



Organización de los
Estados Americanos

Verbal Report
Electoral Observation Mission
General Elections in Antigua and Barbuda
June 12, 2014

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Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

On February 21, 2014, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States, Jose Miguel Insulza, received a request from the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to observe the 2014 General Elections. On February 25, the Secretary General accepted the invitation and appointed Dr. Rosina Wiltshire, from Trinidad and Tobago, to lead the OAS Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) in the country, and designated Mr. David Alvarez Veloso as Deputy Chief of Mission.

The OAS fielded a gender-balanced team of 16 members from 12 countries. On Election Day, the observers visited 100% of the 164 polling stations distributed in 49 polling districts across the country's 17 Constituencies. This was the second time the OAS carried out an Electoral Observation Mission in Antigua and Barbuda.

The mission arrived in the country on June 5, 2014 and concluded its activities on June 14, 2014.

Pre-electoral period

During the pre-electoral period, the Mission met with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, Her Excellency the Governor General DAME Louise Lake-Tack, then Prime Minister the Hon. Baldwin Spencer, and leader of the opposition Gaston Browne, representatives from all political parties, ambassadors, NGOs, labor unions, church representatives, police officials, members of the Chamber of Commerce, and other electoral missions, who shared their perspectives and concerns regarding the electoral process.

One of the main concerns that was brought to the Mission's attention was the general perception that the campaign spending was particularly high during this election, especially noticeable through billboards and political paraphernalia installed across the country. Given the lack of limits on the total amount that a party or a candidate is permitted to spend and the absence of any provision for direct or indirect public funding of parties, most actors voiced the need to establish a cap on campaign spending, as well

as to fully disclose the source of funding in electoral campaigns, guaranteeing higher levels of accountability and transparency.

Regarding gender equality, the Mission found that during this election five parties nominated 41 candidates for 17 positions, out of which five were women, representing 12.2% of the total of candidates. Although the Mission acknowledged that the participation of women in the political arena has shown some advancement -especially visible in the designation of women in key government positions- there is a general consensus about the pressing need to address the prevalent under-representation of females as candidates and elected representatives.

The Mission found that there is consensus among all parties that the imbalance and inequitable distribution of voters across constituencies could potentially contribute to an unequal representation of the electorate. For instance, while in the constituency of Barbuda 1,017 citizens elect one representative, in St George, candidates compete for the support of 5,535 electors to win the only seat available in the constituency. This imbalance is replicated in other constituencies, and the inequality should be reviewed by the Constituencies Boundaries Commission established in the country's Constitution.

Considering that the voters' list represents a fundamental instrument of the voting system, the Mission took note of the concern expressed by several actors regarding the absence of a process of continuous registration, as established by law. After the re-registration process that was conducted from September through November 2013, continuous registration should have been restored to ensure the inclusion of all eligible voters in the final voting list. The Mission noted that the interruption of continuous registration could potentially contribute to the disenfranchisement of some citizens who met the criteria to cast their vote.

Concerning the registration process, the Mission acknowledges the concern expressed by some actors regarding the delivery of the new ID cards required for voting. By June 11, 2014 Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission had distributed 45,838 voter identification cards while 1,883 were left to be collected. Voters were reminded in a timely manner that on Election Day, ABEC would be distributing ID cards from 8:30am through 4pm.

The Mission took note of the political composition of the Electoral Commission and heard the concerns expressed by several actors regarding the need to appoint the seventh member of the body considered in the legislation to guarantee the balance of power. Bearing in mind the challenges ahead and the crucial role of the Electoral Commission in addressing these matters, the Mission encourages all political actors to reach an agreement regarding the composition of this institution.

Election Day

On Election Day, OAS observers visited 100% of the polling stations across the country. The Mission was pleased to observe the extraordinary commitment of women and men with the electoral process noticeable in the large number of citizens waiting to cast their vote in all polling centers, resulting in an extremely high turnout that reached 90.27%. Considering that voting is not mandatory in Antigua and Barbuda, the high turnout

reflects citizen's commitment to democracy and their engagement in exercising their right to vote.

The Mission noted especially the extraordinary dedication of women in the political process, reflected in their strong presence at polling stations as presiding officers, poll workers and party agents. During the opening of the polling stations observed by the EOM team, 99% of presiding officers and 86% of designated poll workers were women. In addition, 89% of the polling stations had only women as party agents. These numbers depict a very clear image of the high participation and the scope of women's involvement in the electoral process.

On June 12, by 6:00 am, elections were underway in all constituencies. In general, observers noted that polling centers were well equipped with all the necessary materials for the voting process and that staff was consistently well trained and diligent in the exercise of their duties. The layout of the polling stations was in general adequate and priority access to the elderly and disable voters was mostly guaranteed.

Because of the high turnout, OAS observers noticed long lines in several polling stations across the country during the voting process. Additionally, the OAS/EOM observed that, due to the lack of the publication of voter lists outside polling stations, some citizens encountered difficulties when trying to identify where they should cast their vote. The Mission noted with satisfaction that the voting process was permanently scrutinized by political party agents.

The Mission acknowledges the presence of security officials in all polling centers and recognizes their important role in maintaining a peaceful atmosphere for the electorate. Nevertheless, the OAS learned that Police officers in Antigua and Barbuda are not given an opportunity to vote in advance. They are therefore required to vote at the same time as the general public, reducing their capacity to ensure the safety and security of the voting process.

As is tradition in the country, at 6:00 pm, upon the close of the polls, ballot boxes were transported to a central counting center for each constituency, instead of being counted at the polling stations. Election results were processed, tallied and transmitted via telephone from each of the 17 counting centers to the receiving center located in the ABEC. The Mission considers that both the transportation to a central counting center and the transmission of results via telephone could potentially raise doubts about the transparency and efficiency of the counting process. Nevertheless, counting procedures were methodical and conducted according to stipulated guidelines. The counting was completed in the presence of polling agents, observers, and candidates, as well as of citizens who voluntarily chose to be present. There were enough police and security personnel to ensure adequate security during the counting process.

ABEC received and disseminated the information to political parties, media and the general public via Internet as it was being processed. By 9:00pm approximately 9.3% of the votes were received and by 1:00am 58.40% of the votes were published.

Final results of the General Elections gave 14 seats to the major opposition party, the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, and three seats to the ruling party, the United Progressive Party. On June 13, 2014, the Honorable Gaston Browne, leader of the

Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party, was sworn in as Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

Recommendations

With the purpose of supporting the continuous efforts of Antigua and Barbuda to strengthen their democracy and electoral system, and based on the observations and information gathered by direct observations of the OAS team, as well as in meetings with stakeholders, the Electoral Observation Mission would like to offer the following recommendations:

- In terms of electoral organization, the Mission recommends taking a number of actions to speed up the electoral process, including the publishing of voter lists outside each polling station and enabling the verification process of at least one or two additional voters while one voter is casting his/her ballot.
- The Mission suggests consideration of the counting of the votes at the polling stations under the supervision of the Presiding Officer and the scrutiny of Electoral Officers, Political Agents and Security Forces, as well as citizens of Antigua and Barbuda. In addition, the transmission of electoral results through computer networks could also be a secure and viable alternative to the phone system currently in use.
- While a dedicated website to follow the results was established for Election Day, the OAS/EOM noted that the Electoral Commission's official web site was under construction and no information was published. The Mission recommends the designing and publishing of an updated website including historical information and resources regarding the registration process, civic education and electoral results, among others. A higher level of voter's awareness about the Electoral Management Body (EMB) should increase voter's confidence and provide transparency.
- The Mission would welcome the restitution of the continuous registration process by the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, following the rules instructed by the Representation of the People Act. The OAS suggests that the electoral authority ensure that the registration process is not interrupted in the event of future re-registration processes.
- In order to guarantee the balance of power within the Commission, established by the reform made after the 2009 Election, the Mission would welcome stakeholders agreement on which candidate should occupy the seventh seat as soon as possible.
- Once the electoral process is finalized, the Mission recommends that all political actors guarantee the independence of the Boundaries Commission in the upcoming debate regarding the constituencies' boundaries established in the Constitution, to ensure that the future constituencies are more balanced in terms of number of voters.
- The Mission invites political parties and candidates to engage in the promotion of specific reforms to directly tackle the existing situation of the underrepresentation of women running for seats in the House of Representatives. In this regard, the

Mission recommends that political parties work on the inclusion of affirmative action measures to guarantee the full exercise of political rights for men and women and the promotion of gender equality in the electoral competition. In addition, the Mission would like to highlight the need for the Electoral Commission to proactively seek to incorporate a gender perspective into its work in order to create the needed conditions for the equal participation of men and women in the electoral process and the full exercise of their political rights.

- Special attention should be paid to the problems associated with the high cost of election campaigns and the establishment of a transparent system; particularly, positive legislative actions should be taken in order to enhance transparency in the funding of candidacies and parties. In this sense, consideration should be given to prohibit direct or indirect anonymous contributions, without regard to the sums of money involved. In this regard, the Electoral Commission must be empowered with authority and resources for effective oversight of political spending, and must ensure the enforcement of more effective sanctions in case of misconduct.

A more detailed final report on the observations and recommendations of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission will be published in the forthcoming months.

The OAS Mission wishes to thank the Government of Antigua and Barbuda for the invitation to observe this process and to nationals of Antigua and Barbuda for their warm welcome to their country. Finally, the Mission expresses its gratitude to the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Spain, Chile, France, Serbia, Turkey, United Kingdom and South Korea for their financial contributions that made this mission possible.

