

# **Chapter 5**

## **Voting, Counting and Tabulation**

### **Background**

On Monday 28 November 2011 National and Regional elections took place in 2,096 Polling Stations across the ten Regions of Guyana. Many Polling Stations were grouped together in Polling Places, such as in schools. The 2,096 Polling Stations were located in a total of 933 Polling Places. The number of voters per Polling Station was set at a maximum of 400.

A single sheet ballot was used for the election, but it was for both election types. The ballot was perforated for later separation for the count. The ballot for National elections was on the top section and the ballot for the Regional elections on the bottom section. The two sections were different colours.

Polling took place from 06.00 hours to 18.00 hours. Polling Stations were supposed to have a 200 yard zone established, indicating an area within which no campaign materials were supposed to be present and voters were to be free of any undue influence.

Polling Stations were run by a Presiding Officer, who was supported by an Assistant Presiding Officer, two Poll Clerks and a Ballot Clerk. Where there was more than one Polling Station at a Polling Place then there was an Information Poll Clerk to provide advice as required to voters on the correct location of their respective Polling Station.

Proxy voting is provided for in the law, but persons requiring this must have registered in advance and received the appropriate certificate. Persons on election duty, such as election officials, could apply for a Certificate of Employment, which allowed them to vote where they worked on election day as opposed to where they were registered to vote.

There were two forms of the voters' list used in the Polling Station. One contained details of the voter but had no photo. There were multiple copies of this and Poll Clerks and Party Agents all had copies. The second version was a fully detailed list with photos of the voters. There were two copies of this, one used by polling staff and the other shared between Party Agents.

Each party putting up a list of candidates was also allowed to have an accredited Party Agent present. In addition there were national and international observers accredited to be present. Media were not allowed to be present inside Polling Stations. A security officer was stationed at each Polling Station.

Disciplined forces (army, police and prison officers) voted on Monday 21 November 2011. Their votes were held securely by GECOM and were later dispatched to designated Polling Stations to be mixed in with the votes cast on 28 November 2011.

## **Key Procedures for Opening and Voting**

The stated procedures for opening and voting are as follows:

Prior to opening, the Presiding Officer ensures the proper layout of the Polling Station. Each Polling Station has a six-digit security number, which is to be stamped on the reverse of each ballot to validate it. This is determined prior to opening by the drawing of lots by polling staff. The ballot boxes are sealed and polling commences.

Upon arrival at a polling station each voter presents their Identification Card (ID) and their name is checked on the List. ID can be in the form of a National ID Card or a Passport. In cases where a voter has neither form of ID but they are on the voters' list and can be identified by virtue of their photograph on the list then they are asked to swear an oath of identity and thereafter allowed to vote.

**The voters' fingers are checked for ink and so long as their identity has been satisfactorily determined and they do not have ink on their fingers they are allowed to vote.** The name and ID number is called out. The List is marked to indicate the person has participated and they are then handed a ballot and instructed on the modalities for marking the paper and for folding it. The ballot is then stamped on the reverse with the six-digit number, once on the top and once on the bottom, for the two ballot types.

The voter is then directed to the voting booth and he/she marks the ballot in secret and folds the ballot. The voter then approaches the ballot clerk and shows the folded ballot with the six-digit number visible. The voter then dips their right index finger into the ink and places their ballot in the box. The voter then leaves the Polling Station.

If a voter requires assistance due to being blind or incapacitated they can be helped by a person of their choice. But the person assisting has to be a registered voter from that Polling Station and can only help a maximum of two persons during the day. In such a case, both the voter and the person assisting have to swear oaths that the request is legitimate. Alternatively, the Presiding Officer can assist the voter.

If a voter spoils their ballot they can request a replacement and the spoiled ballot is suitably marked and placed in an envelope for spoiled ballots. But there is a maximum of two replacement ballots per voter.

## **Assessment of Opening and Voting**

Overall Commonwealth Observers reported extremely positively on the opening and voting procedures and concluded that voters were free to express their will. In virtually all cases observed, polling officials worked diligently and methodically to process voters, abiding by the stipulated procedures. The process was transparent and Party Agents, who were present in all observed stations, and observers were able to carefully follow things.

Observers from the local Electoral Assistance Bureau (EAB) were present in many Polling Stations and played an important role as the major national observer team. But it was noted that they lacked resources in some areas.

Commonwealth teams noted that the majority of polling station officials were women. Security at polling stations was visible and effective but not intrusive. Where any problems were encountered, Returning Officers responded to resolve issues. For instance, in one area

the Returning Officer had to provide permission for AFC Agents to be present even though the party had not completed proper paper work in time.

The ID of voters was carefully checked. In cases where there was no such ID provided then an oath was administered as per the regulations. The secrecy of the vote was upheld and voters were inked after having voted. Observers did note that the ink used took some time to dry and darken, and that initially it was not always evident on the finger. But it was the case that after 30-60 minutes after it had dried it provided a clear mark.

The vast majority of persons arriving at each station were found on the list. However, it was also evident that some persons did have difficulty in finding the Polling Station at which they were registered. This may have been due to a lack of familiarity as to which polling station was the right one for them, or it may have been due to their names being absent from the list. For instance it was observed in one case that a wife was on the list but her husband was not. Polling officials were not really in a position to offer concrete advice to affected persons apart from telling them to try a nearby Polling Station. This problem may reflect that not enough people engaged in the earlier public verification exercise of the voter register, or that they had not checked their names when the lists were posted outside Polling Stations prior to the election.

Some of the other issues and isolated incidents observed were:

- There were a few incidents in Georgetown on the day of the election. At a Polling Station in Lodge, a senior PPP/C official caused an incident when he attempted to enter a Polling Station to replace the Party Agent. He was informed by the Presiding Officer that he was not entitled to do so as he did not have the required certificate. A stand-off ensued and the police were called. In Tucville there was some tension when a crowd gathered in the evening outside a Polling Station; the police were called and the incident soon dissipated.
- A couple of days before the election GECOM had informed parties that their Agents would not be given a Certificate of Employment to vote where they were working on election day. Apparently, while not provided for in the law, such a practice had been allowed in the past. It seemed that the change in practice had not been well transmitted through party structures and did cause parties some confusion on election day.
- In some Regions it was observed that the **'patriotic wall'** (photos of the President, Prime Minister and Minister of Education) in schools was still up in polling stations. In Bartica, the photos were up on the walls in the morning but an instruction was given and the photos were eventually removed as they should have been earlier.
- In Region 3, a GECOM official reported to a Commonwealth team that earlier in the day a PPP/C supporter had been in front of the station pretending to be a GECOM official and directing Afro-Guyanese voters away from the Polling Station. The police had arrested the individual. (See Region 3 report below for details.)

## **Key Procedures for the Count**

The stated procedures for the count are as follows:

Voting finishes at 18.00 hours, but any persons waiting to vote at that time shall be allowed to do so. Following the close of polling the room is re-arranged for the count.

Prior to counting the ballots in the box polling officials have to note down the figures for spoiled ballots, tendered ballots and unused ballots. They will also identify the number of ballots received and the number of voters having participated. Following this they are to open the ballot box and count and record the total number of ballots in the box.

Ballots are then sorted into those for the National Assembly and those for the Regional Council elections, by tearing the perforation and separating the two election types. Starting with the national elections ballots are then picked up individually and identified as to which party the vote is cast for. The vote is called out and shown to those present. Polling officials and Party Agents all record each vote on a tally sheet, which the polling station official provides. The vote totals for each party list are determined and recorded. This is then repeated for the Regional Council elections. Following completion of the count a Statement of Poll (SoP) is completed, which represents the key source document for the verified results. Each Party Agent can receive a copy of the SoP and a copy is also posted publicly at the site of the Polling Station.

At the completion of the counting process polling officials have to complete a whole series of forms and all materials are then packed up. Deputy Returning Officers come round to collect the results from each Polling Station. The results in the form of the SoP are delivered to the Returning Officer and copies are also sent directly to the Chief Election Officer in Georgetown. The ballot boxes, containing the ballots, are sealed and stored at a local storage facility.

## **Assessment of Counting**

During the vote count, officials again worked hard and in a transparent manner, with Party Agents able to closely follow the process and able to receive a copy of the respective Statements of Poll. National and international observers were also present in many instances. The counting process is quite drawn out, with each ballot shown to the Agents to confirm which party has been selected. Questions over the validity of any ballot were discussed between officials and agents and agreement was usually reached (final results issued by GECOM indicate that the number of invalid ballots was relatively low).

While officials worked diligently to conduct the count, there was a slightly lower level of familiarity with how to proceed compared to the voting. This may somewhat account for the slow pace of the count. But ultimately officials worked hard to do it correctly and Party Agents signed off on the Statement of Poll in those places observed. The Statement of Poll was also posted for public scrutiny.

## **Overview of the Countrywide Observation**

Commonwealth teams reported from eight of the country's ten Regions:

### ***Region 2***

- Female officials outnumbered male officials to a ratio of 8:1 in polling stations visited.
- A mapping of the District showing the polling stations, Deputy Returning Office and the distances in time between polling venues and the GECOM Centre was a very helpful tool provided by the Returning Officer
- Most of the polling stations were located in schools, which provided for space for polling. A few private business places were used for polling. The polling stations were well organized and easily accessible in the area
- Security in the area was well organised at each polling station and was free of any disturbances.
- Women were well represented in the elections though youth voters were less evident.
- Not all GECOM staff and Party Agents had the Certificate of Employment to vote where they were assigned. Even those with the Certificate were not always clear that they could have voted in the station assigned. Most opted to go to their area of voting with the certificate using it as a priority document to speed up their process.

### ***Region 3***

- The polling and count was smooth, orderly and well conducted in the Region, with procedures meticulously followed.
- In many polling stations there were a few cases of voters turned away due to not being found on the relevant roll, and there was some inconsistency in the advice given to these voters. A copy of the full regional roll available for reference at each polling place, or a consistent practice of referring voters to the GECOM hotline, would assist in ensuring that all voters can easily verify their registration details.
- In one polling place (La Grange Primary School, West Bank Demerara) a polling official reported that earlier in the day, a party supporter outside the gate had been turning away supporters of other parties, telling them (untruthfully) that they were not on the roll. We were told that the police intervened and detained the culprit, and that at least some of the affected persons returned later to vote.

### ***Region 4***

- GECOM polling staff were consistent and professional in implementing polling procedures on election day.
- Most voters turned out to vote in the early hours of the morning and the rest trickled in towards the end of the process.
- Polling stations located upstairs on the first floor of buildings were difficult to access by physically incapacitated voters.

### ***Region 5***

- Polling commenced on time at 06.00 hours, at the polling stations observed at the start. The polling officials (the vast majority of whom were women) observed proper procedure at the start and generally throughout the vote. The polling stations were generally accessible, however, in a few areas where the upper floors were accessed via long flights of steps, some of the older voters appeared to have had tremendous difficulty.

- There were long queues at the commencement of the poll, but the electors were orderly, patient and efficiently processed. However, many were not clear on the procedure for voting. The polling officials were quite helpful and knowledgeable.
- At the start of the poll, only PPP/C and APNU agents were noted and the team was informed that AFC alleged that its agents were being denied access to the polling stations. The Returning Officer had previously advised that AFC had failed to provide its list of agents by the required deadline. The situation was however later resolved and AFC agents were noted at all polling stations visited after 12 pm. All polling stations visited had stationary EAB observers.
- The count and tabulation were efficiently conducted, though laborious and evidently taxing for already overworked officials. The count was observed and participated in by agents of PPP/C, APNU and AFC, as well as EAB observers, and there was consensus among the participants as to the results.

### ***Region 6***

- People in the streets appeared relaxed, moving around town normally and without any apparent fear. At the 25 Polling Places that were visited during the voting period it was clear that this lack of anxiety was confirmed by the evident professionalism, dedication and encouragement of the Polling staff. The fact that the same system and competence was evident everywhere showed that the staff had been very well trained.
- The voters were treated with real courtesy by the staff with support being given to elderly and disabled voters.
- The Party agents behaved impeccably and showed no antagonism towards each other. Outside, the police were alert but quiet and helpful and the queues patient and cheerful.
- Across the 25 polling stations six names were reported as not found on the official list. Otherwise no voter complaint about the polling process was apparent. One person with no ID card was allowed to vote under oath.
- The counting process at an observed Polling Station was laborious but meticulously executed. Two ballot papers were rejected and displayed – one unmarked and the other spoiled.
- It was encouraging to find that domestic observers from the EAB (Election Assistance Bureau) were present at almost every Polling Station reflecting a clear interest in the country in democratic elections.

### ***Region 7***

- The size and difficulty of travel within Region 7 necessitated the despatch of ballot boxes as much as 18 hours before the opening of the poll.
- Three polling stations were relocated a couple of days before the election and a few voters complained about their inability to find their polling stations and the lack of knowledge of the means to locate it.
- Voter turnout peaked at the opening of polls and largely tapered out to an infrequent trickle until the close of the poll. (Final voter turnout was 61.78%.)
- Some electors and party agents questioned the efficacy of the maintenance of the patriotic wall (photos of the President, Prime Minister and the Minister of Education) within polling stations sited in schools. One party agent objected to the wall on the ground that it suggested support for the ruling party to be a patriotic duty. GECOM swiftly took heed of the complaints and re-issued a directive that the photos should be taken down or covered.

- Campaign posters were visible within the 200-yard proximity limit of some polling stations. GECOM responded to complaints and the posters were all removed within 4 hours of the opening of polls.

### ***Region 9***

- Polling stations opened on time and voting was conducted in an orderly fashion and in accordance with legal requirements at all stations visited. Party Agents and EAB observers were generally present.
- Some voters were confused by the method necessary to fold completed ballot papers and had to make several attempts to re-fold the paper so the six-digit station number showed properly.
- At a small number of polling stations there was confusion early in the day concerning the authority of official letters or cards under which party agents would be allowed inside. Although the Returning Officer quickly made the requirements clear and ensured all party agents were allowed into the stations, some representatives were not able to observe the opening of the polls.
- The counting process at the polling stations observed was smooth and transparent, and was conducted in the presence of all party agents and EAB observers. There were no complaints about the counting process, although electoral and party officials expressed exhaustion by the time the count was underway; most appeared to have worked straight through from 5 a.m. until the count was complete after 10 p.m.
- Statements of poll were promptly posted publicly and sealed ballot boxes were sent to the returning office quickly where possible. Unofficial results were transmitted from the most remote areas to the returning offices via radio or telephone before they began the hours- or days-long journey to the returning office.

### ***Region 10***

- Preparations for the election prior to polling day were completed in a very orderly way, with many of the ballot boxes having to be dispatched to distant regions up to 2 days prior to polling day.
- Polling day was peaceful and orderly and conducted in a very professional manner, although sometimes procedures seemed very slow and cumbersome.
- In many booths, the polling officials were all women, and in others, the overwhelming majority were women.
- There were people waiting in line at the opening of the polls and a vast majority of eligible voters cast their ballots in the first-few hours.
- After the close of the poll, the preparation for the count of the 99 ballot papers in the polling station observed was excruciatingly slow, with the commencement of the count almost 1¾ hours after close.
- **Based on the team's observation and other reports received, Region 10 was free of any incidents of concern and conducted in a very peaceful environment overall.**

## **The Tabulation and Results Process**

As stated earlier, the process for delivering results in Guyana from Polling Station to Returning Officer to Chief Election Officer is a manual one, with Statements of Poll physically delivered. There is no parallel transmission electronically or through texting or by any other means. Given the remote nature of some of the Regions of Guyana this can be a challenge and inevitably slowed down the tabulation in affected areas.

Once the Returning Officer received the Statements of Poll a Region-wide tabulation was conducted. At the same time the Chief Election Officer, who also receives copies of each

Statement of Poll, also tabulates. However, the official tabulation at the national level is only done once the Chief Election Officer receives the official tabulation and Statements of Poll from the Returning Officer. Further, at GECOM the Commissioners were also individually checking and verifying the Statements of Poll and initialling them prior to them being processed and entered into the system. Only then could the information be transmitted to the Media Centre to provide updates to the nation.

As a consequence, in spite of the fact that the Chairperson had earlier indicated that the final results would not be out until two to three days after the election, there was some anxiety among the public about the apparently slow nature of the publicly announced results. GECOM maintained that such a multi-layered and rigorous system was necessary to ensure accuracy and accountability. While accuracy in the results is vital, as it is in every election, it seems that the post-election climate in Guyana clearly cannot tolerate waiting so many days, given that it leads to such tension and discontent.

During the tabulation process the PPP/C called for recounts of results from 30 Polling Stations in Region 3 and 48 in Region 4. They had submitted the request prior to noon on the day after the election as provided for in the Act. The basis of the request was linked, in part, to a claim that their Agent had not been present during the count in some Polling Stations. This caused some consternation on behalf of the opposition. In the event, it was only the rejected or questionable ballots which were reconsidered. In Region 3 this was done on the evening of 29 November 2011. In Region 4 it was started on the afternoon of 30 November 2011, but PPP/C quickly dropped the demand once it became clear there were no significant problems.

The final results were announced by the Chief Election Officer at a news briefing on the afternoon of Thursday 1 December 2011.

The final vote totals were as follows:

APNU	139,678	40.8%
AFC	35,333	10.3%
PPP/C	166,340	48.6%
TUF	885	0.2%
Total Turnout	346,717	72.9%
Invalid Votes	4,481	1.29%
Valid Votes	342,236	

Seats won for the 65-member National Assembly were as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	National Top Up	Overall Total
<b>APNU</b>	1	-	1	4	1	-	1	-	-	2	10	16	26
<b>AFC</b>	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	5	7
<b>PPP/C</b>	1	2	2	3	1	2	1	-	1	-	13	19	32

By virtue of the fact that the PPP/C won the most seats in the National Assembly, Mr Donald Ramotar was announced as the new President. He was sworn in on Saturday 3 December.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- In order to ensure that voters have access to timely and accurate information on election day to identify their respective polling stations, a Region-wide copy of the voters' list could be provided to each polling place, so that an official could accurately re-direct any voter not knowing their place of poll.
- Accuracy in the tabulation process is critical. It is equally clear that the process is also time sensitive. GECOM should, in consultation with stakeholders, look into means by which the process can be streamlined in order to speed it up, while maintaining accuracy, transparency and accountability.
- The Electoral Assistance Bureau fulfils an important function in observing the voter registration and voting processes. However the organisation appears to be under-resourced. It is important that it receives adequate resources to fully play its role.
- Polling staff work extremely long hours on the day of the election, and the level of tiredness at the end of the process may partly account for the slow pace of the vote count in the Polling Stations. A relief system could be developed, enabling Presiding Officers in particular to have a short break in the course of the day.