner of Registration is not a member of the Elections Commission.

The nomination of candidates

For the general election, all of Guyana forms a single constituency. In regional elections, each region is a constituency. Each qualified political party or organization submits a list of candidates for both the general and regional elections to the Chief Election Officer on nomination day, which occurs not later than 32 days before election day, and parliamentary seats are allocated in proportion to the number of votes cast for each list. Under the most recent amendments to election law, each national list must be supported by 300 to 350 electors and each regional list by 150 to 175.

The lists are reviewed and approved by the Elections Commission. Once the lists are approved, the Commission publishes the party names and symbols it has approved in the Government Gazette. The names of candidates on those lists and any combinations of party lists are announced no later than 23 days before election day.

Polling districts

For the conduct of elections, Guyana is divided into ten polling districts that comport with the ten administrative districts in the country, which are constituted under the National Registration

Order of 1980 and correspond to the ten regions of Guyana. Each district is subdivided into a number of polling stations. The polling districts are as follows:

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

CHAPTER IV
The 1997 elections

Voter registration

The registration of electors for the 1997 elections is provided for in the Representation of the People Act, Chapter 1:03; the Election Laws (Amendment) Act No. 12 of 1996; and the National Registration Act, Chapter 19:08. The preparation of the register of voters began with the publication of Regulations by the President on May 20, 1997, under the National Registration Act.

Officers of the National Registration Center conducted the registration of all voters who were eligible as of September 30, on a house-to-house basis. A preliminary voter list based on this information was compiled and published so that any claims and objections could be raised. After these had been processed, the final voter list was also published, for general information. Among the features of the registration and the claims-and-objections periods was the appointment of polling agents (scrutineers) by political parties to oversee the process. The scrutineers accompanied the registration officers on their visits.

According to information obtained by the Mission, in initial registration and the distribution of voter identification cards, the Elections Commission appeared to have exerted enormous efforts to minimize barriers to the process. One major problem in the information-gathering process was the late arrival of the cameras that were to have been used in photographing registrants. The Commission had sought overseas funding for the purchase of the cameras, but, in the end, the Ministry of Home Affairs provided funding. According to the Elections Commission, the delay in the availability of cameras and the difficulty of scheduling citizens to have their pictures taken could have affected up to 13,333 citizens, who would have been deprived of the franchise. The Commission apparently made arrangements for these persons to be photographed between October 2 and 30 in their respective electoral districts. Photographing continued until a few days before the election so that cards could be made for as many people as possible.

Voter identification cards

According to the Elections Commission, an identification card for voting purposes only was required in 1997 for the first time. They were intended to overcome problems that had developed in previous elections, when a variety of documents--such as, for example, national identity cards, passports, and other records--were allowed as adequate identification.

To assure that voter identification was both recent and uniform, the Commission decided to use a distinctive card containing updated information. Its strong advocacy resulted in an amendment

to the electoral code requiring the presentation of a card as the only way individuals could be identified to vote; in essence, “no voter identification card, no vote.”

Further delay occurred while the Commission decided what company to choose to manufacture fraud-proof cards. Ultimately, the cards were prepared electronically and showed the information on each elector on the final voters’ list.

Initially, the cards were distributed from the district registration centers. However, when thousands of them failed to be picked up, the Commission arranged for distribution house-to-house. The distribution deadlines were continually extended so that there would be every opportunity for citizens to obtain their cards.

Preliminary voter list

The National Registration Center began the re-registration of voters at the end of December 1996 and finished at the end of May 1997. By the end of June 1997, the Preliminary Voters List, containing 461,415 registered voters whose photographs had been taken, was produced.

In its report dated December 13, 1997, the Elections Commission noted that owing to the lapse of time between the closure of registration at the end of May and the start of the production of the cards in September, some information collected during the registration period had become obsolete: some addresses had changed, some people had moved out of Guyana, and a number of people had died. According to the report, there were 461,369 electors and a total of 423,209 electors’ identification cards, representing 91.73 percent of the total registered, had been issued.

Polls conducted in advance of election day

Special arrangements were made for the Disciplined Forces (the Police, the Defense Force, the People's Militia, and the National Service) and non-resident electors to vote in advance of election day. The Disciplined Forces voted on December 10, 1997, while non-resident electors voted on December 5, 1997. According to Guyanese law, the day appointed for this voting cannot be more than ten days or less than five days before election day; in 1997 it was December 10 for the Disciplined Forces and December 5 for the non-resident electors.

For the Disciplined Forces, the ballot papers were the same as those used on election day but were stamped in advance by the Chief Election Officer with the words "Disciplined Forces." The procedure for voting, including the sealing of the ballot box and other paperwork, was the same. After the poll, the ballot boxes, packets and materials were forwarded to the Chief Election Officer, who was responsible for counting the votes.

Non-resident Electors include ambassadors, high commissioners, their spouses and children, and members of their staff and their spouses and children. These voters cast their ballots on December 5, 1997, for the national slates of candidates only.

There were several complaints in the press that the number of voter identification cards did not match the number of ballots cast by non-resident electors. However, the Commission said that the number of such ballots was so small that it would not affect the outcome of the elections.

Polling stations

For the 1997 election, the Guyana Elections Commission desired to avoid the problems experienced in previous elections, as a result of the very large numbers of people attempting to vote at some polling stations. The goal in 1997 was to limit the number of potential voters assigned to each polling station to no more than 400. As a result, 1,844 polling stations were established, about twice as many as there had been in 1992.

Table I: Polling Stations by Region, 1997

1. Barima-Waini	66
2. Pomeroon-Supenaam	115
3. Essequibo Islands-West Demerara	244
4. Demerara-Mahaica	746
5. Mahaica-Berbice	127
6. East Berbice-Corentyne	302
7. Cuyuni-Mazaruni	77
8. Potaro-Siparuni	35
9. Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo	54
10. Upper Demerara-Berbice	100
TOTAL	1,844

The Commission also decided that citizens should vote only at polling stations in the places where they had originally registered, i.e., to vote where they lived, as determined in the house-to-house registration process. However, the Commission received numerous requests to amend this policy as December 15 approached. Some political organizations claimed that the franchise would be restricted if citizens could not vote wherever they happened to be on election day. The Commission initially claimed that changing the “vote where you live” rule would undermine the entire process of reducing the size of polling stations. It also contended that it would be difficult to have sufficient ballots and other supplies on hand to process an unknown potential number of voters.

Ultimately, the Commission accommodated many of the concerns. Members of the Disciplined Forces were able to vote at almost any polling station on December 10. The OAS observers reported that this caused occasional long delays while additional ballots were being

obtained. The loosening of the rule for the Disciplined Forces further encouraged critics, and on the eve of the election the Commission allowed nurses and citizens in some of the less-populated regions to vote where they were on election day.

Voting and counting procedures

Polling Station Officials

Under Guyanese law, each polling station is to have one Presiding Officer, an Assistant Presiding Officer, a Poll Clerk, and a Counting Assistant/Ballot Clerk. These officials are required to be present at the opening of the polling station at 6 a.m. Other persons permitted to be present then and at any time during the day include the regional Returning Officer and his staff, members of the Elections Commission, the Chief Election Officer, candidates, and party scrutineers. The Commission also permitted international and local observers to be present.

Voting Procedure

On election day, a polling station must be open for 12 consecutive hours between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Prospective voters are to enter the polling station one at a time, and present themselves to the Poll Clerk at the entrance. The Poll Clerk is to check the final voter list, call out the name and registration number of the elector, and refer the elector to the Assistant Presiding Officer, who keeps the voter identification card and issues the ballot paper. The elector goes to the voting compartment, marks the ballot, and returns to the Counting Assistant/Ballot Clerk, who stains the voter's finger and permits him or her to place the ballot in the ballot box. The voter identification card is to be put into the ballot box after the vote is inserted.

Special Voting Circumstances

A registered voter may apply and be granted permission to have someone cast for him or her by proxy. An elector can be appointed to vote as a proxy for no more than two other people. A proxy elector must vote at the polling station where he or she is registered.

Provision is made under Guyanese law for certain electors to vote at a polling station other than the one at which their name appears on the final voter list. In general, this arrangement applies only to election officers, and to members of the police force, the Guyana Defense Force, and rural constables on duty at polling places who would not have voted already as members of the Disciplined Forces. However, the Elections Commission may also grant citizens special permission to vote at any polling station in the region in which they live. For example, OAS Mission staff from Guyana applied for and received special permission.

The Presiding Officer at a polling station can allow a person who is blind or incapacitated to be accompanied by someone else who will vote as instructed. A blind or incapacitated elector who is unaccompanied can request and receive assistance from the Presiding Officer.

Counting and Returning Ballots

The Presiding Officer must permit anyone who is in line at 6:00 p.m. to vote, after which the polling station is officially closed. After the doors are closed, the ballot box is unlocked and preparation made for the counting of votes at the place of poll.

Because of the “no card, no vote” provisions of the 1997 amendments to the Guyana Electoral Code, the first responsibility during the December elections was the handling and processing of voter identification cards. The Presiding Officer was responsible for matching the number of cards that had been placed in the ballot boxes with the number of ballots.

According to 1997 practice, the Presiding Officer was to count the ballots at the polling station after the polls closed. First he or she was to make a preliminary tally of used, unused, spoiled, and tendered ballot papers in order to complete an inventory of election supplies used and available (Form 23, the Ballot Account).²

After that tally, the Presiding Officer was to open and empty the ballot box, distribute tally sheets, count and record the number of ballots, and returns them to the box.

In 1997, the national and regional ballots were printed on a single page, with a perforation between. The Presiding Officer and the team at the polling station were to tear the sheet apart and count the votes cast for each list. The Presiding Officer would then complete and sign the document containing the results (Form 23A, the Statement of Poll). No one else was required to sign the Statement of Poll, although copies were prepared for the regional Returning Officer, the Assistant Presiding Officer, candidates or party agents present at the polling station, and the Chief Elections Officer.

The sealed, locked ballot box, into which a special locked bag was to have been placed containing the voter identification cards, was to be taken to the headquarters of the regional Returning Officer. The Statement of Poll was to have been kept separate, so that the Returning Officer could report the results from each polling station to the Chief Elections Officer in Georgetown.

² A tendered ballot is one that is proffered to the polling officials and accepted but for some reason is set aside and not counted .

CHAPTER V
Political parties

The major Guyanese political parties and the principal minority parties have their origins in the pre-independence era following the Second World War. Profiles of the ten political parties contesting the 1997 general elections follow.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C); symbol: Cup

Formed in 1950, the PPP is Guyana's oldest active party, and was led by Cheddi Jagan until his death in March 1997. Before the 1992 elections, the PPP entered an alliance with a coalition of prominent business and other leaders (Civic). That alliance was victorious in Guyana's 1992 elections.

The People's National Congress (PNC); symbol: Palm Tree

The PNC was formed in 1957 after Forbes Burnham had broken with Dr. Jagan. The party initially advocated socialist policies while encouraging foreign investment. Hugh Desmond Hoyte succeeded as leader of the PNC and President of Guyana when President Burnham died in 1985. The PNC ruled Guyana from independence in 1966 to 1992.

Working People's Alliance/Guyana Labour Party (WPA/GLP); symbol: Bell

Founded in late 1975, the WPA began as an alliance of left-wing groups. Its best-known leader was the late Walter Rodney. For the 1997 elections, the party formed an alliance with the GLP, led by Nanda Gopaul.

The United Force (TUF); symbol: The sun

TUF was founded by the late Peter D'Aguiar, who started a major industrial conglomerate (Banks DIH), and is now headed by Manzoor Nadir. The party favors racial integration. Its principal programs are based on market-oriented economic principles.

A Good and Green Guyana (AGGG); symbol: Front-end loader

Hamilton Green, the mayor of Georgetown in 1997, founded the AGGG soon after he left the PNC in a dispute with its leadership. The AGGG has the majority in the Georgetown City Council and contested national elections for the first time in 1997. The party's stance is, in part, to maximize the role of Georgetown in Guyana's politics.

Guyana Democratic Party (GDP); symbol: House

The GDP was founded by Asgar Ally not long after he resigned as Minister of Finance of the PPP/Civic government. Mr. Ally portrayed himself as an activist, and younger than some candidates from the larger political parties. The GDP contested elections for the first time in 1997.

Justice For All Party (JFAP); symbol: Scale

The leader and presidential candidate of the JFAP is C.N. Sharma, the owner of a television station in Georgetown. The party contested for regional legislative seats except in Region 4. Mr. Sharma claimed that the party spoke for the poor and promised to focus on land rights for Amerindians, protection and care for the disadvantaged, and a resolution of ethnic problems.

National Democratic Front (NDF); symbol: The factory

The NDF Presidential candidate was Joseph Bacchus. It contested for regional seats only in Region 10. Its platform called for free education from kindergarten to high school, better pay for teachers, low-cost housing for the poor and racial unity.

God Bless Guyana (GBG); symbol: Dove

The GBG did not contest for any seats. Its presidential candidate, Hardat Persaud, contended that his party was inspired by God. He had an evangelical message and promised development of the natural resources of the country, improved housing and electricity, and free education and health care.

National Independent Party (NIP); symbol: Three concentric circles

The NIP presidential candidate was Shain Hussain. It did not contest for regional seats. The party promised constitutional reform, amnesty for squatters, title to land, and greater youth involvement in the administration of the country.

CHAPTER VI
The pre-election period

Code of Conduct and Media Guidelines

In 1997, the Guyana Elections Commission established a *Code of Conduct for Political Parties* and issued *Guidelines for the Media and Contesting Political Parties at the Forthcoming General and Regional Elections*.

The *Code of Conduct*, to which six out of ten political parties, including the PPP and the PNC, subscribed, commits its signatories to respect the laws relating to freedom of speech and freedom of association. Among these is the right of Guyanese citizens to engage in lawful political activities, including meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and house-to-house visits. It also expresses a commitment to ensure that no political party, organization, action group, or individual will provoke or promote violence against any other party, organization, or group. The political parties also agree to refrain from using or permitting appeals to racial hostility or racial loyalty (Appendix XI).

In the *Guidelines for the Media*, the Elections Commission characterizes the media as having an obligation to serve the society and public in a manner commensurate with the freedom of expression they enjoy. Prior to the election, the media are charged to allow the views of all parties to receive equitable and fair exposure. Media managers and editors are to consider it obligatory to retract any previously published statements that are found to be untrue. The media are to encourage participation in the democratic process and ensure that the public has the opportunity to be informed on the candidates and issues. The Guyana Elections Commission also requests both the print and electronic media to provide contesting political parties with some publicity free of charge (Appendix XII).

The OAS observers witnessed a number of instances in which political parties or media organizations acted outside of the letter and the spirit of both of these documents. Further, there was no indication that the Commission had established a procedure to receive complaints in a structured way related to these provisions, nor were any actions taken or further provisions put in place.

The political campaign

The message of the election campaigns conducted by the two major parties was summed up in their slogans: that of the party of government, the PPP/Civic, was “One Good Term Deserves Another,” while the PNC’s slogan was “Enough is Enough.”

Political parties proclaimed positions on issues such as jobs and the economy, foreign debt, development of infrastructure, housing, education, health, accountability, youth, and women's issues. The observers reported that in a number of instances, political party activities exhibited a message that manifested strong racial overtones.

Political meetings and rallies were held throughout Guyana after nomination day. The OAS observers noted that these events sometimes became quite heated as election day approached. In at least one instance a political rally broke up in a stone-throwing melee that was provoked both by persons on the platform and by political opponents in the crowd. At some rallies, indecent language, personal attacks and racist comments were leveled at rival presidential candidates.

Nonetheless, leaders of the main parties claimed that the conduct of the campaigns was generally an improvement over 1992. It is noteworthy that party leaders and the leadership of non-governmental and religious organizations called for restraint in the final days of the campaign.

Media coverage

Members of the OAS Mission observed the media's coverage of the campaign during the exploratory trip and while the Mission was in Guyana prior to election day. Much of the coverage was devoted to the official statements made by the larger parties or was based on photo opportunities arranged for leaders of the two largest parties. There was little coverage of the other parties in the print media. The electronic media also focused much of their coverage on press opportunities provided by the two major parties. However, television stations frequently had lengthy talk shows or call-in programs, often with a distinctive partisan emphasis (in one case, a presidential candidate himself owned a television station). Radio stations are controlled by the Government.

One local non-governmental organization, the Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB), performed a content analysis of the media coverage of six radio and television stations and the two main Georgetown newspapers between October 7 and November 5, 1997. The media analyzed were GBC Radio, WRHM Channels 6 and 7, NBTV Channel 9, GTV Channel 11, CNS Channel 12, VCT Channel 28, the *Guyana Chronicle*, and the *Stabroek News*. Some of the EAB findings are summarized below.

The EAB reported that government-owned *GBC Radio* aired positive references about the PPP/Civic 86 percent of the time and extended minimal coverage to the other parties. The majority of *WRHM* coverage was devoted to the PPP/Civic (39 percent) and the PNC (30 percent), primarily in the form of news. The EAB reported relatively unbiased coverage of both major parties and also noted that the smaller political parties received minimal coverage. In the case of *NBTV Channel 9*, according to the EAB, the majority of its time spent on political coverage (52 percent) was devoted to positive coverage of the PNC (67 percent), whereas the majority of *GTV Channel 11's* time (66 percent) was devoted to positive coverage of the PPP/Civic (90 percent). EAB reported that 17 percent of *GTV* time was devoted to the Alliance for Guyana. *CNS Channel 12* devoted 87 percent of its total air time to coverage of the Justice for All party, whose founder owns the station.

As regards the Government-run *Guyana Chronicle*, the EAB reported that 56 percent of its coverage was devoted to the PPP/Civic and 29 percent to the PNC. Of the coverage afforded the PPP/Civic, according to the EAB, the *Chronicle* was biased in its favor almost 88 percent of the time. The privately owned *Stabroek News* devoted most of its space to coverage of the PPP/Civic (46 percent of all political references), followed by the PNC (29 percent), and the remaining 25 percent to all other parties. The EAB reported that the *Stabroek News* demonstrated no bias towards any party.

Pre-election issues

Printing of Election Ballots

Approximately one month before the December 15 elections, the printing of ballots by the Government printer stalled. A stalemate ensued in the Commission over where to get the job done, and ultimately, with the Chairman breaking a tie vote, it was decided to print them in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite serious efforts on the part of the Commission to station some of its members from different political parties at the printing firm in Trinidad, the off-shore printing resulted in questions being raised about every element of the process. For example, one party hinted that many more ballots might have been printed than were projected to be needed; some intimated that the party of Government might have had quantities of ballots ready to “stuff” the ballot boxes. However, the Mission members saw no evidence of these assertions.

Voter Identification Cards

The requirement that voters present a valid voter identification card also created an issue. Members of the OAS Mission noted that some political leaders questioned the costs of taking a census and then using the results solely to identify voters. Other leaders claimed that the difficulties in the taking of photographs had disenfranchised voters. In addition, questions were raised about the accuracy of the information on the cards. The OAS observers also noted that a number of political figures questioned the system used by the Commission to distribute the cards. The issue of identification cards persisted throughout the election campaign.

Voting Exceptions

In addition to the alterations in procedures that allowed members of the Disciplined Forces to vote where they were stationed, rather than where they were registered, it was discovered that some members who possessed valid voter identification cards were not included in the list of electors of the polling station to which they had been assigned. The Elections Commission attributed this situation, in part, to the fact that the list of voters in the Disciplined Forces had been extracted from the final voters’ list, on the basis of the occupation that had been listed during the previous registration period. The Chairman, therefore, in a policy decision made on the Disciplined Forces on their day of voting, allowed members who possessed a voter identification card to vote even if their names did not appear on the list of electors at the polling station.

As was said above, Mission members noted that the Commission made additional exceptions just before the regular election day so that citizens in the more remote areas of Guyana and nurses could vote at polling stations where they had not registered if they had a valid voter identification card. This policy did not extend to the more populous areas. The late changes in electoral procedures and the uneven application of electoral regulations in different regions caused some political leaders and citizens to question the conduct of the election.

Announcement of Voting Results (Disciplined Forces)

According to Guyanese election law, votes cast by members of the Disciplined Forces must be counted separately from those of other citizens. The Mission noted, however, that the results were also made public separately from other votes. This not only removed the secrecy from an entire class of voters but created an atmosphere of undue influence, caused some discord, and aroused expectations in some political circles.

The Mission's pre-electoral activities

The Deputy Chief of Mission and a number of observers arrived in Georgetown on November 22, 1997. Preliminary tasks included making arrangements for office space and accommodation, and establishing a headquarters. The Chief of Mission and almost all of the remaining observers arrived between November 26 and 29. Immediately after his arrival, the Chief of Mission, accompanied by the Director of the OAS National Office, met with key figures such as President Samuel Hinds; the Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cheryl Miles; the Leader of the Minority, Desmond Hoyte, S.C.; and the Chairman of the Elections Commission, Doodnauth Singh, S.C., to discuss the elections and the role of the Mission. On November 28, the Chief of Mission held a press conference to inform the press and public of the Mission's presence and strategy. (See itinerary of the Chief of Mission, Appendix VI.)

To prepare the observers for their assignments a period of orientation was held, during which they were addressed by the Chairman of the Elections Commission and other Guyanese experts on the politics and political culture of the country. The topics covered included, among other matters, the role of the OAS in election observation, the legal framework and administrative organization of the elections, and the history and the development of democracy in Guyana.

Because of difficulties with transportation and delays in the issuance of credentials, the observers' field activities during their first week in Guyana were limited to attending political meetings or rallies. On December 1 and 3, two members of the Mission's management team arrived to coordinate data collection and reporting and to complete arrangements for budgeting and deployment.

The initial trips to the field by observers on December 5, 1997, enabled the observers to assess the situation, conclude their necessary logistical arrangements, and establish contact with the election officials and political activists in these areas. On December 8 the observers were deployed into their respective regions. Shortly after observers were stationed in the field, they reported that some election officials were concerned about inadequate communication links and shortcomings

regarding logistics. Those concerns were reported to the Chairman of the Elections Commission by the OAS Mission.

The membership of the Mission, which earlier consisted of 17 observers from nine member states, was augmented on election day by five observers representing an inter-American organization and a diplomatic mission in Guyana, two observers supplied by the Government of Colombia, and an additional four-member OAS team that included the Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, Ambassador Christopher Thomas. These additions increased the team to 28 members representing nationals of 12 OAS member states.

The Mission maintained the strongest possible OAS presence in Georgetown (Region 4) on the day of the elections, given that nearly half of Guyana’s registered voters live in that region. Other OAS observers were deployed in regions where voter population exceeded ten thousand. The aim was to provide as much coverage as possible in the areas where the greatest number of voters resides (see Table II).

Table II: Registered Voters and Deployment of OAS Election Observers on Election Day, by Region

Region	No. Registered Voters	No. Observers
1. Barima-Waini	12,374	1
2. Pomeroon-Supenaam	27,498	1
3. Essequibo Islands-West Demerara	62,490	2
4. Demerara-Mahaica	200,277	20
5. Mahaica-Berbice	32,020	1
6. East Berbice-Corentyne	79,129	1
7. Cuyuni-Mazaruni	10,726	0
8. Potaro-Siparuni	4,863	0
9. Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo	8,628	1
10. Upper Demerara-Berbice	23,364	1
Total	461,369	28

CHAPTER VII
Election day

OAS observers visited a total of 457 polling stations throughout Guyana on election day, December 15. This represents 25 percent of the polling stations and allowed observers to gather a significant amount of information on the voting process.

Citizen participation was high. Generally, voting took place in a tranquil atmosphere throughout the country. The Mission observed that the people exercised their franchise responsibly and peaceably. The members also noted that, in general, the established administrative procedures for the elections were followed.

The observers found that 95 percent of the polling places observed opened on time and that the electoral officials generally arrived earlier. Where there was a delay in opening it was caused in most cases by late arrival of ballot boxes and materials. Scrutineers from at least the largest political parties were present at nearly all the polling stations observed, as were representatives of other parties in many cases. The observers also reported that in some cases there was inadequate lighting, space and equipment for the conduct of the election process.

With a few exceptions, OAS observers reported that officials at the polling stations appeared to be adequately prepared to perform their tasks while the ballots were being cast and that most demonstrated a sense of responsibility: showing those present at the opening of the polls that the ballot box was empty, stamping ballots on the back of both the regional and presidential portions, verifying the authenticity of the voters' identification cards, referring voters to other polling stations whenever applicable, and giving impartial instructions to voters as to how to cast their ballots.

OAS Mission members at some polling stations observed a variety of administrative problems. In 7 percent of those visited, the personnel did not insert voter identification cards in the ballot boxes, as instructed by the Elections Commission. When this situation was reported to the Commission, several Presiding Officers were fired by the Chairman. However, Mission members reported that mishandling of the cards continued at other polling stations. The OAS observers attributed many of the problems they encountered to either a lack of effective training of electoral personnel or a failure to communicate instructions universally and clearly.

OAS observers noted that the secrecy of the ballot was assured at 99 percent of the polling stations. In three of them, Mission members found that the voting cubicles did not adequately shield the voter. In at least one case, people were stationed outside the voting area conducting what was called "community services"-- telling citizens "how to vote" and whom to vote for. Tendered ballots were used in only 1 percent of the OAS-monitored polling places.

The observers reported that polling stations closed after allowing voters in line at 6 p.m. to cast their ballots. After the polls closed, scrutineers, and local and international observers remained during the closing and counting process.

Mission members were present in 22 polling stations during the counting process. Questioned ballots were reported in only 5. The observers reported that all the electoral officers and scrutineers signed the poll book after following closing procedures. During the count, OAS observers reported, the number of voter identification cards matched the number of ballots cast in all cases observed; during the voting, the cards had been punched and secured properly in ballot boxes in 95 percent of the polling stations observed.

The observers reported that 14 percent of the polling stations did not send security officers to accompany the ballot boxes to the Returning Officer's offices. Political-party representatives were allowed to accompany the ballot boxes. In 86 percent of the cases, the vehicles to transport the ballot boxes arrived late.

CHAPTER VIII
The post-election period

A serious breakdown of the electoral process occurred after the ballots were counted, when communication and logistical difficulties prevented the timely transmission of the preliminary and final results from polling stations to the Elections Commission. The delays resulted in various allegations and suspicions, particularly since expectations had been raised by a promise that partial returns would be announced early on election night and almost complete results by midday on the following day, Tuesday, December 16.

In regions outside of Region 4 (Georgetown), the Elections Commission said, the system for reporting preliminary results was based on a network of telephone and radio links to Georgetown. Presiding Officers or regional Returning Officers were to report preliminary results, identifying themselves with a “secret number”. These data were to be transcribed onto a “computer friendly” form, verified, and posted appropriately.

Within Region 4, given the short distance to the headquarters of the Elections Commission, there was to be a system of “runners” who would bring in the preliminary results to be transcribed, verified, and posted.

At approximately 12:30 a.m. on December 16, the Chairman of the Elections Commission briefly escorted senior OAS Mission personnel through the section of the Commission’s headquarters where preliminary results were being collected, tabulated, and verified. Mission personnel took note of what appeared to be an efficient system.

However, later during the same morning, the OAS Mission learned that the central elements of this plan were not working. Preliminary results were being announced very slowly from scattered areas around the nation. Results from Region 4 were not being announced at all. In a news conference, the Chairman of the Commission announced that the system of runners had not been used: the electoral officials had decided that the security of the ballot boxes was more important than a rapid announcement of the preliminary results. He also told reporters that there had been transportation difficulties in Region 4.

As Tuesday the 16th wore on, OAS observers noted that rumors were spreading about the possibility of various irregularities related to the delay in the announcement of results from Region 4 and possible missing ballot boxes. Tensions grew. In the afternoon, during another press conference, the Chairman of the Commission and the Commissioner of Police called on citizens to remain calm. They also asked reporters to be restrained in their reporting of stories regarding the conduct of post-election activities.

On the same day, the Chief of the OAS Mission and other senior Mission personnel sought an audience with the Chairman on these issues, and were referred to the Chief Elections Officer, Stanley Singh. He indicated that ballot boxes would be opened to verify contents only if there was a major discrepancy between the summary of the results in each polling station (Statement of Poll), the statement of preliminary results, and the information written down informally by party scrutineers at the end of the count. The Chief of Mission suggested to Mr. Singh that the presence of OAS observers during a verification might help to clarify the situation and give confidence to Guyanese that procedures were being followed, but was told that if the Commission needed that kind of help it would request it.

Political party verification of count

On the morning of Wednesday, December 17, the Chairman of the Commission and the Commissioner of Police held another news conference. The Police Commissioner said that he had faxed a letter to the Chairman, saying that unless results from Region 4 began to be released, he could not predict the situation in the streets.

The Elections Commission had met and, in cooperation with six of the ten political parties competing, created a process whereby individual Statements of Poll would be compared with the informal tallies taken at the polling stations by scrutineers on election night. The Chairman of the Commission and the Chief Elections Officer had announced that another reason for the delay in the reporting of Region 4 results was that the Statements of Poll were incorrect or incomplete or had been placed inside the locked ballot boxes.

The verification process began at 8 a.m. Wednesday morning. At approximately 3 p.m., the OAS Chief of Mission and other international observers were invited to the Commission, and the Chairman escorted them to the place where verification by the political parties was being conducted. It was the first time that international observers had visited the tabulation center since the visit after midnight on the morning after the elections.

At this juncture, a representative of the PNC expressed his displeasure with the verification process and welcomed the presence of observers. A system of rotation was set up, so that OAS observers would be present at all times during the remaining verification exercise. The Chief Elections Officer conducted the verification process along with Commission staff members, members of the Elections Commission, and political-party representatives.

At approximately 10 p.m. that night, the PNC delegation's leader, Robert Corbin, announced that his delegation was withdrawing from participation in the verification process, claiming that the Commission staff had not organized the materials well enough for review and that he had also been hearing of alleged discrepancies from regions outside Region 4. He said he was leaving to consult with the PNC leadership.

Shortly after the meeting broke up, one Commissioner (Moen McDoom) said that the Commission had learned so much about the information on the "computer unfriendly" Statement of

Poll that, if needed, it could proceed with verification without the participation of the political parties, though he added that this opinion was his own and any decision would have to be made by the Commission as a whole. He also expressed regret that the PNC had left the meeting and hoped that they would return.

At 1 a.m. on Thursday, December 18, the Deputy Chief of the OAS Mission received a telephone invitation for the OAS to attend a press briefing at PNC headquarters at 2 a.m. After consultation with the Chief of Mission, the Deputy Chief attended the news conference, accompanied by a representative of the Commonwealth observer delegation and a representative of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). A representative of the National Democratic Institute also attended, as did the project coordinator for domestic observers from the Electoral Assistance Bureau. The press conference began at 2:30 a.m.

The Leader of the Minority, Desmond Hoyte, S.C., opened the briefing by expressing disappointment with the actions of the Commission. He also asserted that the Commission had decided to proceed with verification without the parties, as suggested by Commissioner McDoom. The OAS Mission later learned that this was incorrect; all work on verification had ceased shortly after the PNC delegation's departure.

Mr. Hoyte and others on the panel, including Mr. Corbin and the PNC's Vice Presidential candidate, Winston Murray, made a number of additional assertions. Mr. Hoyte noted that Region 4 is a PNC stronghold and hinted that there might have been partisan motives for withholding information from that region. He added that, once Region 4 results were known to have been unavailable, PNC supporters from throughout Guyana had reported irregularities that resulted in reports of lower-than-anticipated levels of support of his party.

After the conference ended, the OAS Deputy Chief of Mission, the IFES representative, and the head of the EAB delegation had discussions with Kit Nascimento, the press spokesman for the PNC, who repeated the allegation that the Commission was proceeding with verification. The observer delegations expressed the hope that the PNC would return to the verification process.

At 9 a.m. on December 18, the Mission learned that the PNC had met with the Commission and presented a number of demands, which were agreed upon. Accordingly, the verification process began again. Later that morning, a crowd gathered approximately 100 yards south of the Elections Commission. Some waved PNC political placards or palm fronds, the party symbol. They shouted slogans and declared that Mr. Hoyte should be announced as the winner. After a few hours, law-enforcement authorities decided to break up the crowd, using tear gas and rubber bullets. OAS observers and those involved in the verification process could see and hear the commotion. Nevertheless, the verification process continued until about 3 a.m. on Friday morning, December 19.

At about 11 a.m., December 19, the verification process resumed after the PNC representatives arrived. In response to a previous PNC allegation that the computer programs were being manipulated to deny votes to them and other parties, the Commission Chairman asked the Commission's computer professionals to explain how votes were being tabulated and posted.

Announcement of results

The Chairman of the Elections Commission held a noontime news conference on Friday, December 19, in which--stating that he was using his authority under Article 177 of the Constitution--he announced that Mrs. Janet Jagan, the PPP/Civic candidate, had won the presidency by "an unassailable lead." He noted that he had received certified results from the Chief Elections Officer, Mr. Stanley Singh, and was quoted in a *Guyana Chronicle* story on December 20 as having said, "that it had clearly been established that [Mrs. Jagan] ought to be declared the President." It was reported that at that time there were 37,000 votes that remained to be verified out of some 348,911. He further announced that in his opinion, one of the political parties had such a large lead that it would be impossible for any other party to win even if it won all of the unverified votes.

Aftermath of the announcement

The announcement brought the verification process to an end and resulted in angry denunciations of the Chairman's actions. Two PNC members of the Elections Commission and the head of the PNC delegation to the verification process approached the OAS Mission to protest that the Chairman had acted without consulting all the members, had not received specific authorization from the Chief Elections Officer, and had made the announcement before the verification by the political parties had been completed.

The Mission later learned that the PNC had filed a request in the Supreme Court of Guyana in an attempt to overturn the Chairman's announcement and prevent Mrs. Jagan from being sworn in (see Appendix XX.) The request was granted, but before the writ could be delivered, Mrs. Jagan was sworn in later on Friday afternoon at the offices of the Elections Commission.

Later in the day, OAS Mission personnel met to discuss the situation. After an analysis of the events before and during the elections, and considering that the new President had been installed and the matter was now in the hands of the Guyanese legal authorities, it was determined that the Mission's mandate had concluded.

Liaison with other missions

The OAS Chief of Mission maintained continuous dialogue and participated in structured meetings during the elections and in the course of the post-election period with the Chiefs of Mission of the Commonwealth, IFES, EAB as well as with the heads of mission of the diplomatic corps from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Meetings were also held with the leaders of the two major parties and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs at various times to understand their

preoccupations and express the view of the Mission that regardless of the election results, it was important for them to call for calm and restraint. During the verification period, the Minister of Foreign Affairs requested that the missions remain in Guyana at least until after the swearing-in of the President. This was agreed upon by all the missions.

The Project Coordinator of the EAB informed the observer chiefs at a breakfast meeting on December 19 that he was in daily contact with the political leaders and had been invited to continue dialogue with them.

CHAPTER IX
Conclusions and recommendations

Guyana's 1997 elections represent a further step in the consolidation of democracy in that country. Citizen participation on election day was high. Generally, voting took place in a tranquil atmosphere throughout the country. On the whole, the Mission noted that the administration of the election on December 15 was adequate, and activities at polling stations went smoothly prior to the counting of the votes. This represented an impressive effort by local and regional electoral officials.

However, the post-electoral process manifested significant weaknesses in organization, management, and execution. The collection, transmittal, verification, and announcement of results were not systematic or uniform in execution and there were undue delays in announcing results from major population areas, particularly Region 4. These post-election difficulties contributed to a certain climate of distrust of the Commission and its procedures among some sectors. Some political parties have alleged a pattern of fraud, but the Mission wishes to note that it observed no fraudulent or intentionally improper behavior by electoral officials while it was in the country.

It was evident that a number of election officials were not adequately trained or may not have received clear instructions as to specific procedures. OAS observers noted that in some cases there was inadequate space, lighting, and a lack of equipment needed for the efficient election day performance of vital election functions. Significantly, the possibility of poor post-election communications and potential logistical shortcomings had been detected early by OAS observers and reported to the Commission days before the election. The Mission was assured by the Chairman of the Commission that these issues posed no problems, but they became central after the closing of the polling stations. It is noteworthy that there was no formal procedure to receive and process complaints.

There were continual pressures on the Elections Commission to change its rules and regulations, even on election day. The changes in procedures did not always reach all the regions at the same time, which resulted in their being applied unevenly.

The Mission identified three areas in particular that, had more attention been paid to them, could have helped to avert some of the problems in 1997 and enhanced confidence in the electoral process. First, the Mission notes the absence of a modern civil registry in Guyana. Second, there

were no independent experts in computer systems present to verify the programs that were posting and reporting results. Finally, there was no quick-count mechanism.³

As noted previously, the National Registration Center collects and maintains information that is used for census and electoral registration purposes. Some concern was expressed by some political parties that the National Registration Center could have been used more fully in 1997. The constant updating of a modernized civil registry in a computerized database is fundamental to the efficient management of national elections data in countries that have such registries. The verification of the accuracy of a computerized program by independent experts can be a source of great comfort to citizens unfamiliar with modern data techniques. A quick count might have acted as a checking mechanism when questions were being raised about the tabulation of results.

Given the situation in which they found themselves, the Elections Commission exercised considerable flexibility when required, in seeking to ensure that all Guyanese citizens who were eligible to vote had an opportunity to do so. The Commission facilitated the distribution of voter identification cards, verified that citizens were registered, and ensured that citizens were assigned to polling stations near their homes to allow them to vote expeditiously.

The lack of time, planning, sufficient training, and thorough "test runs" of the system for collecting and reporting election results contributed to the confusion after the polls closed. In short, according to the Mission's observations, the administration of the 1997 elections was effective to a point but displayed serious deficiencies in the final stages.

Recommendations

On the basis of its experience in Guyana, the OAS Electoral Observation Mission offers the following recommendations on strengthening the democratic and electoral processes, for consideration by the Guyanese authorities:

1. The terms of the members and the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission expire three months after each election. While some members have later been reappointed, there is still a break in service that can cause a lack of continuity in the body. The Mission suggests that making the Elections Commission a permanent body could strengthen it substantially.

³ A quick count is a means of auditing an election by fitting data from a sampling of a statistically significant set of polling stations into a computer program to give a snapshot or projection of the outcome.

2. The Mission also recommends that consideration be given to making the post of Chairman of the Commission, whose qualifications are outlined in Guyanese law, a full-time position.
3. Under current law, the National Registration Center (NRC) and the Commissioner of Registration are required to perform many of the duties of the Commission, particularly in the period between elections. The NRC manages Guyana's civil registry year round and administers the registration of citizens and voters. Once an election date is announced, the Commissioner of Registration becomes the Chief Elections Officer. The Mission recommends that consideration be given to undertaking programs to strengthen, modernize, and professionalize the National Registration Center and its functions.
4. Given the difficulties experienced by the Elections Commission in some key aspects of the administration of the elections, the Mission recommends that consideration be given to an independent top-to-bottom review of the organization, management structure, duties, and responsibilities of the Commission and its staff (including the National Registration Center and the Commissioner of Registration). This should include an evaluation of the training needs for election administration.
5. The Government of Guyana should consider the establishment of a modern computerized civil registry and database that can be easily updated through the years.

The process of strengthening democracy through free and fair elections is one that requires time in planning and attention to detail at every stage in its implementation. The electoral process in Guyana has made important strides but can be further improved.

Healing, reconciliation, and Nation building

It was evident in the course of the Guyana elections that the country was divided politically, for the most part along racial lines. Political leaders openly referred to the Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese as these terms relate to the identity of Guyanese people.

Although this racial identification is usually intensified around election time, it could also, in a country with such a small population, affect racial harmony, social equity, or indeed national development in the long term. In order to engender a greater sense of nationhood regardless of race, the Government of Guyana should consider the establishment of a commission on race relations to explore ways to build a more cohesive society that is better equipped to overcome ethnic tensions to achieve national goals.

CHAPTER X
Appendices