



STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN GUYANA

A SUMMARY REPORT OF MULTISTAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

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List of Acronyms

APNU – A Partnership for National Unity
 AFC – Alliance For Change
 APA – Amerindian People’s Association
 AVE – Amerindian Village Election
 CEO – Chief Elections Officer
 CSO – Civil Society Organizations
 DRL – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs
 EME – Electoral Management Expert
 EMB – Electoral Management Body
 GRE – General and Regional Elections
 GRO – General Register Office
 GoG – Government of Guyana
 GECOM – Guyana Elections Commission
 IPs – Indigenous Peoples
 IRO – Inter-Religious Organization
 IRI – International Republican Institute
 LGE – Local Government Election
 MG – Multistakeholder Group
 NRA – National Registration Act
 PAC – Program Advisory Committee
 PSC – Private Sector Commission
 PWDs – Persons with Disabilities
 Regional Election Officer (REO)ROPA – Representation of the People Act
 SOP – Statement of Poll
 SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
 WGEC – Women and Gender Equality Commission

Strengthening Electoral Processes in Guyana

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Executive Summary

Following a challenging five-month electoral process in 2020, the Government of Guyana (GoG) signaled its intent to ensure electoral reform was undertaken before any other elections were held. The A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and Alliance for Change (AFC) coalition also publicly stated its interest in reforms to various electoral processes and civil society organizations (CSOs) called for a citizen's centered approach to strengthening elections. In April 2021, the International Republican Institute (IRI) received funding from the **Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs (DRL)** to provide the people of Guyana and their leaders with technical assistance to advance their own priorities on electoral reform.

From April 2021 to November 2022, IRI facilitated broad stakeholder consultations to foster greater inclusion of Guyanese in its electoral reform-focused program. The Program Advisory Committee (PAC) was convened during this process and 13 leaders from the government, parliamentary opposition, and civil society engaged in discussions on strengthening elections. Discussions focused on the following areas of the electoral cycle: the legal framework, planning and implementation, training and education, voter registration, voting operations, and election day and results transmission and tabulation. The following report summarizes discussions on these various areas.

The issues on which the PAC arrived at a general agreement on the way forward included the powers of the chief elections officer, penalties to deter electoral malpractice and rigging, recruitment of Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) staff, polling place locations and early voting for polling day staff, updating election manuals, voter and civic education, youth inclusion, persons with disabilities (PWDs) inclusion, observer status for local organizations, CCTV at the entrance of polling stations, use of private residences as polling stations, and electronic distribution of statements of poll (SOPs).

The issues on which the PAC did not arrive at a consensus on the way forward included term limits for GECOM commissioners, the composition of GECOM staff, size of the voter's list, the use of biometrics in the registration process, PWDs participation as candidates in elections, use of biometrics at the place of poll, administration of Amerindian Village Elections (AVEs), tabulation of SOPs and dispute resolution provisions.

Guyana's commitment to electoral reform is commendable and it will likely continue to navigate the path to electoral reform in the years preceding the 2025 General and Regional Elections (GRE). In its Electoral System Design Handbook, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) notes that electoral systems "will inevitably need to adapt over time if they are to respond adequately to new political, demographic and legislative trends and needs."¹ Changes will need to be negotiated by the current holders of power and will hopefully reflect the wider public aspirations for reform.



¹ <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-system-design-new-international-idea-handbook>

Introduction

The following report summarizes the views of Guyanese leaders on strengthening electoral processes arising from a six-month dialogue facilitated by the International Republican Institute (IRI). This was part of a wider 20-month stakeholder consultation process undertaken by IRI to foster greater inclusion of Guyanese in their electoral reform-focused program. IRI received funding from the **Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs (DRL)** in April 2021 to provide Guyanese leaders with technical assistance to advance their priorities on electoral reform. The views represented in this report are of the Guyanese leaders and stakeholders who participated in program activities and do not represent IRI or the funding agency.

National Electoral Reform Process

Soon after the 5-month 2020 election, the Government of Guyana signaled its intent to ensure that electoral reform was undertaken before any other elections were held. In the year following, a parliamentary constitutional reform committee was established to draft the Constitution Reform Bill and the government released proposed amendments to the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) for public feedback in November 2021. The ROPA amendments, the National Registration Act (NRA) amendments, and the Constitution Reform Bill were taken to Parliament in November 2022.

The ROPA amendments pave the way for a range of changes including implementing harsher penalties for electoral malpractice and rigging, the location of polling stations, and the addition of a subdistrict to District 4. The Constitution Reform Bill calls for the establishment of a 20-member commission appointed by the president and is expected to facilitate national consultation to identify reforms. The commission will implement reforms relating to elections and GECOM, taking into consideration its composition, method of electing its chairman and members, and its jurisdiction over the national registration and electoral processes.²

Some civil society organizations (CSOs) have called for a citizen's centered participatory dialogue approach to electoral reform in Guyana. While there is yet no formally established participatory dialogue process, the government provided open access to the ROPA amendments online for about 12 months after its release, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs Anil Nandlall met directly with some CSOs and GECOM to receive feedback directly, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance facilitated a meeting with about 150 civil society representatives in October 2022. In November 2022, the ROPA amendments were tabled at the National Assembly and the APNU + AFC coalition opposition expressed their objection by exiting the sitting. The coalition opposition has maintained that it will not support holding future elections until the size of the voter's list and wider concerns about voter personation are addressed.

Guyana's commitment to electoral reform is commendable and it will likely continue to navigate the path to electoral reform in the years preceding the 2025 GRE. In its Electoral System Design Handbook, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) notes that electoral systems "will inevitably need to adapt over time if they are to respond adequately to new political, demographic and legislative trends and needs."³ Changes will need to be negotiated by the current holders of power and will hopefully reflect the wider public aspirations for reform. IRI's electoral reform assistance program provided the only available neutral space where the government, the parliamentary opposition and civil society have recently engaged in constructive, and respectful dialogue on their interests for strengthening electoral processes.

Program Advisory Committee, Multistakeholder Group & Roundtables

A key recommendation arising from IRI's 6.5 months of initial stakeholder consultations from May to October 2021 was to establish a Program Advisory Committee (PAC) to further demonstrate transparency, foster inclusion, and ensure that program activities are driven by national stakeholders. Following these consultations, IRI convened a Multistakeholder Group (MG) – of about 40 organizations across government, political parties, and civil society – to further brainstorm the structure and operation of such a committee.

² <https://dpi.gov.gy/constitution-reform-commission-bill-passed/>

³ <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/electoral-system-design-new-international-idea-handbook>

IRI consulted with the MG in December 2021 and January 2022 on arrangements for the PAC and Sub-committee 1 – a group of three MG volunteers and IRI’s program team – was established to further brainstorm arrangements for convening the PAC. From February to June 2022, Sub-committee 1 invited 17 organizations participating in the MG to mutually nominate representatives and alternates to fill 2 seats for government, 2 seats for the opposition, and one seat each for the private sector, indigenous peoples, women, persons with disabilities and youth. These initial 9 representatives would be responsible for inviting two additional civil society organizations to participate in the PAC. Sub-committee 1 also drafted a Terms of Reference (TOR) for the PAC which would be finalized by its members once it had been convened.



1 Some of the PAC's members and Sub-committee 1 representatives at its launch on June 2, 2022, at Cara Lodge, Georgetown, Guyana.

On June 2, 2022, IRI launched the PAC in collaboration with Sub-committee 1 and the committee convened for the first time on July 19, 2022. At its early meetings, the PAC agreed to add two seats to its structure to make way for a third government representative and a third parliamentary opposition representative. Later it invited the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO) and the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) Guyana to fill one

seat each. This resulted in the PAC’s 13-seat structure with about 21 members⁴ engaged in discussions during the lifetime of the committee from July to November 2022.

From a sustainability perspective, the PAC offers an opportunity to build the habit among actors and stakeholders of listening to each other’s perspectives on electoral reform as a foundation for national action. The key functions of the PAC were to review and offer feedback on key recommendations and reports on electoral reform arising from IRI’s program activities; consolidate stakeholder recommendations arising at MG meetings and during program activities, and compile a final summary of recommendations on strengthening electoral processes and inform the program multistakeholder group.



⁴ All PAC members did not nominate an alternative representative.

Program Advisory Committee (PAC) Representatives

For a full list of PAC representatives and alternates click [here](#).



Hon. Sonia Parag,
Minister of Public
Service



Hon. Kwame McCoy,
Minister of Public Affairs



Hon. Charles Ramson,
Minister of Culture,
Youth and Sport



Hon. Gail Teixeira,
Minister of Parliamentary
Affairs and Governance



Attorney-at-law Gary
Best, A Partnership For
National Unity



Hon. Amanza Walton-
Desir, A Partnership For
National Unity



Hon. David Patterson,
Alliance For Change



Hon. Deonarine
Ramsaroop, Alliance For
Change



Ganesh Singh, Guyana
Council of Organizations
for Persons with
Disabilities



Captain Gerry Gouveia,
Private Sector
Commission



Clinton Urling, Private
Sector Commission



Renata Chuck-A-Sang,
Women and Gender
Equality Commission



Sharon Atkinson,
Amerindian Peoples
Association



Sherry Balkarran,
National Tshaas
Council



Atisha Christie-Renville,
Youth Challenge
Guyana



Rondell Nedd, Guyana
National Youth Council



Nicholas Peters, SASOD
Guyana



Ernestine Leonard,
SASOD Guyana



Sidi Neil Bacchus, Inter-
Religious Organization



Pastor Stanley Boodie,
Inter-Religious
Organization



Hon. Lenox Shuman,
Liberty and Justice Party



Facilitator: Sara Bharrat,
IRI Local Program
Manager



Election Management
Expert: Orrette Fisher,
IRI



Roundtables on Priorities for Strengthening Elections

IRI also collaborated with local CSOs to facilitate an Election Roundtable Series focused on identifying stakeholder priorities for strengthening electoral processes in Guyana. The series targeted the media, women, youth, unions, and the LGBT+ community to foster rich dialogue and sharing of ideas and priorities on improving electoral processes. Ideas and recommendations from the series were captured in respective reports annexed to this summary arising from the PAC's discussions. Together, these offer a snapshot of Guyanese interests in strengthening elections.

See the table below for priorities arising from roundtables facilitated in partnership with the Guyana Press Association (GPA), the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC), and the Women and Gender Equality Commission (WGEC). While IRI provided updates to the PAC on the roundtables, the Committee did not discuss the stakeholder priorities arising from these sessions. The views reflected below are of the participating organizations and not of the PAC or IRI.

Media's Priorities	Unions' Priorities	Women's Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to timely information on elections and decisions: GECOM should hold regular press conferences to update the media and public on decisions and elections. • Media Center: Reasonable accommodations via a media center should be provided to the media for elections coverage. • Media Code of Conduct: GECOM should consult with the media ahead of elections to update and sign the Media Code of Conduct established under previous leadership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action must be taken to clean the bloated voter's list. • Use of technology should be considered as a strategy for improving the transparency of elections and to address the threat of voter personation. • GECOM's structure should be examined and revised to improve decision-making and transparency. • Addressing issues of race relations is important, especially within the context of elections and approaches to governance. • Consideration must be given to a model of shared governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration needs to be given to gender orientation being a part of the National Identification cards. • The consolidation of all laws in relation to elections. • The elections Code of Conduct for political parties need to be enforced and harsher penalties for violation implemented. • All laws in relation to elections should be consulted and placed in a central place to have information on elections easily accessible to the public. • Consideration should be given to revising the composition of GECOM. • Additional opportunities to build knowledge among women, both as voters and potential candidates, of the electoral and wider political processes.
<p>Post-roundtable Action: IRI in collaboration with the GPA convened a media working group in November 2022 to draft an MOU to present to GECOM. The GPA plans to engage GECOM on this ahead of the upcoming local elections in 2023.</p>	<p>Post-roundtable Action: There has been no follow-up action. GTUC is interested in convening a working group of five volunteers to brainstorm strategies for amplifying the unions' voices in the electoral reform process.</p>	<p>Post-roundtable Action: There has been no follow-up action. However, WGEC is interested in engaging GECOM and policymakers directly to share the priorities arising from the roundtable. IRI will provide support.</p>

Summary of Issues Discussed Regarding Strengthening Electoral Processes

This section summarizes the PAC's discussions from July 19 to November 30, 2022, towards identifying recommendations for strengthening elections in Guyana.



Legal Framework

Term Limits GECOM Commissioners

The PAC's discussions on term limits for GECOM commissioners did not reach a consensus on the way forward. During the SWOT analysis ([see Appendix 17](#)) some representatives flagged the loss of public trust resulting from opaque decision-making as a key risk to the administration of elections. Fostering a higher level of individual commissioner accountability through term limits was identified by

some representatives as one strategy that could contribute to more effective and transparent decision-making within the electoral management body (EMB).

Ten of 13 committee representatives are in favor of implementing term limits for commissioners nominated to GECOM. Currently, the position of GECOM Commissioner is the only constitutional appointment that does not have a term limit. Other constitutional appointments either expire at retirement or a period after which renewal is mandated.

On nomination and acceptance of the position, a GECOM Commissioner occupies the position until they resign, die, or become otherwise physically or mentally unable to function. For example, there are no explicitly stated term limits for ministers of government, however their mandate is renewed every five years through GRE. One possible solution arising from discussions is to institute a similar arrangement for the renewal of nominations for GECOM Commissioners every five years or immediately following the completion of the GRE. This issue has been flagged for further future exploration.

The 3 government representatives are not in support of this recommendation. In their view, term limits for GECOM Commissioners will not significantly impact the decision-making process and there is no interest in changing government nominees. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.

Composition of GECOM (and Vulnerability of GECOM Chair)

The recommendation to expand the composition of GECOM to include additional members did not gain consensus from the PAC. As identified during the PAC's SWOT analysis, a non-political GECOM was the key interest driving discussions on this idea. Some committee representatives recommended revising the composition of GECOM to reflect voting parliamentary representatives and non-voting civil society groups. Other PAC representatives made a case for the expansion of GECOM's composition to include independent civil society representatives as full members of the commission.

While the PAC agreed that the constitutional process in place for selection and appointment of the GECOM Chair is strong and does not need revision, some representatives believe the 3-3-1 (3 government nominated commissioners – 3 opposition nominated commissioners – 1 constitutionally appointed chair) structure of GECOM institutionalizes contentious decision making and places the Chair in the vulnerable position of tiebreaker on sensitive, crucial decisions. 6 of 13 committee representatives advanced the idea of expanding GECOM's current composition to include non-partisan, civil society representatives to address the tiebreaker dynamic and improve inclusivity.

However, 7 of 13 committee representatives either disagreed or did not offer a view on this issue. While the private sector representatives advanced that the current system is sound, they expressed willingness to learn more about the possibilities of expanding the structure of the EMB. The issue has the potential for further discussion. The committee has expressed willingness to listen to a further detailed presentation on options available and how some lessons could be adapted to Guyana's unique context. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.

Powers of Chief Elections Officer

There is general agreement among the PAC that the powers of the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) must be curbed through legislative amendments. However, representatives agreed that further discussions on how this is done will be required once the details of the amendments to the ROPA were studied. The government representatives highlighted that the proposed amendments to the ROPA which address this issue were available for public feedback in November 2021 and remained open for feedback at the time of the PAC's discussions.⁵

Based on the last GRE, some representatives advanced that it is evident that the CEO has too much-vested power and there is an absence of rules governing the exercise of this discretion. Currently, the CEO has the power to dictate processes that can create disenfranchisement. This means that curbing the powers of the CEO is an urgent matter for ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections in the future.

Among key questions arising during the PAC's discussions were:

- Does the CEO report to the GECOM commission and the commission in turn establishes the rules and regulations that govern the CEO and all other GECOM staff?
- Who determines the role of the CEO and how the entire GECOM body functions?
- Aside from who/ where the CEO's role resides, is it a matter that only who determines the CEO's role can amend it?
- The excess powers of the CEO, when it is being presented by the Government for electoral reform, where will those powers go? If some of the powers are being taken away, they would have to be placed somewhere else. Where?
- When things are embedded in law, and particularly this one, is this one of the things that can be changed in parliament, or it needs to be changed in the constitution?

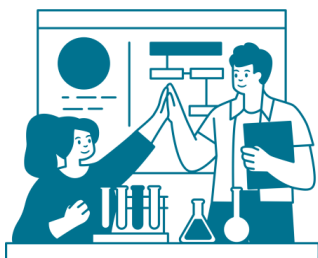
As information to the PAC, IRI's Election Management Expert (EME) explained that the role of the CEO is part of the statute; it is in the law. There are also some aspects of the operations that can be considered administrative and GECOM can, in fact, make directives in relation to these functions. However, the statutory function of the CEO is contained in the law and would have to be amended through parliament.

A parliamentary opposition representative noted that the CEO is statute-based; however, the commissioners are not statute based, therefore consideration would have to be given to how the powers being redistributed will be placed outside of a statutory appointment. In their view, this is linked to the wider issue of how GECOM is constructed, where the Chair casts the deciding vote. A government representative highlighted that this may not only be a matter of passing on the power or delegating, but rather curbing the powers generally. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.

Penalties for Electoral Malpractice and Rigging

There is consensus among the PAC on the recommendation to establish harsh penalties for electoral malpractice and rigging. The government representatives noted that this is one of the proposed amendments to the ROPA. During discussions, parliamentary opposition representatives highlighted that the ROPA proposals seem to only apply to those persons holding low positions and raised concerns about the definition of "persons" in the phrase "persons rigging..." in the proposed amendment. If the legislation is amended, it should apply from the top to the bottom and not only place penalties against persons from the middle to lower level. The private sector representative agreed with the latter and there were no objections from other representatives. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.

⁵ The amendments to the ROPA were taken to Parliament during the November 2022 session and passed by the government's majority in the National Assembly.



Planning and Implementation

Recruitment of GECOM Staff

While the PAC discussed the recruitment of GECOM staff and historical attempts in Guyana to undertake ethnic balancing in employment, there was no recommendation arising in this area. A government representative expressed the view that it is a fact that GECOM's staff does not reflect Guyana's diversity. However, the private sector representatives cautioned against suggesting that anyone because of their demographics is unsuitable and highlighted that GECOM's hiring process is a merit-based approach and should continue that way.

Noting agreement with the private sector's position, a parliamentary opposition representative explained that in the past an advertisement was placed in the newspaper by GECOM, and anyone could apply once they were over 18 years of age. That individual, once successful, was required to complete a two-day training and then they would write an exam. This practice should still be the same and it is the best process to implement in a situation such as this if the commission would like to encourage a particular group to apply more than they are at liberty to do so.

This idea of balancing has been in the psyche of Guyanese for a long time, and how this may be applied to GECOM has to be thought about further. GECOM does not have a closed system, maybe more needs to be done in relation to recruitment and mobilizing applications from a wider cross-section, but people must apply voluntarily. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.

Location of polling places and early voting for polling day staff and agents

Discussions on the location of polling places arose from concerns about the use of private residences and are further detailed in a later section of this report (under the sub-heading [Places of Poll and Polling Stations](#)). However, the entire selection process of polling places must be considered, not just the selection of private residences.

During the SWOT analysis presentation, the Indigenous Peoples' representative highlighted challenges with the location, number, and distribution of polling places in hinterland areas. For example, a polling station was set up in a central location, and voters are expected to travel for miles (sometimes on foot) to get there from satellite communities.

On the issue of early voting for polling day staff and agents, a parliamentary opposition representative noted that in the past an election day staffer was issued with letters of employment which paved the way for them to vote. However, these letters are no longer issued, and it is difficult for polling day staff to vote. Perhaps the solution to this can be to facilitate voting by polling day staff at the same time as the disciplinary forces. See [Appendix 8](#) for full discussion.



Training and Education

Election Manuals

Acknowledging that GECOM is the responsible body to address this, the PAC agreed that there is a need to ensure election manuals are more reader-friendly, accessible, in tune with the law, and more widely available to the public. Representatives recommend that GECOM engage in a process for updating the manuals in collaboration with political actors and other stakeholders. In addition, short videos, and other content, can be developed to raise public awareness and knowledge of the various processes set out in the manual. These materials should be uploaded to GECOM's website as part of permanent resources and promoted widely. See [Appendix 12](#) for full discussion.

Voter and Civic Education

There was consensus among the PAC that increased public education efforts offer an opportunity to improve public trust and confidence in the electoral system. The committee suggested that GECOM design a strategy and plan for civic and voter information that is implemented throughout the electoral process and between electoral cycles, with attention to ensuring content is cross-sectional and inclusive. Alongside this, the PAC also suggested more targeted sensitization and awareness of electoral processes for broad-based stakeholders. They also agreed that GECOM should prioritize hiring a Voter Education Manager to begin acting on these various recommendations. See [Appendix 12](#) for full discussion.



Voter Registration

Registration

The key interests which drove discussions on the issue of registration were the use of biometrics for voter identification during the registration process, the creation of an integrated identification card, and the opportunity for further professionalizing GECOM's staff. Some committee representatives suggested that a more efficient method for capturing fingerprints can make the electoral system stronger and more robust than it is currently. Others acknowledged that perhaps consideration can be given to this in the future as a possible opportunity to innovate and adopt more

technologically efficient practices.

However, the committee did not reach a consensus on this. The main concern for government representatives and some civil society representatives is whether introducing new technology will disenfranchise voters. For example, a change in the method for capturing fingerprints could require the creation of a new voter's list which is connected to wider concerns about how decisions are made on who to remove from the list. Whether or not electronic fingerprint capture is added to the registration process, this must not in any way impact the National Register of Registrants (NRR). See [Appendix 9](#) for full discussion including views on the broad use of technology in electoral processes.

List of Electors

The list of electors/voter's list is among the most publicly debated electoral reform issues in Guyana and the committee did not reach a consensus on the way forward. Two of three parliamentary opposition representatives and some civil society representatives described the current voter's list as "severely bloated" and are interested in safeguards and changes which will efficiently clean the list to improve its credibility. It was highlighted during SWOT analysis presentations that among the risks of a bloated voter list is a higher cost of elections. However, the government and private sector representatives believe there is no need for significant changes because a sound, clear mechanism is currently in place for cleaning the list.

While a parliamentary opposition representative acknowledged that there is a mechanism for cleaning the list, in their view it does not work as efficiently as it should, and this gives rise to challenges. Though a new voter's list is the ideal solution for some parliamentary opposition and civil society representatives, there is a willingness to focus on ensuring that the current list has integrity as the way forward. It was suggested that GECOM can conduct a process to test whether the mechanisms for removing dead voters are effective and provide data to political actors on the realities on the ground.

Further, a more efficient and effective system for sharing information on dead citizens with GECOM can be put in place. For example, when a death is registered with GRO, this information should be directly copied to GECOM. This will save time and resources and ensure that GECOM can actively contribute to the process of maintaining the list from an administrative standpoint. IRI's EME suggested that consideration can also be given to GECOM conducting a one-off re-verification process to identify dead persons and confirm this through the established mechanisms to remove those names from the list. However, government representatives highlighted that the disadvantages of this approach would cost, the fact that this issue was settled by the court and may deviate from established legal processes, and there is no data to support that it is needed.

The integrity of the voter's list is connected to concerns about voter personation. To address this concern, it was suggested that GECOM review voting data to determine whether there have been instances of dead citizens voting. Some committee representatives, including the government, expressed strong disagreement with this recommendation because in their view the system is robust and does not allow room for this type of interference.

Overall, the PAC agreed that discussions on this issue highlight the need for additional voter education and that party agents have a clear role in this (voter education) and in helping to ensure dead voters are highlighted for removal from the list. See [Appendix 9](#) for full discussion.



Voting Operations and Election Day

Youth Inclusion

The PAC's youth representative called for increased engagement and consultation with youth on electoral processes and suggested that GECOM consider how youth can inform its decisions on the conduct of elections. Young people, the representative said, are interested in learning more about electoral processes and opportunities to shape the administration of elections. Further advancing the point, the women's representative noted that there are two key issues arising; first youth do not seem to feel consulted on the decisions made by GECOM and second, there seems to be interested in having a quota in place for youth involvement, for example as candidates. The latter will have to be discussed in the future.

A government representative noted that the electoral process and the entire mechanism for elections in Guyana do not exclude youth participation. Youth participation comes in many forms, including through engagement with political parties that generally focus on coordinating young people as part of their pitch to the electorate and demonstrate to them that they are key and essential to the entire flow of governance. Youth participation at the level of GECOM is also evident; for example, at the last election, there were quite a few young people who were a part of domestic election observer groups.

IRI's EME explained that the points raised by the youth representative are heard across various other jurisdictions. One of the things that is brought up, and that has been addressed to a certain extent, is that enough effort was not being made by political parties, as well as the elections management body to reach the youth in the space where they are. However, with the development of social media and the political parties and the elections management body using social media platforms more, this has improved the ability to reach youth in those spaces.

Following an additional discussion on how youth can be more engaged and the EMB's role in this ([see Appendix 10](#)), the PAC agreed that GECOM should ensure that its voter education strategy is inclusive, intersectional and, for example, can consider consulting youth, PWDs, Ips, and other groups in tailoring and adjusting communication materials for different audiences it has identified.

Persons with Disabilities Inclusion

Several recommendations from the persons with disabilities (PWD) representative on inclusion were fully supported by the PAC. The PWD representative recommended that the current measures in place to support voters with disabilities should be reviewed with the view of fostering independent voting for those who wish to vote on their own. For example, there are no provisions for tactile ballot guides for visually impaired persons so that they can vote independently.

Additionally, the PWD representative also recommended training for GECOM staff on engaging voters with disabilities and ensuring that polling stations are wheelchair accessible. Election day staff can be trained in basic sign language or at the very least ensure there are simple signs or instructions sheets available to deaf voters. See [Appendix 11](#) and [Appendix 13](#) for full discussion.

Candidates with Disabilities

The PWD representative also advocated for amendments to the Local Government Election Act to remove the provision for the disbarment of persons receiving public assistance from running as candidates. Most of the people receiving public assistance are PWDs and so this provision impacts them the most. This recommendation did not receive wide support from the PAC.

However, A parliamentary opposition representative supported the call for the removal of the legal provision preventing PWDs from receiving public assistance from participating as candidates in local elections. According to them, this practice is discriminatory and undemocratic and there is no such impediment to participation at the national level, therefore none should exist at the local level. Some government, other parliamentary opposition, and some civil society representatives noted that removing the cited legal provision could be problematic and there needs to be further discussion on the issue. See [Appendix 11](#) and [Appendix 13](#) for full discussion.

Accreditation of Local Observer Groups

The PAC agreed that criteria for accrediting domestic observer groups should be laid out in the legal framework. The recommendation was put to the committee by the youth representative who noted that local organizations were interested in domestic observation which offers similar privileges as those given to international observer groups.

IRI's legal expert explained that there is a difference in legal provisions for international observers and domestic observers. Domestic observers do not have any legal provisions that give them the right to observe the elections, and whether they are accredited is left to the arbitrary decision of the CEO. Further, while there is a specific law that gives these rights to international observers, but there is nothing in the legal framework in relation to domestic observers, therefore it is possible for domestic observers to be rejected at certain stages of the accreditation process. The amendments in ROPA provide a possibility to address this but offers no criteria nor information on the scope of observation or which parts of the electoral process the domestic observers would have access to.

IRI's EME added that local observers in the 2020 elections were not given a fraction of the privileges that were given to the international observer and there is a need for Guyana to define what is a domestic observer and the criteria one would have to meet to become one. See [Appendix 10](#) for the PAC's full discussion on this.

Voter Personation

Two out of 3 parliamentary opposition representatives recommended that challenges with voter personation can be addressed to some degree by implementing electronic voting and biometrics at the place of a poll. In their view, biometrics at the place of poll is one in a suite of tools that can be used to verify voter identity. This is important to further strengthen the integrity of electoral processes and its (voter personation) existence has been confirmed in correspondence and public communication by GECOM and during the recount process. The PAC was split on the issue and whether it is significant enough to justify the substantial investment required to address it.

However, some PAC members (including government representatives) described the citations of evidence of multiple voting and voter personation as "disingenuous." The government, according to its representatives, is committed to fostering greater trust and transparency and election observer reports show that the 2020 electoral process went smoothly and cite no occurrence of voter personation or multiple voting. The robust nature of the system does not allow for this to happen and the real issue in the last electoral process was dishonesty within the election mechanism.

A parliamentary opposition representative maintained that voter personation is not a "figment of people's imagination" and reminded the committee that the chairman of GECOM wrote to the relevant authorities to ask them to confirm/ substantiate and those formal responses were received, indicating that there was a merit of those persons being out of the jurisdiction and persons who are recorded as dead in Guyana's death register as having cast a vote. There is also a press release from GECOM, in which the chairman said, while this is very concerning, it was not within GECOM's mandate to address.

See [Appendix 10](#) for the PAC's full discussion on this.

Places of Poll and Polling Stations

On the issue of places of poll and polling stations, the PAC discussed concerns with the use of private residences as polling stations and the introduction of CCTV at polling stations to further improve transparency in election day operations. While there was consensus on the first, the committee did not fully agree on the use of CCTV cameras.

The government's representatives highlighted that the ROPA amendments address the selection and placement of polling places and stations. For example, from the perspective of the district and based on the voter population, no more than 400 voters can vote at a polling station. Also, it is recommended that the locations of polling places should be publicized in advance of the elections. Earlier the IPs representative had raised concerns about the location, number, and distribution of polling stations in hinterland areas and requested further information on how the ROPA amendments addressed these.

Regarding legislative amendments which address the use of private residences as polling stations, the PAC agreed that these should clearly state that if there are no government buildings available in any area to use as a polling station then an established standard criterion should guide the establishment of such a location, for example by using tents. Every effort should be made to avoid the use of private residences.

The religious community representative noted the connection between arrangements for polling places and stations and the size of the voter's list. They explained that the number of polling places would be dependent on the number of persons on the list and if there were a bloated list this would directly impact the number of polling stations needed. See [Appendix 10](#) for the PAC's full discussion on this.

Amerindian Village Elections

The IPs representatives, during the SWOT analysis, highlighted that Amerindian Village Elections (AVE) is currently administered by the Regional Democratic Council (RDC). Since RDCs are made up of elected officials from political parties contesting GRE, they are not viewed as the most appropriate body to administer AVE. IPs are interested in GECOM administering AVE in consultation with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, District Councils, and the National Tshoas Council. The arising recommendation is to make legal and other provisions to bring AVE under the premise of GECOM. This solution will address other existing concerns about the limited resources available to village councils to generate their voter list, for example. See [Appendix 10](#) and [Appendix 13](#) for full discussion.



Results Tabulation and Transmission

Resolution of Election Disputes

During the SWOT analysis, some PAC representatives identified the non-acceptance of election results and disputes due to the perceived lack of credibility of results as a key area for discussion. The risks associated with the inefficient resolution of election results include the strong possibility for civil unrest, a delay in the declaration of results (as observed during the 2020 elections), and loss of international backing. While the committee agreed generally that election petitions should be addressed in a timelier manner, they did not arrive at a consensus on how this can be done. One of the arising interests discussed at length was the establishment of an election court to address petitions and other election disputes.

Some parliamentary opposition representatives noted that the non-acceptance of results is a moral issue driven by the perspective from which it arises. While there is a possibility to make it more of a legal issue by having legislation that compels acceptance, there is uncertainty about how well this would address the problem. Guyana will have to continue exploring ways of fostering stronger commitments for the election results to be accepted once it is announced by GECOM; save and except that there is some petition that changes this.

In terms of the elections court, the opposition representatives said there may be a need for a wider discussion. However, there is an agreement that petitions need to be timelier; this should not last an entire term a government is in office. This does not speak to efficiency, perhaps the possibility of petitions being dealt with before a government takes office is something that can be examined. Regardless of the petitions being dealt with prior to or after a government takes office, it is a matter that should be dealt with swiftly and to make this more likely, a time cap should be placed on the process. Some civil society representatives supported this approach.

Representatives from the government and civil society disagreed with the suggestion that a petition should be dealt with before a government goes into office. There are proper mechanisms in place that determine if a political party legitimately won an election. If an aggrieved party wishes to file a petition, they should be able to do so, but not before a government takes office. See [Appendix 13](#) for full discussion.

Statements of Poll Tabulation and Transmission

On the issue of SOPs tabulation and transmission, the PAC agreed that a more efficient process for tabulating and transmitting election results is required and that electronic copies of SOPs should be made available to the public. A parliamentary opposition representative advocated for electronic voting as the overarching system that would improve this process. However, if there is reluctance to take this step, they said intermediary steps can be taken to use electronic methods to improve efficiency in the transmission of election results. For example, after the results are tabulated manually, the presiding officer can input the results into a system and have it transmitted immediately to the Regional Election Officer (REO) via electronic means.

Another parliamentary opposition representative suggested reducing the time it takes to declare the results. Instead of waiting for the SOPs to reach GECOM to be verified, the SOPs posted by each polling station in every region should be taken as official results. They further explained that the change ahead of the 1992 elections, underscored by 'counting at the place of poll,' was to counter the allegation of rigging via aggregation and counting at the regional levels, but this is being defeated by a final verification by GECOM at the very top. The opposition recommended that results at the place of poll when posted are official and ought not to be considered as 'provisional' bringing the tabulation process back to where it was pre-1992.

However, the government representatives and some members of civil society did not agree with this, noting that the check and balance is important because of "the human factor; someone may try to interfere and thus the current mechanism has great wisdom in it." While it is understood that the amount of time spent on results tabulation and transmission needs to be reduced. It is also important to ensure that proper verification takes place.

See [Appendix 13](#) for full discussion on this issue.



Recommendations for Strengthening Elections Arising from the Program Advisory Committee's Discussions

The following table summarizes the recommendations for strengthening elections in Guyana arising from the discussions among the representatives of IRI's Program Advisory Committee (PAC). Recommendations have been categorized into two key sections: (1) Areas of Consensus – where there was general agreement among the committee and (2) Areas of No Consensus – where there was no general agreement among the committee on the recommendation. PAC defined short-term as before the next GRE, medium-term as before next 2 GRE, and long-term as longer than 2 GRE cycles. In the final column, IRI's Election Management Expert includes best practices and/or expert suggestions for the consideration of Guyanese and their leaders as they continue to navigate electoral reform nationally.

Electoral Process/Framework/Period	Arising Area of Reform	Type of Reform	Estimated Time	Recommendations	Best Practices/Expert Notes
Areas of Consensus					
1. Legal Framework (Pre-Election Period)	1.1 Powers of the Chief Elections Officer	Legislative	Short-term	1.1.1 Amendments to the electoral legal framework must curb the powers vested in the Chief Elections Officer. The arrangements for this must be based on wide consultation with political actors and other national stakeholders.	1.1.1.1 Powers of Chief Electoral Officer are usually clearly documented in legislation outlining the scope within which the incumbent must operate.
	1.2 Penalties to deter electoral malpractice and rigging	Legislative	Short-term	1.2.1 Amendments to the electoral legal framework must provide for harsh penalties to deter electoral malpractice and attempts to rig elections. Provisions for penalties should be applied to all levels of officers and agents in the electoral process. The final national arrangements for this must be based on wide consultation with political	1.2.1.1 Documented in legislation.

				actors and other national stakeholders.	
2. Planning and Implementation (Pre-Election Period)	2.1 Recruitment of GECOM staff	Administrative	Short-term	2.1.1 GECOM should continue to recruit staff in keeping with standards of fairness and inclusion. While it is recognized that the idea of balancing ethnic representation has been in the psyche of Guyanese for a long time, there is no recommendation on how this may be applied to GECOM's recruitment process.	2.1.1.1 Qualifications and selection criteria clearly documented with objections to key appointments allowed with documented proof that eligibility criteria were breached.
	2.2 Location of polling places and early voting for polling day staff and agents	Administrative + Legislative		2.2.1 GECOM's authority of selecting polling stations in accordance with the legislative framework is recognized. However, it is recommended that GECOM remain aware of the concerns regarding selection of private residences as polling places, strive to always select suitable places of poll, and remain open to listening to stakeholders who have entrusted GECOM to do what is right. 2.2.2 Early voting for polling day staff is recommended. Consideration can be given to allowing them to vote at the same time as the	2.2.1.1 Establish and Document: a) Minimum qualification for building to qualify as a Polling station b) alternative arrangements if no suitable buildings available in polling division. c) list of polling stations in each region to be reviewed at agreed intervals ahead of upcoming elections. 2.2.1.2 Advance voting by Permanent and polling day staff allows them to concentrate on election day duties without having to choose between working and voting. EMB is also better able to deploy its human resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

				discipline forces, allowing polling day agents and staff to be located where they are best suited.	
3. Training and Education (Pre-Election Period)	3.1 Election Manuals	Administrative	Short-term	3.1.1 More reader friendly, accessible election manuals which are in tune with the law must be produced. GECOM is the responsible body to address this and to ensure the manuals are widely distributed. This should be embarked in collaboration with political actors and other stakeholders. Short videos, and other content, can be developed to raise public awareness and knowledge of the various processes set out in the manual (example). These materials should be uploaded to GECOM's website as part of permanent resources and promoted widely.	3.1.1.1 A separate manual is produced for each category of stakeholder which outlines duties and responsibilities as established in the law but in a very reader friendly way. (Election day workers, party agents, security forces, candidates etc.)
	3.2 Voter and Civic Education	Administrative	Short-term	3.2.1 It is recommended that GECOM consider developing a strategy and plan for civic education and voter information that is implemented throughout the electoral process and between electoral cycles. Attention should be given	3.2.1.1 Civic education to mirror election cycle to keep electorate engaged. Registration period, close of registration, claims and objections, collection of ID cards, updating information to include name change through marriage and address change etc.) Not to be undertaken just prior to election

				<p>3.2.2 Sensitization and awareness on electoral processes for broad-based stakeholders.</p> <p>3.2.3 Priority should be given to hiring a Voter Education Manager to begin acting on these various recommendations.</p>	
<p>4. Voting Operations and Election Day (Election Period)</p>	<p>4.1 Youth inclusion</p>	<p>Administrative</p>	<p>Short-term</p>	<p>4.1.1 GECOM should ensure that its voter education strategy is inclusive, intersectional and, for example, can consider consulting youth, PWDs, IPs and other groups in tailoring and adjusting communication materials for different audiences it has identified.</p>	<p>4.1.1.1 Public relations firm or expert engaged to assist in ensuring all audiences are identified and captured in the public education campaign.</p>
	<p>4.2 Persons with disabilities (PWDs) inclusion</p>	<p>Administrative + Legislative</p>	<p>Short-term/ Medium-term</p>	<p>4.2.1 In addition to the current measures in place to support PWDs to vote, it is recommended that a method be added to allow PWDs to vote independently should they desire it. Currently, GECOM has regulations on engaging PWDs, but the question is whether these regulations need to be reviewed to ensure they promote independent participation in electoral</p>	<p>4.2.3.1 Scheduled meetings with minority groups outside election period.</p> <p>4.2.3.2 Monitoring of developments in other jurisdictions.</p> <p>4.2.3.3 Training manual to include section on handling interactions with persons with disabilities and special needs.</p>

			<p>processes for PWDs. For example, there are no provisions of tactile ballot guides for visually impaired persons.</p> <p>4.2.2 Additional training for GECOM staff on engaging PWDS. For example, train election day staff in basic sign language or at the very least ensure there are simple signs or instructions sheets available to PWDS at the polling station.</p> <p>4.2.3 Ensuring that polling stations are wheelchair accessible. While resources may be limited, a start must be made somewhere.</p>	
4.3	Observer status for local organizations	Legislative	Medium-term	<p>4.3.1 Criteria for local groups to be accredited as a local observer should be set out in the legislative framework.</p> <p>4.3.1.1 Local observer groups once accredited are treated similar to external observers.</p>
4.4	CCTV at entrance polling stations to improve transparency	Legislative + Administrative	Short-term	<p>4.4.1 With further consideration of the advantages and disadvantages, explore the use of CCTV cameras at polling stations to further improve transparency in election day activities.</p> <p>4.4.1.1 Achieved through national security for public buildings.</p>
4.5	Use of private residences as polling stations	Legislative + Administrative		<p>4.5.1 Regarding legislative amendments which address the use of private residences as polling stations, these should</p> <p>4.5.1.1 Document detailing criteria for establishing polling station location to detail circumstances under which the use of private</p>

				clearly state that if there are no government buildings available in any area to use as a polling station, use an established standard criterion to guide the establishment of such a location, for example by using tents. Every effort should be made to avoid the use of private residences.	residences can be used as polling stations.
5. Results Tabulation and Transmission	5.1 Electronic distribution of SOPs	Administrative	Short-term	5.1.1 A more efficient process for tabulating and transmitting election results is required and electronic copies of SOPs should be made available to the public through a website, for example.	5.1.1.1 None.
Areas of NO Consensus					
6. Legal Framework (Pre-Election Period)	6.1 Term Limits for GECOM Commissioner	Legislative	Medium-term	6.1.1 In keeping with standards for constitutional appointments, term limits should be clearly legislated for GECOM Commissioners (excepting the Chair who is selected through a sound constitutional process). For example, there are no term limits for Ministers of the Government, however their mandate is renewed every 5 years. This can possibly	6.1.1.1 Term limits do exist for commissioners. 6.1.1.2 Grounds on which commissioners can be removed documented. 6.1.1.3 Political Party representatives usually serve at the pleasure of the party and can be recalled.

				be applied; where political parties have the option to renew their nominations for GECOM commissioners every five years.	
	6.2 Composition of GECOM	Legislative	Medium-term	6.2.1 Consideration should be given to expanding the composition of GECOM to include independent civil society commissioners. This can contribute to less contentious decision-making by alleviating the Chair's responsibility as the sole tiebreaker on sensitive issues in the current structure. An exploratory dialogue among relevant actors and stakeholders is recommended to learn more about available options and to consider what could potentially be adapted to Guyana's unique context.	6.2.1.1 Composition specific to jurisdiction usually with a mix of government and opposition members. Some jurisdictions include civil society/independent members.
7. Voter Registration (Pre-Election Period)	7.1 Size of Voter's List	Legislative + Administrative	Short-term	7.1.1 GECOM can conduct a process to test whether the mechanisms for removing dead voters are effective and provide data on the realities on the ground. 7.1.2 The previous recommendation highlights the need for additional voter education on the current processes for	6.1.1.1 Expert suggestion: Consideration can be given to GECOM conducting a one-off re-verification process to identify dead persons and confirm this through the established mechanisms to remove those names from the list. Discussion: Disadvantages with this is cost, it was settled by the court, it may deviate from established legal

				<p>cleaning the voter’s list. Party agents have a clear role in this and in helping to ensure dead voters are highlighted for removal from the list.</p> <p>7.1.3 Review voting data to determine whether there have been instances of dead citizens voting.</p> <p>7.1.4 A more efficient and effective system for sharing information on dead citizens with the EMB. For example, when a death is registered with the General Registrar Office (GRO), this information should be directly copied to GECOM. This will save time and resources and ensure that GECOM can actively contribute to the process of maintaining the list from an administrative standpoint.</p>	<p>processes and there is no data to support this.</p>
	<p>7.2 Registration process – use of biometrics</p>	<p>Legislative + Administrative</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>7.2.1 A more efficient method for capturing fingerprints is recommended to make the system stronger and more robust. Specifically, it is recommended that GECOM use an electronic capture method for fingerprints. Some members are interested in this change now and others view it as a</p>	<p>7.2.1.1 The trend is to move away from manual capture of fingerprints and more towards electronic capture.</p>

				possible opportunity to innovate in the direction of making the system more efficient in the future. The solution should not interfere with the NRR.	
8. Voting Operations and Election Day (Election Period)	8.1 PWDs participation as candidates in elections	Short-term	Legislative	8.1.1 Amend the local government election act to remove the provision for disbarment of persons receiving public assistance from participating as candidates. Most of the people receiving public assistance are persons with disabilities and this provision impacts them the most.	8.1.1.1 Campaign finance legislation to clearly establish criteria eligibility and declaration requirements for candidates.
	8.2 Biometrics at the place of poll	Legislative + Administrative	Medium-term	8.2.1 Biometrics at the place of poll should be utilized to confirm the identity of a potential voter.	8.2.1.1 This is an emerging trend.
	8.3 Administration of Amerindian Village Elections	Legislative + Administrative	Medium-term	8.3.1 Make provisions (legal and otherwise) to bring Amerindian Village Elections under the premise of GECOM.	8.3.1.1 Elections of this nature which impact citizens of the country are handled by the national election management body. 8.3.1.2 insert
	8.4 Administration of Amerindian Village Elections – voter’s list	Legislative + Administrative	Medium-term	8.4.1 The previous recommendation will address the issue of limited resources.	8.4.1.1 Same as previous.
9. Results Tabulation and Transmission	9.1 Tabulation of Statements of Poll (SOPs)	Legislative + Administrative	Medium-term	9.1.1 Currently, results tabulated at the polling station are provisional, and only become final when they	9.1.1.1 Polling station results are official unless changed by an official recount.

				are tabulated again at GECOM. The recommendation to the future is to assess this system carefully and consider removing the counting of ballots centrally before results are official. The results from the place of poll should be considered official.	9.1.1.2 Candidates/political parties in some jurisdictions can request a magisterial recount under established circumstances.
	9.2 Dispute resolution	Legislative	Long-term	9.2.1 Petitions should not be put forward before the government is installed. A petition is a mechanism for addressing grievances.	9.2.1.1 Full time constitutional /election court for matters like these to be heard in a timelier manner than has been previously done. New amendments to ROPA give space to regional results to be announced.



Appendices and Annexes

Appendix 1 – [PAC Terms of Reference](#)

Appendix 2 – [PAC List of Members](#)

Appendix 3 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 1](#)

Appendix 4 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 2](#)

Appendix 5 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 3](#)

Appendix 6 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 4](#)

Appendix 7 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 5](#)

Appendix 8 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 6](#)

Appendix 9 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 7](#)

Appendix 10 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 8](#)

Appendix 11 – [PAC Meeting Minutes 9](#)

Appendix 12 – [PAC Virtual Working Meeting Notes 1](#)

Appendix 13 – [PAC Virtual Working Meeting Notes 2](#)

Appendix 14 – [Roundtable Report: Media’s Priorities on Strengthening Elections](#)

Appendix 15 – [Roundtable Report: Women’s Priorities on Strengthening Elections](#)

Appendix 16 – [Roundtable Report: Union’s Priorities on Strengthening Elections](#)

Appendix 17 – [PAC SWOT Analysis Presentations](#)

Appendix 18 – [Expert Comments on PAC SWOT Analysis](#)

Annex 1– [Multistakeholder Group Meeting 1](#)

Annex 2 – [Multistakeholder Group Meeting 2](#)

Annex 3 – [Multistakeholder Group Meeting 3](#)

Annex 4 – [Use of Technologies Presentation](#)