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FIRST REPORT

OAS Electoral Observation Mission

2026 General Elections in Antigua and Barbuda

First Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Antigua and Barbuda for the 2026 General Elections

May 1st, 2026

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM), led by former OAS Secretary for Access to Rights and Equity Maricarmen Plata, commends the people of Antigua and Barbuda on the transparent and orderly conduct of the general elections of April 30th. The Mission applauds the civic commitment of voters, the professionalism of all poll workers, and the efforts of police officers, party agents and all the electoral officials who made the conduct of these elections possible.

The OAS/EOM extends its gratitude to the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC) for its openness and the valuable information provided. It also expresses its appreciation to the various political actors, electoral and governmental authorities, candidates, and the representatives of civil society organizations with whom it met, for their willingness to share their perspectives, which complemented the Mission's direct observation.

The OAS/EOM comprised 17 members¹ from 11 countries, five of whom worked virtually. The Mission arrived in Antigua and Barbuda in a staggered manner beginning on April 24th, 2026, and observed the process in all of the country's constituencies. During its deployment, the OAS/EOM analyzed different aspects of the elections such as electoral organization, electoral technology, electoral justice, political-electoral financing, and the political participation of women. The Mission's specialists also followed up on the recommendations issued by previous OAS Missions.

Through an exhaustive examination of the regulations and other relevant documents, as well as its direct observation and meetings with key actors, the Mission conducted a comprehensive analysis of the electoral process. This analysis was carried out while adhering to the principles of objectivity and neutrality, non-substitution of national actors, respect for domestic law, and the guarantee of independence and transparency, among other principles that govern the work of OAS Electoral Observation Missions² as mandated by the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

PRE-ELECTORAL STAGE

Antigua and Barbuda's Parliament was dissolved on Tuesday, April 1st, 2026, and general elections were subsequently scheduled for April 30th, 2026. Nomination Day was held on April 13th, in accordance with the electoral calendar established by the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), and 37 candidates were nominated across the 17 constituencies: 17 for the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP); 16 for the United Progressive Party (UPP); 1 for the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM); and 3 independent candidates.

¹ 7 men and 10 women.

² Organization of American States. (2024). Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions, pp. 15 and 16. See: <https://www.oas.org/ext/DesktopModules/MVC/OASDnnModules/Views/Item/Download.aspx?type=1&id=958&lang=2>

In the weeks leading up to the election, the Mission observed that media coverage heavily focused on the issuance of voter IDs. The Mission was informed that, since voter IDs have a ten-year validity, and the last voter re-registration took place in 2014, many of these IDs started expiring in 2024, prompting large numbers of voters to seek replacements before the 2026 elections and leading to heightened public attention. The OAS/EOM noted the efforts of the ABEC to guarantee that all eligible citizens had access to their voter ID before election day, by offering extended opening hours, including on weekends. The Mission also noted that registered voters who did not have their IDs on Election Day, had the option to collect a temporary, single-use voter ID card from the ABEC, that would allow them to cast their ballot. During election week, the Mission was informed that the renewal of expired voter ID Cards ranged from a high of 93% completion in the St. Peter constituency to a low of 61% in St. Mary's North. On Election Day, the ABEC website indicated that 32,271 replacement voter ID applications had been received.

In a similar vein to the 2023 elections, the Mission was informed of incidents of the destruction of campaign paraphernalia, which were described as acts of vandalism. This was of concern to the OAS/EOM, as were stakeholder reports of a sense of voter apathy, which some linked to voter fatigue, given the frequency of recent elections and by-elections. Nevertheless, some stakeholders also noted that campaigning has increasingly moved to social media platforms, where activity remains high.

Finally, the Mission observed that the call for snap elections prompted discussions among stakeholders regarding the predictability of the electoral calendar. Actors with whom the OAS/EOM met shared their views that the short timeframe associated with snap elections may place some candidates and political parties at a disadvantage, potentially impacting their ability to organize effective campaigns and canvass resources.

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the OAS/EOM was present in all constituencies of Antigua and Barbuda, observing the process from the distribution of election materials and the opening of polls through the voting process and the tallying and announcement of results. Mission members visited 178 polling stations across all 49 polling divisions in the 17 constituencies of Antigua and Barbuda, and reported that the process unfolded calmly, efficiently, and in full accordance with the law.

Polling stations observed by the Mission opened punctually at 06:00h and were equipped with all materials necessary to conduct the vote. The OAS/EOM also noted that locations provided sufficient space to guarantee the secrecy of the ballot. Election workers —the majority of whom were women— demonstrated proficiency in the required procedures, efficiently assisting voters and responding to inquiries.

While lines formed at several locations, voters generally waited patiently to exercise their right to vote, and the process progressed smoothly throughout the day. Observers confirmed that voters could easily identify their respective stations, with the assistance of clear signage that directed the flow of the lines, and were aided when necessary by information clerks, who were present at all locations.

Agents from the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) and the United Progressive Party (UPP) were present at the polling stations visited by the Mission in Antigua, while agents of the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM) observed the proceedings in Barbuda. Throughout the day, the Mission also encountered and engaged with both international and national observers at different locations.

The OAS Mission commends the electoral authorities, polling staff, party representatives, and security services for their professionalism and diligence on Election Day.

The Mission noted the efforts made by ABEC to locate polling stations on ground floors to improve accessibility for people with limited mobility. However, challenges remained at some locations, due to the uneven terrain or the distance between entry points and the ballot boxes. The Mission encourages continued focus on accessibility infrastructure to ensure the voting process remains as seamless and inclusive as possible for all citizens, particularly the elderly and people with disabilities.

At the end of Election Day, OAS observers were present for the close of polling stations and the transfer of ballot boxes to the counting stations. At most of the locations visited by the Mission during the closing of polls there were few or no voters waiting to exercise their franchise. Members of the OAS/EOM reported that polling stations generally closed promptly at 18:00h, and that voters in line were granted the right to vote, according to the established procedures.

At the conclusion of Election Day, OAS observers monitored the closing of polling stations and the secure transfer of ballot boxes to the counting centers across the 17 constituencies. Once the polls closed, officials tabulated the results in accordance with established procedures. These results were subsequently transmitted to ABEC for official publication on its website.

The results indicated that the ABLP won 15 constituencies overall, while the United Progressive Party (UPP) and the Barbuda People's Movement each won a single constituency. The voter turnout was 62.41%,³ a reduction of 7.9 percentage points when compared to the 2023 general elections, where participation was 70.34%.⁴

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mission takes note of the efforts made by the ABEC in preparing for this election, thus ensuring the political rights of the 63,313 registered electors. There continue to be opportunities, however, to modernize and strengthen some areas of the process. Drawing on its direct observations, meetings with stakeholders, and its review of the existing regulatory framework, the OAS/EOM presents below its findings and recommendations with the objective of contributing to the continued enhancement of the Antigua and Barbuda electoral system.

³ https://abec.gov.ag/elections_2026/#

⁴ <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/10/>

I. Electoral Organization and Registries

Registration of Electors

Antigua and Barbuda has a system of continuous registration, in which applicants visit their constituency registration officers throughout the year with proof of age and citizenship or naturalization, and, subject to the registration officers' instruction, a residence verification is conducted, or a proof of address (such as an official letter) is accepted in order to satisfy the requirements for registration. A similar process applies to electors who are already registered in a constituency who are to be transferred to a new location: the registration officers conduct consultations, may conduct the verification of residences, and then inform the elector of their finalized registration. Each registration office has scrutineers representing the interest of political parties recognized by the legislation and all applicants must submit their fingerprints for cross matching. Under the current regulations, a claims and objection period follows the registration process.

The Mission observed that, while registration has been occurring in a mostly homogeneous manner throughout the country, the legislation does not clearly outline the procedures registration officers must follow prior to and after an application for registration. This was also the finding of the 2023 OAS/EOM, when the Mission recommended introducing a mandatory home/residence verification procedure into the legal framework.

As noted in the 2023 report, the Mission observed that there are no formal inter-institutional protocols for removing deceased electors, or those absent from the country for ten consecutive years, from the voter register. Currently, the removal of deceased persons from the Register of Electors relies on *ad hoc* arrangements, such as the voluntary submission of death certificates or funeral programs by family members. To establish a more systematic and reliable framework for maintaining the Register's integrity, the Mission reiterates its previous recommendations regarding:

- Establishing formal procedures for the inter-institutional exchange of information which permit the ABEC to systematically obtain lists of deceased persons and other relevant data in order to sanitize the list.
- Introducing a unique national identifier that assists the efforts of the Civil Registry to accurately identifying electors.

Delimitation of Constituency Boundaries

For the 2026 elections, a total of 63,313 electors were registered, an increase of approximately 3.9% since 2023. Previous OAS Missions have noted that there are significant variations in the distribution of electors across the country's seventeen constituencies. For these elections, the elector totals in the constituencies ranged from 1,263 in St. Phillip South, to 5,997 in St. George. Differences of more than fourfold in the value of votes between constituencies point to an opportunity for thoughtful review to support greater balance in Antigua's electoral framework.

As reported in the last election cycle, the Constituency Boundaries Commission has not been able to address the disparities among constituencies' elector counts, since it depends on census data to ascertain the number of inhabitants within each constituency,⁵ and a census has not been conducted since 2011. The legislation⁶ in Antigua and Barbuda states that a census shall be conducted, as far as practicable, in ten-year intervals, however the execution of the 2021 process was delayed by the 2020 pandemic. The Mission observed that the National Bureau of Statistics initiated a Population and Housing Census in June 2025,⁷ and that its implementation was delayed, with field operations starting in late September 2025.⁸ Due to the dissolution of Parliament in preparation for the elections, all operations were suspended in April 2026. The process is expected to resume after the electoral process.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Resuming the process of constituency boundaries review at the earliest opportunity, following completion of the Population and Housing Census.
- As recommended in 2023, revisiting the related legislation and considering the possibility of utilizing the electors list in order to inform the boundaries realignment.

II. Electoral Technology

The Mission noted measurable progress in ABEC's digital outreach, which leveraged its web portal and social channels to maintain high levels of citizen engagement. On the one hand, permanent access to the constituency-based search tool is a vital resource in facilitating access for voters. Also, the inclusion of multimedia assets, such as registration tutorials and real-time statistical updates on ID card distribution, have added tremendous value to these platforms. To ensure continued scalability and efficiency, the Mission recommends further incremental improvements. The following sections outline where technology can be further integrated, building upon the baseline established in the 2023 recommendations.

Access to Electoral Information

In accordance with previous OAS recommendations, issued in 2014 and 2023, the Mission was pleased to note that the ABEC has developed and implemented an updated, user-friendly website with ample information about the electoral framework, system and processes. While the website features detailed information about where to vote through a link to the Register of Electors, the Mission recommends:

- Enhancing the current web portal with a comprehensive voter status dashboard to allow electors to easily verify their registration status and track the online issuance of their physical identity cards.

⁵ According to the Commission Guidance Act of 2012, the realignment of electoral boundaries is reliant on census data.

⁶ National Bureau of Statistics (Amendment) Act, 2024

⁷ National Bureau of Statistics. (2025). Census Day is June 25, 2025. <https://statistics.gov.ag/census-day-is-june-25-2025/>

⁸ Antigua Newsroom (2025, September 29). 2025 Census Begins Across Antigua and Barbuda. <https://antiguanewsroom.com/2025-census-begins-across-antigua-and-barbuda/>

Election Results Tabulation System

As noted in 2023, along with the manual nature of the voting process, there are limited technology tools in the tabulation and transmission of electoral results. One of the uses of technology observed in the 2026 elections, was the publication of real-time results on the ABEC official webpage. The Mission noted that the electoral authority published the results as they were received from the constituencies and was pleased to observe that the tabulation system worked in an uninterrupted manner, providing citizens with timely access to information.

As the incorporation of technological tools has the potential to significantly improve monitoring and control of electoral processes, the Mission reiterates its previous recommendation, and adds:

- Implementing a central computerized results receiving center, where election results are periodically communicated through telecommunication lines (using a smartphone, tablet or laptop) with a specially designed computer application, from the various constituencies across the island.
- Scanning (or photographing) the Statement of Polls and simultaneously sending them to the ABEC for publication alongside the results, so that citizens can visually compare the results published on the ABEC website.

III. Electoral Justice

In relation to electoral justice, the Mission notes that progress has been achieved in addressing recommendations put forward by the OAS/EOM in 2023 concerning the claims and objections procedures under the ROPA and public education initiatives. With respect to the claims and objections, concerns had previously been raised regarding the handling of objections to the Register of Electors. The Mission was informed that registration officers participate in continuous training programs which aim to improve consistency in the application of procedures and ensure the effective resolution of objections. In this regard, the Electoral Commission expressed confidence in the preparedness of registration officers to manage all objections in accordance with the ROPA.

Further, in response to the recommendation to strengthen public education, the Mission observed that ongoing initiatives have been implemented during the current electoral cycle to inform citizens of their electoral rights and relevant procedures. Stakeholders indicated that these efforts include regular public awareness campaigns disseminated through multiple platforms, including the Commission's website, social media channels, and traditional media, including videos, infomercials, and periodic public notices. These developments reflect the Electoral Commission's willingness to consider and implement the Mission's recommendations, taking steps to strengthen the integrity and accessibility of electoral justice processes and enhancing public understanding and participation in the electoral process.

Electoral Legislative Framework

The Mission observed that the ROPA, first enacted in 1975 prior to independence, continues to serve as the primary legislative framework for the conduct of elections. Since its passage, the Act has been amended on approximately 10 occasions in an attempt to reflect evolving political and electoral realities. However, despite these consistent amendments, the legislation has never been fully reenacted as a consolidated instrument.

Stakeholders indicated that, within the context of constitutional reform, a comprehensive review of the laws of Antigua and Barbuda is anticipated, with the aim of repealing outdated provisions and consolidating legislation that has undergone numerous amendments. In this regard, the Mission observed that an officially compiled version of the ROPA is not readily available. As a result, the cumulative effect of successive amendments presents challenges for electoral actors, observers, and the wider public in interpreting the law and obtaining a clear and coherent understanding of the current electoral framework. The Mission highlights that such fragmentation in the law may create uncertainty in the application of electoral rules and limit transparency for stakeholders. International standards highlight that electoral legislation should be clear and accessible to the general public to ensure legal certainty, a cornerstone of credible electoral processes.⁹

In this context, the Mission recommends:

- Considering a comprehensive revision and compilation of the ROPA to further modernize the legal electoral framework and provide a single, authoritative text that enhances clarity, certainty, and accessibility for all electoral stakeholders.

Effectiveness of Electoral Remedies

Regarding election petitions, the Mission received feedback from stakeholders which noted that the seven-day period for the filing of election petitions is short and may limit the ability of electors to adequately prepare and submit a petition to the Court. This is so particularly given the practical challenges associated with gathering relevant electoral evidence for the filing of these petitions, such as the ‘picture’ list of electors used on election day. It was noted that the limited accessibility to such materials further constrains electors’ ability to effectively pursue electoral petitions. In light of these concerns, stakeholders suggested extending the filing period for election petitions beyond seven days in order to improve access to electoral justice.

Additionally, the Mission observed that, while there is a defined timeframe for the filing of petitions, there is no corresponding statutory deadline for their resolution. Stakeholders highlighted that some petitions may take several months to be resolved, which can contribute to prolonged uncertainty in the electoral process. In at least one instance, it was indicated that a candidate opted to resign, triggering a by-election, rather than awaiting the resolution of an election petition.

⁹ IDEA International, Electoral Standards Guidelines for reviewing the legal framework of elections. P. 15.
<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/international-electoral-standards-guidelines-for-reviewing-the-legal-framework-of-elections.pdf>.

The Mission observes that international standards emphasize that voters, candidates, and political parties must have access to effective mechanisms and remedies for the enforcement of electoral rights. It is stressed that these mechanisms must be prompt, timely, and capable of preventing the erosion of electoral rights. Further, the standards suggest that the legal electoral framework should establish clear and reasonable deadlines for the filing, consideration and resolution of complaints in order to ensure that electoral disputes are addressed expeditiously and without prolonged uncertainty.¹⁰ The Mission notes that the absence of clear statutory timelines for the determination of electoral disputes may give rise to legal uncertainty and the erosion of electoral rights.

In this context, the Mission recommends:

- Reviewing the statutory timeframe for filing election petitions, introducing clear deadlines for their determination, with the goal of enhancing accessibility and legal certainty, while ensuring alignment with international standards on timely and effective remedies.

IV. Political-Electoral Financing

The Mission notes that, unlike some other countries in the Caribbean,¹¹ Antigua and Barbuda has a legal framework that addresses certain aspects of campaign financing, primarily through the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2001.¹² However, these provisions do not constitute a comprehensive regulatory system, and there remain important opportunities to further develop this area. In its current form, the framework requires political parties to keep records of monetary and in-kind contributions received “during an election,” to identify certain sources of contributions, to submit post-electoral reports to the Electoral Commission, to audit party accounts, and to grant the Commission access to records and audited accounts.¹³ The same legal framework also gives the Commission a role in relation to compliance and sanctions.¹⁴

¹⁰ United Nations Human Rights Committee. (2007). General comment No. 32, Article 14: Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial (CCPR/C/GC/32)

<https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=Q7TyLkIkZy6AMMYILBtJdvBPX2s6eKHWibm1z7ee9AaJJSzx7ddl%2Bhdo8FKs0VQhNYR1HyG2kbxgw9flcW3JDw%3D%3D;>

Venice Commission. Code of Good Practices. Condition 3.3 (g)

[https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Code_conduite_PREMS%20026115%20GBR.pdf;](https://www.venice.coe.int/images/SITE%20IMAGES/Publications/Code_conduite_PREMS%20026115%20GBR.pdf)

International IDEA. (2002). Electoral Standards Guidelines for reviewing the legal framework of elections, p. 93-94

[https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/international-electoral-standards-guidelines-for-reviewing-the-legal-framework-of-elections.pdf.](https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/international-electoral-standards-guidelines-for-reviewing-the-legal-framework-of-elections.pdf)

¹¹ Organization of American States (OAS). Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy. Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (2025). *Political-Electoral Financing Systems in the Americas: A Perspective from OAS Electoral Observation Missions (2017-2021)*. “It should be noted that there are no specific regulations governing political-electoral financing in four of the 21 countries covered by this study. F.N. 11: Grenada, Suriname, Saint Lucia, and The Bahamas.”

[https://www.oas.org/ext/DesktopModules/MVC/OASDnnModules/Views/Item/Download.aspx?type=1&id=1219&lang=1.](https://www.oas.org/ext/DesktopModules/MVC/OASDnnModules/Views/Item/Download.aspx?type=1&id=1219&lang=1)

¹² Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. *The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act*. 2001. Section 43, replacing section 83 of the principal Act. [https://laws.gov.ag/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/a2001-17.pdf.](https://laws.gov.ag/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/a2001-17.pdf)

¹³ Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. *The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act*. 2001. Section 43, replacing section 83 of the principal Act, especially subsections 83(1) – (5). [https://laws.gov.ag/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/a2001-17.pdf.](https://laws.gov.ag/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/a2001-17.pdf)

¹⁴ Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. *The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act*. 2001. Section 43, replacing section 83 of the principal Act, section 83 (6). The statutory text refers to a penalty of EC\$2,000 (Approx. \$740 USD) per day for non-compliance.

In this regard, even if stakeholders suggested that there may be limited political momentum to advance reforms in this area, it is important to emphasize that the regulation of political financing goes beyond a purely technical matter. Effective rules in this field contribute to ensuring a more level playing field among political actors and enhance voters' ability to make informed decisions by increasing transparency regarding the resources that support electoral campaigns, thereby reinforcing democratic processes.¹⁵

Transparency in Political Finance

The Mission confirmed that, for the 2026 general elections, the obligation to report contributions received “during an election” is interpreted as applying only from the issuance of the writ, on April 7th, to the return of the writ, on May 1st, a period of less than one month in the usual five-year political-electoral cycle. This interpretation is consistent with the legal definition contained in the Representation of the People Act, according to which “at an election” means the period beginning with the issue of the writ and ending with the return of the writ, and “during an election” bears the same meaning.¹⁶

The Mission considers that this limited temporal scope leaves a substantial part of the political-electoral cycle outside the reporting framework. As several stakeholders indicated, campaign activity, fundraising, political mobilization and campaign-related contributions and expenditures may occur well before the formal election period. Stakeholders also indicated that the amounts officially reported may not fully reflect the actual scale of campaign financing, as contributions can be made outside formal channels or prior to the reporting period, reinforcing perceptions of limited transparency. In this sense, the Mission reiterates the concern expressed in 2023 that a reporting obligation confined to less than one month in a five-year cycle is insufficient to provide an effective transparency mechanism.¹⁷

The Mission was informed that parties are formally notified of their obligations and generally comply with reporting requirements. However, the daily penalty for non-compliance has not been applied in practice. The Mission further notes that, while reports are audited before submission and are laid in Parliament, as stated by ABEC, it is not clear that reports submitted by political parties include expenditures in addition to contributions. This issue is particularly relevant because the legal framework does not expressly require the inclusion of expenditures in the reports submitted by political parties. As noted by the 2023 OAS/EOM, in practice, these reports include information on contributions, but do not provide details on how those resources are spent. In this regard, the Mission reiterates its previous recommendations¹⁸ regarding:

¹⁵ Organization of American States. Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy. Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation (2025). *Political-Electoral Financing Systems in the Americas: A Perspective from OAS Electoral Observation Missions (2017-2021)*.

¹⁶ Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. *The Representation of the People Act. Chapter 379*. 1975. Section 2(1), definitions of “at an election” and “during an election.” <https://laws.gov.ag/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/cap-379.pdf>.

¹⁷ Organization of American Electoral States (OAS). *Observation Mission to Antigua and Barbuda – Final Report, 2023, Political Finance section*. <https://www.oas.org/EOMDatabase/MoeReport.aspx?Lang=En&Id=451&MissionId=538>

¹⁸ Ibidem.

- Establishing a more robust legislative and administrative system to regulate financial contributions to and expenditure by political parties within or outside of an election, that would include limits on the amount of contributions that can be made by individuals.
- Considering the establishment of a continuous campaign accounting and reporting framework under the electoral law.
- Requiring that the reports submitted by political parties to the ABEC include information on financial expenditures in addition to contributions.
- Providing the ABEC with additional resources, both human and financial, to more effectively monitor and enforce the implementation of campaign finance law and regulations.

Equity in Political Finance

The Mission notes that financial capacity directly affects campaign visibility, including through billboards, social media, advertising, paraphernalia, public events and access to professional campaign support, in Antigua and Barbuda. In this regard, stakeholders described a media landscape in which many outlets are perceived as aligned with either the government or the opposition, including in relation to their ownership structures. These perceptions are consistent with the findings of the 2023 OAS/EOM, which also noted that several radio and television stations and newspapers were owned by political actors, including individuals who contested elections as candidates. In this sense, the Mission reiterates its 2023 recommendation¹⁹ regarding:

- Enacting legislation to regulate access to licensed media outlets to ensure equity among political parties and candidates.

In line with the above, the Mission was informed that electoral campaigns continue to depend primarily on private financing. Several interlocutors referred to the role of business actors and wealthy individuals in financing campaigns and noted that established parties are generally better positioned to mobilize resources. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated that emerging political actors and independent candidates may face greater difficulty accessing the resources needed to campaign effectively, particularly during a snap election. This perception is consistent with the 2023 OAS/EOM finding that political financing in Antigua and Barbuda remains mostly private.²⁰ In a context where the legal framework does not establish direct public financing, nor comprehensive contribution or spending limits, disparities in access to resources may translate into disparities in campaign reach. For this reason, in addition to reiterating its previous recommendations, the Mission recommends:

- Enacting legislation on the financing of political parties and campaigns to include clear limits on campaign spending, and the limitation of private and in-kind contributions to political and electoral campaigns.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

V. Political Participation of Women

The OAS/EOM commends the civic commitment of women in Antigua and Barbuda. Stakeholders underscored that, as has been the case during previous elections,²¹ women constituted the vast majority of election administrators and displayed high levels of participation at the base level of political activity.

In this regard, the Mission took note that, for the 2026 electoral process, women were significantly represented as Returning Officers, with 11 women appointed across the country's 17 constituencies, representing 65% of this electoral corps.²² The Mission also observed that women displayed high levels of political participation as poll workers, and volunteers, a trend that coincides with longstanding traditions of female leadership and engagement in civil society and civic organizations.

Nevertheless, the OAS/EOM observed the potential for greater representation in the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC). Currently, there are two appointed female representatives in the seven-member national electoral body, resulting in 28.57% female representation.²³ This rate of representation decreased in comparison to the 2023 election, in which there were three female representatives among the seven members of the Electoral Commission (42.86%), as well as a female Supervisor of Elections.²⁴

Regarding their participation as voters, for the 2026 election, government authorities made available data on the gender breakdown of the registered electors from September 30, 2013, through February 28, 2026. Out of 63,313 registered voters, women accounted for 54.31% of the electorate.²⁵ Stakeholders with whom the Mission met have noted the general availability of gender disaggregated data that reflects female voter turnout following the election. Data sets that indicate national female voter turnout and provide additional demographic information about women voters is pivotal to detect and bridge potential gender gaps, as well as better understand the gender distribution of the electorate.

Even though women are deeply embedded in the democratic process, they remain significantly underrepresented as political candidates. The OAS/EOM identified important gaps between women's high levels of political participation and this election's decrease in overall female candidacies. For the 2026 election, out of 37 registered candidates, there were 5 female candidates, which represented a decrease in the rate of female candidacies from 20.75% in 2023 to 13.51% this year.²⁶ Following the election, two women were elected to the House of

²¹ Organization of American States. (2023, January 18). *Electoral Observation Mission General Elections Antigua and Barbuda Final Report*. P 4.

²² List of Returning Officers for General Elections 2026.

²³ It is important to note that, at the time of writing this report, one seat of the Electoral Commission was vacant, having been so since November 2024. Discounting the vacant seat, women represent 33% of the current six-member Commission.

²⁴ Organization of American States. (2023, January 18). *Electoral Observation Mission General Elections Antigua and Barbuda Final Report*. P. 51.

²⁵ Statistical Break Down by Gender. Publication of the Elector's Register. Electors Registered from September 30, 2013, through February 28, 2026.

²⁶ The number of women candidates had previously increased from nine out of 53 candidates (16.98%) in the 2018 elections to 11 out of 53 (20.75%) in the 2023 elections. Organization of American States. (2023, January 18). *Electoral Observation Mission General Elections*

Representatives, accounting for 11.7% of its membership. This represents an increase from the 2023 elections, when only one woman secured a seat.

Stakeholders underscored to the Mission how a combination of structural barriers and deeply entrenched sociocultural norms and biases could have prevented women from participating more fully in the 2026 election as candidates. Some of the most prominent structural barriers shared included male-dominated party structures; unequal access to party leadership and campaign financing networks; difficulties balancing domestic and childcare responsibilities; and the placing of first-time female candidates against longstanding incumbents and high-profile party leaders.²⁷ Additionally, actors have expressed to the Mission that during elective office campaigns, female candidates have and continue to be subject to disproportionately high levels of social scrutiny. The OAS/EOM was also informed that electoral attacks against female candidates often focus on their likability and desirability rather than their professional credentials or policy proposals, revealing entrenched assumptions about marriage, childcare responsibilities, and qualities and/or traits perceived as negative when displayed by female candidates.

The OAS/EOM recognizes important ongoing efforts by civil society organizations, female parliamentary leaders, and female political leaders with previous experience in government to visibilize these structural and sociocultural barriers. It also recognizes ongoing efforts to increase female representation in the Senate, implement leadership and capacity-building training programs for women interested in entering the political arena, and promote national policies that foster gender equality in Antigua and Barbuda more broadly.²⁸

To ensure equal representation in decision-making positions, and strengthen transparency and accountability regarding women's political participation, the OAS/EOM presents several recommendations and reinforces previous ones:

- Developing and expanding training opportunities, mentorship programs, networking pipelines, and other initiatives to promote women's participation and leadership in politics, in line with 2023, 2018 and 2014

Antigua and Barbuda Final Report. P 14; (2026, April 14). ANTIGUA- Thirty-seven candidates nominated for April 30 general election. *Caribbean Times*. <https://caribbeantimes.com/antigua-thirty-seven-candidates-nominated-for-april-30-general-election/>; (2026, April 14). Independent candidates among persons nominated to contest April 30 elections. *Antigua Newsroom*. <https://antiguaneewsroom.com/independent-candidates-among-persons-nominated-to-contest-april-30-elections/>; 2026, April 14). Independent Candidates Join Full Slate for Antigua and Barbuda's April 30 General Election. *The Antiguan Herald*. <https://antiguaherald.com/articles/2026/04/14/independent-candidates-join-full-slate-for-antigua-and-barbudas-april-30-general-election.html>

²⁷ (2024, December 11). Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Beyond Political Dynasties – The Critical Need for Women's Political Participation in Antigua. *Antigua Newsroom*. <https://antiguaneewsroom.com/breaking-the-glass-ceiling-beyond-political-dynasties-the-critical-need-for-womens-political-representation-in-antigua/>

²⁸ After the 2023 election, the Senate of Antigua and Barbuda displayed higher levels of female representation compared to the country's House of Representatives, with 7 out of 17 seats (roughly 41%) held by women. Additionally, since the 2023 election, civil society organizations have launched a series of initiatives and capacity-building workshops to foster young women's participation in public leadership, as well as to empower women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to successfully engage in electoral processes and exercise effective, gender-responsive political leadership. Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Antigua and Barbuda*. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/AG/AG-UC01/data-on-women/>; Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWIL). *CIWIL Antigua and Barbuda National Chapter*. <https://www.facebook.com/CIWiLAB/>

recommendations. Government officials, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders should seek to collaborate in this regard.

- As recommended in 2014 and 2023, political parties must work on the inclusion of affirmative action measures to guarantee the full exercise of political rights of women and the promotion of gender equality in elections.
- Promoting a national debate on measures needed to increase the political participation of women in Antigua and Barbuda, for which the OAS has a High-Level Group that offers its collaboration and advice. The High-Level Group seeks to encourage participatory and inclusive national dialogue in countries across the hemisphere on implementing recommendations designed to promote the political participation of women and contribute to the development of proposals for administrative or legal reforms to this end.

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