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CARTER CENTER



*Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope.*

**GUYANA GENERAL ELECTION PRELIMINARY STATEMENT  
SEPTEMBER 3, 2025**

*The Carter Center election observation mission has been in Guyana since late June following an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The mission is led by Jason Carter, chairperson of The Carter Center Board of Trustees and grandson of the late U.S. President Jimmy Carter. On election day, 47 observers from 21 countries visited 234 polling stations across Guyana's 10 regions to observe voting and counting. Carter Center observers continue to assess the conclusion of counting and vote tabulation and will remain in Guyana to observe the postelection environment. All assessments are made in accordance with international standards for elections, and the observation mission was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.*

***This statement is preliminary; a final report will be published after the end of the electoral process.***

**STATEMENT OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

On Sept. 1, 2025, Guyanese citizens cast their ballots in elections to select the nation's next government. Carter Center observers visited 234 polling stations at 204 polling places in all 10 electoral districts on election day and reported that voters peacefully exercised their rights. In addition, Carter Center observers visited all 17 tabulation centers and will continue to monitor tabulation processes in the days ahead.

This is the sixth election that The Carter Center has observed in Guyana. And again, we congratulate the people of Guyana for the calm and quiet dignity with which they exercised their right to choose their leaders on election day. The 2025 election is the first since the traumatic experiences of 2020, and the nation faced important choices about its future and the use of its newfound economic wealth. While the campaign was at times fractious, the Guyanese people demonstrated that they can have lively rallies and impassioned debate while maintaining a peaceful election environment.

Carter Center observers across the country reported that polling staff, party agents, and officials from the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) carried out their duties with integrity and professionalism. Their efforts deserve recognition and appreciation. All Guyanese can take pride in how election day unfolded.

The Carter Center issued a statement on Aug. 19 that addressed several issues from the preelection period, including the size of the voter list, the lack of a level playing field for some aspects of the campaign, and the right to political participation. These and other matters are discussed further here and will be the subject of a comprehensive final report.

The final days before the election saw a court case about ballot access, a request from government-appointed election commissioners to change polling locations, a walkout of opposition-appointed commissioners from a GECOM meeting, and some racially charged and incendiary rhetoric by party officials and leaders. Nevertheless, the final political rallies took place in an atmosphere of hope and celebration.

On election day, all polling stations visited by Carter Center observers opened on time in a calm atmosphere, with some voters queued in long lines to cast their votes. Our observers rated the conduct of procedures positively at every station we visited, with no significant irregularities reported. The Carter Center is aware that as the day progressed, some on social media expressed concerns about citizens of other Commonwealth countries showing up to vote. Guyana's electoral laws generously permit Commonwealth citizens who reside in the country for a year to register to vote in national elections. This is an area that the new parliament may want to revisit.

There are persistent questions about the size and integrity of the voter list in Guyana, as the Center noted in its preelection statement. It is imperative for GECOM to implement procedures for removing voters who have died within Guyana using the new provisions under the law. GECOM should also look to international experience for removing electors who have died overseas. GECOM also could consider options for an independent test of the voter list before the next election, which could help identify priorities for future updates and increase confidence.

The Carter Center welcomes the establishment of the Constitutional Reform Commission during the last parliament and encourages future commissioners to engage with the Guyanese people on ways to reform the election system, create an independent and less political election commission, and strengthen checks and balances in government. Reforms should be in place at least two years before the next election.

The enormous economic gains that Guyana is experiencing from oil offer both promise and peril. It is critical for the next national assembly to take up further constitutional and legal reforms to protect and strengthen Guyana's democracy and elections. The Carter Center urges Guyana's leaders to ensure greater citizen access to public information, to reform the campaign finance system, and to work to provide a more level playing field for all who vie for the privilege of representing the Guyanese people.

The Carter Center notes that at the time of publication of this statement, tabulation is being finalized. GECOM is implementing a new tabulation process for these elections. Carter Center observers have assessed the process so far positively and remain deployed to observe and assess this important component of the electoral process.

### ***ELECTION ADMINISTRATION***

A critical factor in enhancing the transparency of an electoral process and facilitating citizens' active participation is an independent and impartial election management body. A transparent, accountable, and professional body is regarded as an effective means of ensuring that elections meet domestic and international obligations. The body should provide accountable, efficient, and effective public administration of elections and should ensure that the electoral process complies with Guyana's national laws as well as its regional and international obligations for democratic elections and human rights.<sup>1</sup>

*Guyana Elections Commission structure.* GECOM is a constitutional body in Guyana composed of two parts: a secretariat of professional staff led by a CEO and Deputy CEO, and a policy-setting and decision-making commission composed of six commissioners and one chairperson. Unfortunately, the constitution does not explicitly establish the commission as an independent body. Based on the outdated Carter-Price formula, the chairperson is selected based on a list of persons "not unacceptable" to the president that is submitted by the leader of opposition. The current chairperson was appointed prior to the 2020 election. Three commissioners are nominated by the governing party and three by the opposition. In practice, these commissioners have been very closely aligned with Guyana's two historically dominant, ethnically based political parties.

Guyana's polarized political environment and deep lack of trust between parties, exacerbated by the 2020 election, limited the effectiveness of the commission. The commission struggled to reach consensus decisions, even on minor matters, which at times led to gridlock and hampered GECOM's ability to improve its operations. Many significant initiatives to enhance the administration of elections have faced obstacles because of the persistent polarization of the commissioners.

*Lack of access to, and representation in, GECOM.* In addition to the problems of gridlock, polarization, and dominant political party control, another important consequence of the current structure of GECOM is that most political parties are effectively left out of the process. While six parties ultimately registered to compete in the elections, only the two historically dominant parties have representation in the elections commission. Commissioners are perceived as acting as representatives of their parties rather than working to ensure the rights and interests of all stakeholders. This leaves other parties without equal access to information about the electoral process and no voice in decisions affecting the process. In short, the structure of GECOM contributes to a lack of trust among some of the political parties and the broader public, signaling that elections are the exclusive purview of politicians and not the Guyanese people.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, General Comment 25, para. 20.

*Depoliticization of GECOM.* The Carter Center has long recommended that Guyana reform GECOM's structure to increase its independence, effectiveness, and professionalism, and to reduce the direct influence of Guyana's two leading political parties. The Carter Center is encouraged by the establishment of a Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC) and is hopeful that the CRC will resume its work immediately and consider alternative independent and depoliticized structures for the country's election management body.

*Transparency and communication.* Meetings of the commissioners are closed to the public and observers, and there is no public record of the agenda, minutes, or votes and decisions taken. This creates a vacuum that generates suspicion and can be filled with disinformation.<sup>2</sup> Despite some notable improvements, the administration of the 2025 election was characterized by deficits of communication and transparency that undermined public confidence in the institution and its work.

The Carter Center notes that there have been some positive changes in communication and information sharing, including an increase in the frequency of press releases and the introduction of weekly press conferences in the month before election day, as well as an improved website that made key information accessible to the public. The website includes a searchable version of the Official List of Electors, a "find my polling station" tool, key legal documents, and training manuals for polling station staff and others. The Carter Center commends these changes and recommends they be maintained for future elections.

*Electoral procedures.* Well in advance of the election, GECOM made two training manuals available to the public: one for presiding officers and polling day officials that summarized election day procedures, and one for returning officers (ROs) and supernumerary returning officers (SROs). These manuals provided helpful information and represented an important improvement in GECOM's public information efforts.

Unfortunately, tabulation procedures were not widely publicized in advance of the election in a form that made the important innovations in the process intelligible to the general public. Following the Carter Center's Aug. 19 preelection statement, which recommended that GECOM publicly release tabulation procedures, GECOM CEO Vishnu Persaud held a press conference in which he discussed the process. While this was helpful, GECOM should issue complete written polling and tabulation procedures for future elections to ensure that staff are well trained and can implement the process consistently across the country — and so that political parties and members of the public are familiar with the process.

*Electoral preparations.* Preparations for elections were conducted in an orderly and timely fashion, even though the secretariat's workplan compressed the timeline.

Throughout the preelection period, tensions between Guyana's leading political parties remained high and polarized, severely hampering the effectiveness of GECOM. On Aug. 28, opposition-appointed commissioners walked out of a meeting in protest of a late call to change some polling

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<sup>2</sup> The law provides that no evidence of GECOM's internal deliberations or communications between its members is admissible in court. Commission members have used this provision to justify closed-door meetings and not publishing its decisions.

locations. Decisions prohibiting voters from taking cell phones into polling booths were adopted late.

Ballots were printed in Canada and arrived in Guyana in adequate time, and the procurement of other sensitive materials was conducted successfully, as was the packing and distribution of all materials. Polling staff, including presiding officers, were recruited in sufficient numbers and trained on time. Polling places were identified on time. Accreditation of important stakeholders, including the media and observers, went smoothly. Public and voter information efforts were reportedly conducted throughout the 10 regions, but the Center was unable to observe the breadth and depth of those efforts.

*Political party agents.* Several of the smaller and new political parties were unable to meet the deadline for registering their party agents with returning officers. This required GECOM to consider whether to extend the deadline for AFC, ALP, FGM, and WIN, which it quickly did by unanimous decision on Aug. 30. The Carter Center commended GECOM for this decision, highlighting that the presence of political party agents at the polling place for voting and counting on election day is fundamental to the election process and critical to transparency.

#### ***ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION***

Access to information is a critical means of ensuring informed public participation, transparency, and accountability in the electoral process. Elections conducted in the absence of adequate public access to information, including key elements of the electoral process, undermine their integrity. A well-informed electorate is essential to any electoral process and is a fundamental building block of a meaningful democracy.<sup>3</sup>

In its Aug. 19 preelection statement, The Carter Center noted several shortcomings that undermine public access to election-relevant information, such as the failure to publish the census, the absence of campaign and party finance data, limited information around GECOM decision-making, and obstacles faced by some media outlets and citizens in obtaining public information. The U.N. Human Rights Committee, in its May 2024 report, noted concerns that the commissioner of information does not respond to all requests and urged Guyana to ensure that the right of access to information is effectively exercised.

#### ***VOTING***

The quality of voting operations on election day is crucial to determining the degree to which an election is consistent with its democratic obligations.<sup>4</sup> On the eve of the election, GECOM Chairperson Justice Claudette Singh issued a welcome public statement, noting that “elections are

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<sup>3</sup> U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 25(b) U.N. Human Rights Council, General Comment 25, para. 11.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 25 (b); United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment 25, para. 21; United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21 (3); Inter-Parliamentary Union Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, Article 2 (6).

regarded as the cornerstone of our democracy, a time for the expression of the people's will, and this expression must occur in an atmosphere free from intimidation, misinformation, and unrest." She went on to write, "Let us all, therefore, work together to ensure that the September 1, 2025, General and Regional Elections are a testament to Guyana's democratic maturity and a beacon of peace and stability."<sup>5</sup>

On Sept. 1, voting took place at 2,790 polling stations in 1,140 polling places across the country, with a maximum of 400 voters per station.<sup>6</sup>

Carter Center observers reported that citizens across Guyana queued peacefully to cast their votes. On election day, observers from the Center visited 234 polling stations across all 10 regions, representing approximately 8 percent of the total — providing a substantial level of observation coverage. They observed all key phases of the process, including opening, voting, closing, and counting procedures. Overall, the atmosphere throughout the day was described as calm and orderly. Observers rated the conduct of procedures positively at every station visited, with no significant irregularities reported. In most polling stations observed, polling staff appeared well-trained and demonstrated reasonable or better knowledge of the voting process. Voting proceeded smoothly, with minimal technical issues in the stations observed, providing an important pillar supporting election integrity.

Observers reported a strong presence of political party agents at polling stations visited, with PPP/C at 97%, APNU at 90%, WIN at 85%, AFC at 7%, FGM at 3%, and ALP at 2%. No objections were made to presiding officers at 97% of stations observed.

*Opening.* Ninety-four percent of polling stations visited by Carter Center observers opened on time. Opening was calm and conducted according to procedure in almost all polling stations observed. All material was present and correct in 92% of the polling stations visited. Carter Center observers reported high turnout at the start of the day, with electors queuing before opening of the polls. Carter Center observers also reported that opening procedures were followed fully or adequately in all stations observed.

*Polling.* The Carter Center observed voting at 234 polling stations across Guyana's 10 regions. Seventy-four percent of polling stations visited by Carter Center observers were in urban areas and 26% in rural areas.

Overall, polling stations were evaluated as calm, efficient, and peaceful. Voter identification, ballot issuing, inking, and other voting procedures were followed to a substantial degree in observed stations. Party agents were present in 99% of the polling stations visited. Procedures were followed fully or adequately in almost all polling stations visited. Unfortunately, domestic observers were noted at very few polling stations.

*Closing.* The Carter Center observed the closing of the polls at 17 stations. All polling stations visited closed on time and all voters in the queue at 6 p.m. were allowed to cast their ballot, as

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<sup>5</sup> GECOM Office of the Chairman. Statement from Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission, Justice of Appeal (Ret'd) Claudette Singh. Aug. 31, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> A number of polling stations did exceed this ceiling, but none by more than 420 voters.

required by law. Overall, the observer teams concluded that closing procedures were mostly or always followed. The electoral atmosphere at the closing was generally described as calm. Party agents were present in all observed polling stations, and no team reported any case of their interference.

*Disciplined Services Voting (DSV).* On Friday, Aug. 22, members of Guyana's disciplined services had the opportunity to cast their ballots at over 80 polling locations across the country. The practice allows for members of Guyana's disciplined services, who will be serving the country on election day, to cast their ballots in secret and in person. The ballots are stored in secure envelopes and sorted and distributed to some of Guyana's 2,790 polling stations. On election day, the ballots of Guyana's disciplined services are "intermixed" with other ballots, added to ballot boxes, and counted along with other ballots at the end of election day.<sup>7</sup> The practice allows members of the disciplined services to vote in person and in secret and, importantly, ensures that any overall political leaning of the disciplined forces remains unknown, as their ballots are not disclosed as a block.

The Carter Center observed DSV on Aug. 22, including the sorting of ballots the following day, and found the process to be well administered.

*Proxy voting.* Certain voters on the Official List of Electors (OLE) are allowed to vote by proxy, including election officials working on election day, candidates, transport and harbors department workers, people with disabilities, and members of the disciplined forces who did not vote on the day set aside for them to vote in person. Applications for proxy voting are submitted to ROs and were due by Aug. 11. The Carter Center observed seven instances of proxy voting (3% of observations); polling staff conducted this aspect of the process in accordance with law.

## **COUNTING**

The counting process should be transparent and easily verifiable. Following the close of polls on Sept. 1, Carter Center observers continued to observe the polling, counting, and tabulation of results at all levels. The Carter Center observed counting in 17 polling stations across the country. Generally, Carter Center observers reported that, during counting, the atmosphere was "reasonable" or "very good" in a significant majority of locations observed. However, lack of command of procedures slowed the process in some. The counting of ballots, ballot sorting, and reconciliation adhered to regulations either fully or adequately in most polling stations visited, although observers did report some confusion with ballot counting procedures. Representatives of the two biggest parties were present in almost all polling stations observed (PPP/C at all and APNU at all but one).

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<sup>7</sup> GECOM's DCEO told The Carter Center that the commission tries to intermix no more than 25 ballots at a given polling station and looks for polling stations with between 50% and 75% of the maximum number of 400 voters so as not to cause turnout to exceed that threshold.

## ***TABULATION***

The Carter Center observed the tabulation process in all centers. Observers assessed the implementation of tabulation procedures as “reasonable” or “very good” in all tabulation centers and assessed the environment as “reasonable” or “very good” in 96% of all tabulation observations.

The statements of poll (SoPs) began appearing on GECOM’s website before midnight on election day. Although the system was newly introduced, it functioned efficiently, with ROs and SROs uploading electronic copies of the SoPs — displayed on a screen to all present — immediately upon receipt. Once all SoPs were uploaded, the ROs and SROs commenced compiling district and subdistrict tabulation forms, displaying each SoP a second time as they recorded the results. In some centers, the process began late because of the delayed submission of SoPs (for example, in Region 6, the display of SoPs and compilation of results at the subdistrict level started as late as 5:30 p.m. on Sept. 2). The SoPs were displayed for tabulation purposes, and party agents were able to follow the process. Observers witnessed party agents raising objections at 24% of tabulation centers.

The new provisions require that SoPs be uploaded immediately upon receipt, while also stipulating that tabulation may only begin once all SoPs have been received. As a result, ROs/SROs uploaded SoPs through the night and late into the morning after election day, which delayed the start of tabulation. Consequently, as described above, GECOM staff were required both to upload the statements and display them again for tabulation, effectively doubling their workload, placing further strain on already exhausted staff, and delaying the ascertainment of the result.

## ***VOTER REGISTRATION***

Voter registration is an important means of ensuring that the right of universal suffrage is guaranteed.<sup>8</sup> The credibility of elections requires a voter register that is complete, accurate, and up to date. In advance of the 2025 election, the quality and accuracy of the voter registry was a primary point of concern for political party leaders and the general public.

*Voter eligibility.* In Guyana, citizens 18 and older are eligible to vote, along with Commonwealth citizens who have resided in Guyana for over one year in advance of an election.<sup>9</sup> The 2022 amendments removed references to residency requirements, in line with the 2019 judgment that held that the constitution does not require residency for general elections. In April 2025, the High Court further ruled that residency is not required for regional elections.<sup>10</sup>

A noteworthy 2021 amendment to the Registration of Births and Deaths Act allows adults who lack a birth certificate to be issued one based on certain documents, including a declaration by a

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<sup>8</sup> ICCPR, Article 25(b); and UNHCR, General Comment 25, para 11.

<sup>9</sup> Eligibility to vote is discussed in a number of areas of Guyana’s constitution, including articles 59 and 159.

<sup>10</sup> For regional elections, the constitution emphasizes that council members should be elected by the persons “residing in the region.” The High Court ruled that this language does not impose a substantive residency requirement but reflects the address declared by the voter at registration for the purposes of voting. While practical and inclusive, there is a need to further refine constitutional and legislative language to ensure consistency in this area.



“person of high standing in the community,” such as a Toshao in Indigenous communities, where lack of documentation has historically been a problem.

*Improvements to the voter registration process, and other areas needing further strengthening.* Following the 2020 election, important changes were made to Guyana’s legal framework for elections to try to respond to past concerns about the voter registry and improve its accuracy.

*Establishment of a true continuous registration system and removal of house-to-house registration.* In past elections, the voter registry was established by visiting homes during a set period of time to register eligible Guyanese. The last complete house-to-house registration was conducted in 2008, and another was started and halted in 2019. Periodic reviews of this register led to it becoming the basis for elections in 2011, 2015, 2020, and now 2025.

Legal amendments made in 2022 explicitly removed house-to-house registration from Guyana’s legal framework and established a system of near-continuous voter registration. The Official List of Electors (OLE) from the 2020 election became the basis for a register that is now regularly updated twice a year to add new registrants. Following these open periods, a Preliminary List of Electors (PLE) is prepared. This PLE is then open for a period of claims and objections during which the public can view the list and request updates. GECOM conducted an abbreviated claims and objections exercise July 16-22, during which the commission received 6,563 claims and four objections.<sup>11</sup> After vetting and processing these changes, GECOM released the OLE on July 30; it was shared on the commission’s website in a searchable format, an important improvement in transparency. The final OLE is valid for six months after it is certified.

*Improvements to remove names of deceased people.* Other legal amendments in 2022 sought to address previous concerns about difficulties in removing the names of dead people from the list. In the past, the names could not be removed from the voter list unless a death certificate was provided.

In response to these concerns and complications in 2020, the 2022 amendments strengthened GECOM’s ability to remove the names of deceased persons from the list by allowing GECOM to act based on a wider range of official documentation, including both death certificates from the General Registry Office (GRO) and quarterly reports of deaths by the commissioner of police and the country’s chief medical officer. While The Carter Center welcomes these recent reforms, they have not been fully implemented. Stakeholders say that the information received via these channels is frequently insufficient to identify voters with full confidence, and the commission has not agreed upon an effective modality to fully operationalize the new provisions. Some deaths, including those that occur overseas or in villages far from the country’s major towns, are never reported to the authorities.

*The 2025 Official List of Electors (OLE).* The final OLE for the 2025 election was released on July 30 and included a total of 757,690 voters — 376,703 men and 380,987 women. This represents an increase of 14.6% over the final OLE used for the 2020 election, which in turn was an increase of 15.5% from the OLE used for the 2015 election.

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<sup>11</sup> All four objections were dismissed.

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>
R1	14,830	18,952	24,453
R2	33,596	37,979	42,596
R3	84,518	100,758	116,875
R4	256,140	285,617	323,437
R5	40,177	44,663	50,796
R6	91,120	99,132	111,554
R7	12,548	14,887	17,846
R8	6,057	7,280	9,192
R9	14,272	17,922	22,481
R10	30,187	33,808	38,460
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>585,727</b>	<b>660,998</b>	<b>757,690</b>

Many of the Carter Center’s interlocutors raised concerns about the size of the OLE, particularly as the previous census, conducted in 2012, estimated the country’s total population at [746,955 people](#). The government conducted a new census in 2022, but the results have yet to be released, further obscuring public understanding and fueling mistrust. After decades in which many Guyanese left seeking opportunities abroad, Guyana now has a large diaspora. A [2024 U.N. survey](#) estimated there may be as many as 470,000 Guyanese living outside the country. Some share of the sizeable Guyanese diaspora is validly registered.

As The Carter Center noted in its Aug. 19 preelection statement, the failure to publish the 2022 census is a regrettable lapse that obscures public understanding of basic population demographics and their potential relation to the size of the voter list. Following the recent court decisions and legislative changes, registered voters cannot be removed from the list on the grounds that they no longer reside in the country. While recent changes to the legal framework have sought to be responsive to past concerns about removal of the deceased, further efforts are required. While many expressed concern about the relative size of the OLE, The Carter Center has not received evidence of inflation of the voter roll.

The next parliament should revisit this issue. It is imperative for GECOM to implement procedures for removing voters who have died within Guyana using the new provisions under the law and explore innovative measures to remove registered voters who have died in the diaspora.

The Center also recommends that GECOM consider an independent test of the voter list before the next election. This could be modeled on the “people test” conducted on the voter list prior to the 1992 election, in which a sample of names was tested to determine the registrant’s current status. This could help increase confidence in the list and identify needs for reform and updates.

## ***LEGAL FRAMEWORK & ELECTORAL SYSTEM***

### ***Legal Framework***

Guyana is party to international and regional instruments that impose obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights standards in the conduct of elections.<sup>12</sup> General and regional elections are primarily governed by the constitution, the Representation of the People Act (RoPA), the National Registration Act (NRA), and the Local Democratic Organs Act. The framework is further supplemented by other laws, including the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act.

The legal framework forms a sufficient basis for the conduct of democratic elections. The Carter Center, in its preelection statement, welcomed the 2022 amendments aimed at improving the transparency of the process, in particular changes aimed at improving the voter registration process as well as improvements to the transparency of the counting and tabulation processes.

However, the legal framework continues to exhibit notable gaps, as it does not comprehensively regulate several key aspects of the electoral process. These include, among other things, the absence of comprehensive and enforceable provisions concerning party and campaign finance, prohibition of the misuse of state resources, media coverage and oversight during election period, and the registration and functioning of political parties. It is unfortunate that the 2022 amendments did not address these longstanding issues, despite repeated recommendations by The Carter Center and other international observers. The reform process thus represented a missed opportunity to bring the legal framework further in line with international standards and electoral best practice. Regrettably, the consolidated single text of RoPA was not available for the public, limiting stakeholders' familiarity with the applicable legal provisions, including among political parties.

Legal certainty is a fundamental component of the rule of law and is essential to the integrity of elections.<sup>13</sup> It demands that electoral laws be clear, accessible, stable, and foreseeable for all stakeholders. Guyana's legal framework contains several inconsistencies<sup>14</sup>, with some sections containing contradictory provisions, resulting in GECOM's inability to implement them.<sup>15</sup>

*Constitutional Reform Commission.* The Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC) was constituted in 2024 with a mandate to review the constitution, including provisions on electoral

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<sup>12</sup> Guyana is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Guyana is also a party to the U.N. Convention against Corruption, and OAS Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. Guyana is not a party to the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention.

<sup>13</sup> ICCPR GC 34, para. 25: "A norm to be characterized as a law, must be formulated with sufficient precision to enable an individual to regulate his or her conduct accordingly and it must be made accessible to the public." See also ICCPR, Article 2(2) A/HRC/RES/19/36, 2012, p. 16: [The Human Rights Council] calls upon states to make continuous efforts to strengthen the rule of law and promote democracy by: (c) "Ensuring that a sufficient degree of legal certainty and predictability is provided in the application of the law, to avoid any arbitrariness."

<sup>14</sup> For example, the law refers to "polling places" and "polling stations" inconsistently.

<sup>15</sup> Section 47 of RoPA requires that non-resident electors' ballot papers be printed in a different color; however, this provision is not implemented, reportedly to protect voter secrecy. Part X of the RoPA is also not applied, owing to uncertainty regarding its implementation. Article 39 and 39A define two different requirements for the ballot papers. Besides that, the framework contains several technical mistakes.

reform, and the composition of GECOM and its jurisdiction. According to the Establishing Act, the commission comprises 10 members nominated by parliamentary parties, 10 by civil society organizations, and a chairperson. Substantive discussions have not yet taken place, and the commission is expected to resume its work after the election. The Center welcomes this initiative and calls on the new parliament and government to ensure that the commission is adequately supported and that its work proceeds in an inclusive, transparent, and timely manner. The Center calls on the CRC to establish a review process that includes civic education and engagement across the country to include broad sectors of the Guyanese public in discussions about the constitution and areas for change. The CRC's work should be completed so that its core recommendations can be fully implemented at least two years before the next general and regional elections.

*Voting of Prisoners.* Concerns also persist about the ability of people in custody to exercise their right to vote. Despite constitutional provisions that disqualify only those convicted of electoral offenses, no legal or procedural framework exists to enable the participation of other prisoners. As a result, some 2,500 prisoners, including pretrial detainees, remain effectively disenfranchised.

### ***Electoral System***

The 2025 general and regional elections were to choose the 65 members of the National Assembly and select members of 10 regional democratic councils, both under the system of proportional representation.

Of the 65 members of the National Assembly, 25 are elected from geographic constituency lists in the 10 regions, while 40 are elected from a national “top-up” list. The president is elected by plurality linked to the national assembly vote. Voters cast a single vote for a political party, which in fact reflects three choices. First, for their geographical constituency list; second, for the national top-up list; and third, for the president. This uncommon variant of proportional representation results in a bizarre arrangement in which not all parties contesting National Assembly elections appear on the ballots in all 10 regions, creating uncertainty for political actors, which in this election led to legal disputes (See Election Dispute Resolution section). This situation places new and smaller parties at a disadvantage, as those unable to nominate candidates in all 10 regions cannot fully translate their countrywide support into seats.

The Center has previously highlighted that the electoral system is neither a “closed list” system nor an “open list” system. The lists of candidates presented by parties to GECOM have an order, but after the election, the party representative (head of list) has full discretion to select the candidates from that list to fill the seats won. As a result, voters do not know which candidates will be allocated seats.

### ***ELECTORAL OBSERVATION***

GECOM accredited 18 groups of observers. In total, there were around 650 local observers, including those from diplomatic missions, and around 200 international observers. Guyana's civil society is weak. While some long-established organizations representing particular constituencies

persevere, most civil society organizations are small, under-resourced, and often engage in partisan behavior. Guyana does not have an organization of respected nonpartisan domestic election observers that has the capacity to deploy countrywide and assess elections with independence and credibility. Creative ways should be found to help support and sustain such capacity.

On election day, Carter Center observers noted local observers at 23 polling stations (10% of the total observed) and international observers at 16 polling stations (7%).

### ***CANDIDATES, PARTIES, AND THE CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT***

*Campaign period.* The Carter Center observed nomination day, which took place on July 14. Six of the seven parties that submitted candidate lists were ultimately approved to contest the election. All of the approved political parties campaigned across the country, although some faced restrictions. The campaign proceeded in a generally peaceful manner, with no major incidents of violence reported. The Center received complaints from parties about delays in police approval for campaign events and noted that the police indicated intent to approve campaign requests quickly.

The Carter Center noted with concern that a presidential candidate had been denied interior airline service for campaign flights because of fear of secondary U.S. sanctions, as well as reports that parties had been denied use of local public areas for campaign meetings. These campaign issues raise concerns about equal application of the rights of freedom of association.

On Aug. 5, most political parties signed a code of conduct developed by Guyana's Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), in which parties committed to peaceful campaigns, and avoidance of hate speech and ethnically divisive rhetoric. Two political parties, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and Forward Guyana Movement (FGM), did not sign the code of conduct.<sup>16</sup>

The Carter Center received allegations from opposition and new parties of an atmosphere of fear among public sector workers, local business owners, and community members who were concerned about losing their jobs or future economic opportunities if they did not display support for the ruling party. Others worried that political parties might pay electors to vote, prompting GECOM to issue a bulletin reminding voters that this is illegal and eventually decided not to allow phones in the polling compartment.

*Misuse of state resources.* The Carter Center received multiple credible allegations from political parties and civil society that the ruling party used state-owned vehicles to campaign and took advantage of public workers in campaign activities. Public officials opened new public buildings and infrastructures in full ruling party regalia, which blurred the line between the state and the party. Social media and news reports also were rife with photographs suggesting this problem. While these actions during openings did not violate the law, they raised concerns about state resources creating undue influence on voters, contrary to the international standards and best practice.

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<sup>16</sup> FGM argued that the code was unenforceable and should cover other institutions such as the police force and election commission.

*Campaign finance.* The legal framework does not provide comprehensive legislation on party and campaign finance. Existing provisions are limited to expenditure ceilings (which require revision), and a requirement that declarations of electoral expenses be submitted to GECOM within 35 days after the declaration of results. The CEO must publish a summary of these reports in the official Gazette, and the reports may be inspected for two years by anyone who pays a fee.

There is no state funding of political parties in Guyana, nor are there regulations on donations, and enforcement of the existing provisions on expenditure reporting is not ensured in practice. While the High Court may impose fines, these provisions have never been applied, and no oversight exists. These gaps in the legal framework contribute to significant inequities between political parties, particularly newly established ones, and limit transparency about the sources and use of campaign funding, contrary to Guyana's international obligations.

Parties conducted fundraising events throughout the course of the election campaign. However, the substantial advantage of the ruling party over its competitors was evident. The Center calls on all parties to provide their financial reports to GECOM to comply with the existing requirements as a step toward greater transparency in campaign finance.

*OFAC sanctions and the right to political participation in Guyana.* In its Aug. 19 preelection statement, The Carter Center noted that Guyanese banks had acted against WIN candidates, party members, and their associates in response to U.S. sanctions imposed on the party leader and presidential candidate in June 2024. The Carter Center has learned that the banks closed the personal accounts of more than 70 WIN candidates and people associated with the party. The Center expressed concern that an excessive response to U.S. sanctions could negatively affect rights of political participation. The Center noted the role of the private sector in safeguarding the democratic rights and freedoms of these individuals.

On Aug. 26, the U.S. embassy asserted that the Guyanese would only face challenges if they engaged in financial transactions directly with a sanctioned individual and that "simply belonging to a party led by a sanctioned individual does not automatically trigger penalties." The Carter Center notes that this additional information was provided very late in the campaign period.

*PPP/C complaint to the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC).* On Wednesday, Aug. 27, the PPP/C submitted a formal complaint to the ERC regarding threats of postelection violence. While the complaint is an active case and was not released publicly in advance of election day, it seems to be related to alleged comments by the leaders of APNU and WIN that could be interpreted as threatening violence should they lose elections they considered to be unfair.

## ***MEDIA ENVIRONMENT***

The media play a vital role in elections by providing voters with the information they need to make informed choices on election day. In Guyana, freedom of expression and press freedom are safeguarded by both the national constitution and international law. The Guyana National Broadcasting Authority (GNBA), established under the Broadcasting Act of 2011, serves as the regulatory body overseeing the media. However, some stakeholders question its impartiality.

There are no specific provisions regulating media conduct during the election period. The only exception in the Broadcasting Act requires that, at election time, broadcast licensees work with political parties and consult with GECOM to allocate airtime to parties. However, this weak provision is not enforced, and no consultations with GECOM on this matter have taken place.

The Carter Center mission did not conduct systematic media monitoring. Nevertheless, it noted reports of state media coverage favoring the ruling party. Some state media representatives reported difficulties in engaging and communicating with opposition parties, while opposition representatives alleged mistrust and rejection by state outlets for the coverage of their campaign events.

### ***PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN***

Women are active and visible in public life in Guyana. The judiciary includes many female magistrates, and the chief magistrate and acting chancellor are women. GECOM's chair is also a woman, but the other six members are men. Some senior management posts at GECOM's secretariat are held by women, and five of 10 SROs are women, but only three of the 10 ROs are women.

Women were highly visible participants in all aspects of election day, constituting 50.28% of registered voters. They also were very active among those engaged in electoral duties. Women composed 85% percent of polling staff in stations observed by The Carter Center, and 82% percent of presiding officers in stations observed were female. Where party agents from the two major political parties were present in stations observed, women made up 78% and 74% of APNU and PPP/C party agents, respectively. Eighty-three percent of WIN's party agents were women in the stations observed by the Center.

*Women candidates.* In the 2025 election, two women ran for president, and there were several women among the prime ministerial running mates. Some women candidates reported being subjected to offensive language and degrading portrayals on social media. By law, female candidates must make up a third of a party's list for the "national top-up" (proportional representation) election, the combined geographic constituencies, and the elections for regional democratic councils. While at least one-third of candidates on all party lists must be women, there is no requirement to seat them.

In future elections, The Carter Center recommends that political parties be required to denote gender on their party lists, and that published party lists include gender information. The Carter Center calls upon GECOM to engage in proper due diligence to ensure that all party lists meet the requirement to have at least one-third women and calls upon GECOM to reject any party list that does not meet this requirement.

## ***PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES***

An inclusive election process requires that all voters can vote, unimpeded by physical barriers at polling stations. Reasonable accommodations should be put in place to ensure that the secrecy of the vote is guaranteed for voters with disabilities.

Regrettably, the secrecy of the vote for people with disabilities is not ensured. These voters may cast their ballot in person (where polling stations are accessible), through proxy voting, or with the assistance of a person of their choice. While the Persons with Disabilities Act mandates that GECOM ensure barrier-free polling stations and adequate arrangements for people with disabilities, these provisions were not implemented.

The majority of polling stations did not afford the elderly or people with physical disabilities independent access. Nor did GECOM provide special measures, such as ramps for wheelchair users or stencils for visually impaired voters, reportedly because of lack of time. Positively, on the initiative of GECOM and in collaboration with the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD), more than 5,000 polling staff received sensitivity training ahead of election day. Special brochures were disseminated to polling officials to guide their interaction, and GECOM reportedly improved voter education advertisements targeting people with disabilities. On election day, 75 of the 234 polling stations that The Carter Center observed were found unsuitable for voters with reduced mobility.

In past elections, GECOM provided tactile ballot guides to ensure the secrecy of the vote for the visually impaired and has also previously procured portable ramps to improve the accessibility of some polling locations. Unfortunately, these and other steps were not implemented in 2025.

## ***PARTICIPATION OF THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND INTERSEX (LGBTI) COMMUNITY***

Guyana's legal framework criminalizes homosexuality, and Guyana remains the only country in the Americas outside of the Caribbean where homosexual acts remain illegal. The Carter Center has recommended that discriminatory legislation be repealed, as it undermines the right of equal participation in public life and recommends that the issue be considered by Guyana's CRC.

Most contesting parties publicly endorsed the rights of LGBTI persons and pledged reforms to ensure equal access to fundamental rights. At a town hall hosted by the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) Guyana, several parties committed to championing the rights of the community. The Carter Center welcomed these initiatives aimed at advancing the enforcement of fundamental rights in Guyana and hopes that all parties will fully support the rights of LGBTI persons in future elections.



## ***PARTICIPATION OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES***

Protecting religious and ethnic minorities is essential to maintaining a democratic society. The right to be free from discrimination and to receive equal treatment under the law must be upheld throughout the electoral process, including during voter registration.<sup>17</sup>

Guyana is home to an estimated 78,000 Indigenous people who reside in approximately 200 villages and communities across the country. Indigenous communities in Guyana have historically been marginalized, both in terms of their geographic isolation and their limited political representation. Some legal framework changes made before these elections sought to increase inclusivity, including making it easier for Toshaos to help people secure birth certificates and accepting information from Toshaos regarding deaths — changes discussed elsewhere in this report.

Issues related to Indigenous peoples featured in most party manifestos, with pledges ranging from improving access to education and health, to addressing land demarcation, to amending the Amerindian Act (2006). Parties campaigned in Indigenous-populated areas. However, according to some interlocutors, some parties lacked the financial resources to effectively conduct outreach because of high transportation costs, while others reported instances of intimidation. In addition, one presidential candidate was denied air services to campaign.

Although no official figures are available, The Carter Center was informed that a portion of the adult Indigenous population remains unregistered to vote, primarily because of the lack of birth certificates, which prevents their inclusion on the voter list. In some villages, voter education remains limited, mostly because of the limited outreach capacity of the radio or broadcasters.

## ***ELECTORAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION***

Electoral dispute resolution and the right to an effective remedy are critical in ensuring the rule of law and protecting any electoral process from bias or fraud.<sup>18</sup> The High Court has exclusive jurisdiction to hear disputes about results, recounts, and candidate qualification — along with all preelection matters — but these must be submitted via postelection petitions within 28 days of the formal publication of results. The law is generous and gives broad legal standing in postelection cases. However, there are no deadlines for rendering decisions, affecting the right to legal remedy.<sup>19</sup>

The law also allows challenges on constitutional grounds, through judicial review, where either the law itself or its implementation is alleged to be inconsistent with the constitution. The decisions of the High Court can be appealed to the Court of Appeal, with the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) serving as Guyana's final appellate court.

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<sup>17</sup> UNGA ICCPR, Article 26.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Center for Human Rights. Human Rights and Elections: A Handbook on the Legal, Technical, and Human Rights Aspects of Elections. United Nations, para. 47, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Reportedly, a 2015 petition is still pending at the High Court.

*Preelection case regarding ballot access.* On Aug. 20, FGM's presidential candidate filed a constitutional challenge with the High Court contesting the exclusion of FGM from ballots in regions where it had not nominated geographical constituency candidates. The application argued that GECOM's practice violates the principles of equal suffrage, nondiscrimination, and proportional representation, and requested that the court order GECOM to include all qualified parties on the ballots nationwide and to postpone elections until such inclusion was ensured. The court held two days of hearings, which were conducted transparently and allowed the parties to present their arguments. On Aug. 29, the court dismissed the case, finding that the applicant failed to show that GECOM restricted the party's participation or violated constitutional rights. It noted that the party itself chose not to contest certain constituencies, and GECOM could not lawfully place it on the ballots in those locations. Although the ruling was issued on the last business day before the election, FGM informed The Carter Center that they filed an appeal with the Court of Appeal on Aug. 30.<sup>20</sup>

In past election observation reports, The Carter Center has commented on the complexity of Guyana's electoral system to elect the members of National Assembly, difficulties in ballot access, and challenges for newer or smaller political parties. In addition, the electoral system has been the subject of legal disputes prior to the elections.<sup>21</sup>

### ***The Carter Center in Guyana***

The Carter Center has worked in Guyana since 1991 to strengthen democracy, support civil society, encourage sustainable development, and reinforce the rule of law. The Carter Center is a recognized leader in the international election observation community and has conducted more than 125 election observation missions globally, including in Guyana in 1992, 2001, 2006, 2015, and 2020. In addition to work on elections, The Carter Center has conducted a range of activities in Guyana, including helping Guyanese articulate a comprehensive vision and development strategy; supporting civil society groups working to advance the status of women, youth, and Amerindians; assisting judicial system reform programs in partnership with the High Court, the chief justice, the Guyana Bar Association, and the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers; facilitating conflict resolution efforts in support of peace and political dialogue; and supporting government, industry, and civil society stakeholders to comply with the requirements of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

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<sup>21</sup> On July 29, the High Court dismissed on the merits two constitutional applications concerning the electoral system. The first contested the absence of a legal basis in the Representation of the People Act for independent candidates and small parties to effectively contest in geographical constituencies, alleging a violation of the rights to stand and to vote under the constitution and Article 25 of the ICCPR. The second challenged the requirement for parties to contest in at least six constituencies and 13 seats, claiming it creates an unreasonable barrier for smaller and regional parties and infringes on the right to political participation and equal representation.