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**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**

**ELECTORAL OBSERVATION MISSION**

**GENERAL ELECTIONS**

**SURINAME**

**MAY 25, 2020**

**FINAL REPORT**

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## **I. FINAL REPORT TO THE PERMANENT COUNCIL<sup>1</sup>**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

On Monday, May 25, 2020, the Republic of Suriname held elections for a new five-year term for the 51 members of the National Assembly, the 118 members of the District Councils and the 772 members of the Local Councils. The Voters' List for the elections included 383,333 registered voters in 10 electoral districts. Seventeen political parties participated in the elections.

Through a diplomatic note sent to the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), dated June 19, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Suriname invited the OAS to deploy an Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the General Elections. The Secretary General accepted the invitation on June 28, 2019 and confirmed that the Organization would deploy an Electoral Observation Mission contingent upon the availability of financial resources to do so.

The March 11, 2020 declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO) that the emerging COVID-19 viral outbreak constituted a pandemic,<sup>2</sup> prompted further discussions between Suriname and the OAS regarding the proposed Mission. Throughout the hemisphere, governments had implemented measures to protect their populations from infection, including the closure of their airports, airspaces and borders. Suriname had closed its own international airport on March 14, 2020. As a result, regular commercial flights were unavailable posing a significant challenge for the deployment of a Mission. Given the prevailing uncertainty regarding the virus, there was also concern regarding the potential for members of the Mission to be exposed to COVID-19; at the time these issues were being considered in late April 2020, Suriname's authorities had reported ten confirmed cases of the coronavirus, with one death. The US-based Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had also assigned a Level 3 Travel Health Warning for Suriname and had recommended the avoidance of non-essential travel.

Following a series of exchanges, OAS and Surinamese authorities agreed on terms for the deployment of the Mission that would ensure the safe travel and work of its members, as well as the persons with whom they would interact in Suriname.

The legal framework for the Mission was subsequently established in an Agreement on Privileges and Immunities signed between the Government of Suriname and the OAS General Secretariat on May 14, 2020, in Washington DC, prior to the Mission's deployment. Similarly, an Agreement on Electoral Access was signed between the Mission, the Government of Suriname and the Independent Electoral Council (OKB)<sup>3</sup> of Suriname on May 23, 2020, in Paramaribo, upon the Mission's arrival.

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<sup>1</sup> Presented to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States on July 14, 2021, by the Chief of Mission, Gonzalo Koncke.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, Twitter post, 11 March 2020, <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1237777021742338049>.

<sup>3</sup> For its Dutch acronym – Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau.

This was the eighth occasion on which the OAS was present for an electoral process in Suriname.<sup>4</sup>

### – **Composition and Methodology of the Electoral Observation Mission**

The OAS Electoral Observation Mission for the May 2020 General Elections in Suriname was led by the Chief of Staff of the OAS General Secretariat, Gonzalo Koncke, and included thirteen experts from eight countries – three of whom provided their support remotely.

As the first Electoral Observation Mission deployed in the Americas after the WHO's declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mission adopted an innovative approach to ensure that it was able to effectively deliver its mandate, while taking the special circumstances into account. The OAS employed a two-pronged observation methodology, engaging virtually with stakeholders prior to its arrival in Paramaribo and holding in-person meetings on the ground. Precautionary measures, which included the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and social distancing, were implemented for all in-person encounters. All members of the Mission complied with the health measures mandated by the government, including two COVID-19 tests while in Suriname.

The Mission's work focused on key aspects of the electoral process, including electoral organization and technology, electoral justice, political finance and the political participation of women. Members also analysed actions taken on the recommendations issued by the 2015 OAS Mission. On Election Day, the ten members of the Mission present in Suriname observed the poll in seven of the country's ten districts. The Mission remained fully engaged in the post-electoral process, particularly the receipt and consolidation of results by the different electoral authorities, up to its departure on June 3, 2020.

Two days after the General Elections, on Wednesday, May 27, 2020, the Mission issued a Preliminary Report with its principal findings and recommendations.<sup>5</sup> On Tuesday, June 2, 2020, prior to its departure, the Mission issued a further statement,<sup>6</sup> summarizing its post-electoral observations. This document is the Mission's Final Report. It complements the Preliminary Report and provides greater detail on the Mission's findings and recommendations, in the spirit of further assisting Suriname in strengthening its electoral process.

## **B. PRE-ELECTORAL PHASE**

The Mission commenced its engagement with stakeholders virtually, on May 19. To learn about preparations for the process, and hear different perspectives on the elections, the

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<sup>4</sup> OAS Missions were previously deployed for General Elections in 1987, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "OAS Electoral Observation Mission Concludes Field Work in Suriname and Presents Preliminary Report," OAS Press Release E-051/20, May 27, 2020, on the OAS website, [https://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-051/20](https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-051/20), accessed February 3, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> "Statement of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Suriname," OAS Press Release E-059/20, June 2, 2020, on the OAS website, [https://www.oas.org/en/media\\_center/press\\_release.asp?sCodigo=E-059/20](https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-059/20), accessed February 3, 2021.

members of the Mission met either virtually or in-person with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs and other key government officials; the Chairs of the Independent Electoral Council and the Central Polling Station and other electoral officials; political parties and candidates, representatives of the private sector, civil society actors and the international community. The Mission's experts also scrutinized relevant electoral legislation, regulations, processes and procedures to ensure a full understanding of the current context.

In its interactions with stakeholders across the spectrum, the Mission took note of several issues.

#### – ***Electoral Reform***

Suriname is a highly diverse country and this diversity is reflected in its political landscape where many political parties are small and ethnically-based. In this context, alliances or coalitions have traditionally been key to achieving the two-thirds majority in the National Assembly that is required to win the presidency. The Mission was informed that in 2019, the National Assembly approved an amendment to Article 7 of the Decree on Political Organizations of 1987,<sup>7</sup> which had allowed political parties to form coalitions in order to contest elections. The amendment barred pre-electoral coalitions from the 2020 elections onwards and required all political organizations to register independently. Government authorities advised that the goal of the amendment was to guarantee voters could distinguish between different political organizations and make a responsible choice based on parties' programs and policy proposals. Stakeholders were however of the view that the ban on coalitions had been introduced to prevent strong opposition alliances and thereby favour re-election of the ruling party.

#### – ***Electoral System***

Several issues related to the organization of the elections were of concern to stakeholders. First, elections in Suriname are organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs, a government institution, which is responsible for generating the Voters' List, selecting and training the poll workers, distributing polling cards, and designing and printing the electoral materials. The heads of the other two electoral institutions – the Independent Electoral Council and the Central Polling Station – are also appointed by the head of Government, the President. As in previous elections, various stakeholders expressed concern to the Mission regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the Government organizes an election in which the ruling political party also competes.

The Mission also noted that, for the most part, the members of the bodies involved in the organization and supervision of elections are only temporarily assigned to these tasks. Outside of the electoral period, these persons typically have a different job, usually at a

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<sup>7</sup> "Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname, 54/2020 – ACT of 23 May 2019 amending the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 no. 61).

governmental agency. This type of institutional design does not contribute to professionalizing the organization and administration of the elections.

In Suriname, each constituency has at least one polling station, comprising five members and five substitute members, all selected by the Ministry of Home Affairs. For this election 650 polling stations were established. The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Mission that the recruitment process for poll workers had complied with the strict profile requirements established for the job and that all polling station workers had been trained and evaluated. As was the case in previous elections however, various stakeholders expressed concern to the Mission regarding alleged bias in the selection and appointment of the members of polling stations.

As noted by the OAS Mission to Suriname's 2015 General Elections, the current Mission also found significant disparities between the average number of people represented in each electoral district. For example, a seat in Wanica represented 13,233 voters, while a seat in Coronie represented 1,051. The 2015 Mission had suggested these distortions be revised in order to ensure a more balanced representation of inhabitants per district, while ensuring that all regions in the country have equal access to parliament and political representation. The Mission noted that action had not been taken in this regard.

### – *Electoral Organization*

According to Article 90 of the Electoral Law,<sup>8</sup> every person who is eligible to vote should receive a polling card at least three days before the elections, from the District Commissioner of the District on whose Voters' List he or she appears. The main purpose of the polling card is to inform voters about the location of their polling stations. On Election Day, every voter has to present their card along with their ID in order to be allowed to cast a ballot. If the card is misplaced or, for any reason, a voter does not receive it, he/she can request one from the District Commissioner or may collect it on Election Day at his/her assigned polling station. The Mission noted that the delivery of the cards is a complex and logistically challenging process, requiring their distribution to the address of each registered voter. As of May 22 (3 days before the election), 78,783 polling cards, representing 20% of the total, had not been delivered to voters.

Suriname's Civil Registry, which falls under the Ministry of Home Affairs, is responsible for keeping a voters' register, in which the persons who are entitled to vote appear<sup>9</sup>. Voters' Lists are compiled from the voters' register, indicating separately those entitled to vote in an electoral district, as well as in a constituency, for members of the National Assembly and the Local Councils, respectively.<sup>10</sup> When reviewing the registration process within the civil registry, the Mission observed that the requirements to change a person's address do not include the submission of evidence to validate the new residence. Registrants verbally

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<sup>8</sup> Electoral Law of September 29, 1987 (S.B. 1987 no. 62) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Electoral Law, Article 15.

<sup>10</sup> Electoral Law, Article 16, paragraph 1.

provide an address, but no supporting documentation or proof is required, despite the importance of this information in determining where a voter casts his/her ballot.

The Mission also noted that while the Civil Registry is working to include unique biometric data in its database for each person who is eligible to be included in the Voter's List, this data is only collected when citizens apply for and receive updated ID cards. The Mission was informed that at the time of the elections, less than 50% of citizens (about 200,000) had renewed their ID cards, meaning that the Voter's List has not achieved its full biometric identification potential. Also although the Civil Registry's database contains images of registrants, the printed list of voters includes only the personal information of each elector, not a photo.

In its meetings the Mission also heard concerns regarding delays in the availability of electoral materials traditionally used by political parties to guide their supporters on Election Day and a lack of information regarding the destruction of a significant number of ballots by the electoral authorities.

#### **– *Impact of COVID-19***

The Mission noted that on April 9, 2020 the Government of Suriname enacted the "Act for a State of Emergency COVID-19",<sup>11</sup> in response to the health challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures included a 3-month Civil State of Emergency, limitations on public activities, gatherings and freedom of movement (which impacted the ability of political parties to hold some traditional campaign events), and other steps required for public health and safety. The Mission noted that, in general, political stakeholders recognized that the limitations imposed by the Act were due to the public health emergency, and were not politically driven. In its meetings with political parties, the Mission was pleased to hear of the different steps taken by them to continue their party campaigns in the circumstances, including online events, outreach through broadcast and social media, door-to-door interactions with voters and in-person meetings which met the COVID-19 safety standards.

#### **– *Access for Indigenous Communities***

The Mission engaged with representatives of Suriname's Association of Indigenous Village Leaders and took note of several concerns regarding the political participation of Suriname's indigenous peoples. These included limited dissemination of information on how to vote (particularly for first time voters), limited opportunities for registering and obtaining identification cards, delays in the delivery of polling cards and no provision for their participation in electoral processes that also respects their traditional mobility within ancestral lands. The Mission also heard concerns that political party campaigns in indigenous communities tended to be divisive and to exacerbate existing tensions.

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<sup>11</sup> "Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname, 83/2020 – ACT of 09 April 2020 for the implementation of article 72.c of the Constitution with regard to the publication of the Civil State of Emergency in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic (Act State of Emergency COVID-19)", 9 April 2020.

### C. ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the members of the Mission were present in seven of the country's 10 districts, and observed the process from the opening of the polling stations to the tallying and transmission of preliminary results. In total, OAS observers visited 96 polling stations in 53 polling centres during the day.

Members reported that the polling stations they observed generally opened on time, were fully staffed and possessed the required electoral materials. There was adequate space within the polling stations for the proper conduct of the poll and the secrecy of the ballot was properly maintained. Election workers, the majority of whom were women, were diligent in their duties and knowledgeable about the procedures.

Members of the Mission also visited the mobile polling station established for persons in quarantine, and observed the ability of those persons to cast their ballots. Access to the vote is an important right and the Mission commends the electoral authorities on their efforts to ensure these persons were able to exercise their franchise.

There were very long lines and extended wait times in some locations during the day. While this led to complaints in some instances, voters generally waited patiently to exercise their franchise. Efforts were made at some polling stations to assist elderly persons and the disabled, although OAS observers reported this was not a standard procedure at all locations.

The Mission recognized the efforts of the Surinamese authorities to implement precautionary measures within regular polling stations to protect voters against the transmission of COVID-19. These measures included, *inter alia*, the use of masks and gloves by poll workers, the application of antibacterial spray to the hands of voters entering the polling station, the disinfecting of voting booths after each voter had cast their ballot and social distancing overall among the persons authorized to be present. In this regard, political party representatives who were authorized to observe the poll were allocated spaces directly outside of the polling stations to ensure proper social distancing. The Mission noted that the infrastructure of the polling stations did not always allow these representatives to properly monitor the proceedings.

OAS observers reported that electoral officials sought to implement the required COVID-19 measures in a rigorous fashion on Election Day. Social distancing requirements were not met in all locations however, and few citizens reported to vote with a mask. Although Suriname had only reported 11 cases of COVID-19 prior to Election Day, with only one of those reported in May itself, the Mission noted that new cases were reported after the elections.<sup>12</sup> While it is not possible for the Mission to establish a direct causal relationship between the elections and the surge in the number of cases, this data should be taken into consideration by national authorities when reviewing the effectiveness of the precautionary measures implemented.

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<sup>12</sup> See Figure 2 in Annex I - Electoral Organization, of this report.



Members of the Mission reported that they encountered domestic observers at polling stations during the day. The Mission recognizes the creditable efforts of civil society to develop national capacity in electoral observation and, noting that Suriname's current Foreign Minister played a key role in coordinating this initiative for the 2020 elections, underscores the importance of such exercises in enhancing transparency in electoral processes.

The Mission commends the electoral authorities, including the poll workers, supervisory personnel, officers of the Independent Electoral Council and all security personnel who worked long hours to facilitate the conduct of the voting process.

The Mission took particular note of several additional issues that unfolded on Election Day. First, reports were received that incorrect ballots had been delivered to and utilised in several polling stations.<sup>13</sup> Once the errors were detected the Main Polling Station delivered the correct ballots to those locations and voters were invited to return to cast their ballots once more. The Mission also noted that organizational challenges affected the process and resulted in long lines at the end of the day.

Towards the end of Election Day, as the voting process was still ongoing, the OAS team also observed a meeting between members of Suriname's Executive, including the President, and the Chair of the Independent Electoral Council. While the Mission was subsequently advised that the meeting was not unusual in Suriname's political context, where the law assigns a significant role in the electoral process to the Executive, such an interaction on Election Day could suggest that members of the Executive have a differentiated advantage over other candidates. In its Preliminary Statement the Mission recommended that in future elections, the President should disassociate him/herself from decisions related to the electoral process.

The Mission also noted the decision of the electoral authorities, just prior to the official close of the polls at 7 pm, to extend voting for a further two hours. While this measure sought to ensure that all eligible citizens had ample time to cast their ballot, in light of the organizational challenges mentioned earlier, the lateness of the decision created suspicion and confusion among the electorate. There was also confusion at the polling stations. Although the majority remained open, in a few cases, poll workers closed their respective station on time, at 7 pm, asserting they had not been officially notified of any changes. The Mission was also informed that at least one polling station had to request a new ballot box, as it had already sealed the first one when the instruction to remain open was received.

Upon the completion of voting, polling stations conducted the manual counting of ballots and transcribed the results into the Statements of Polls, which were signed by all members of each polling station. The Mission noted that the transcription process was quite long in some

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<sup>13</sup> The "Report of the Session of the Independent Electoral Council for the Declaration of Elections of May 25, 2020 PART I", issued on June 19, 2020, informed that the incorrect ballots for Ressor Council elections were distributed in Ressor Blauwgrond (polling station #8); Ressor Pontbuiten (polling stations #185, #188 and #192); Ressor Tammenga (polling stations #205 and #206) and Ressor Para – South (polling stations #574 and #575).

cases as each statement had multiple pages. For example, the Statement of Poll in Paramaribo comprised 52 pages.

While not required by law, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented an unofficial preliminary results transmission system on election night, whereby media outlets were provided with information prior to the official tally. Upon completion of the Statements of Poll, one poll worker at each polling station, who had been specifically trained for this task, captured an image of the document using a mobile application designed exclusively to transmit images of the National Assembly results. Once transmitted, the data was digitized, validated, verified and consolidated at the Ministry of Home Affairs, producing partial results for each district, which were then uploaded in real-time to a special web site: <https://media.su2020.sr/login>.

Due to the extension in voting and the time required to complete the Statements of Poll, the consolidation and publication of these informal preliminary election results only began late on election night. As of midnight that night, only 2.3 % of the polling station results had been processed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Mission notes that there were no results at this stage from the Central Polling Station – the body authorized to process and release official election results.

#### **D. POST-ELECTORAL PHASE**

In the days after the elections, prior to its departure, the OAS Mission continued its engagement with the electoral process and electoral authorities. Members of the Mission were present at the Ministry of Home Affairs to observe the unofficial processing of preliminary results for the National Assembly; at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo (the National Indoor Stadium) where the ballot boxes and electoral materials for Paramaribo were being collected and at the Central Polling Station. The Mission also visited the Main Polling Stations in Para and in Wanica.

It was notable that although the Central Polling Station is responsible, under Surinamese law, for tabulating and verifying the votes cast in Suriname's general elections, the unofficial preliminary results system is not implemented by the CPS, but by the Ministry of Home Affairs – the entity that is responsible for the preparation of the electoral process. The Mission noted a pause in this unofficial preliminary tabulation process at about 10:00 am on the day after the elections, May 26. As a result, political parties and the general public were deprived of information for about seven hours. While ministry officials advised that this was due to the fatigue of the officials processing the results, better planning would have prevented this outcome, which should not occur in an electoral process. Nevertheless, the Mission observed that the processing of the results resumed later that day at the same percentage at which it was suspended (72% of Statements of Poll).

Preliminary results processed by the Ministry of Home Affairs were uploaded to a special website and shared with the Independent Electoral Council, political parties and the media. As the results website could not be accessed by the general population, media outlets played a key role in informing citizens of preliminary results. The Mission noted that while the

Ministry of Home Affairs processed and disseminated the results for the National Assembly elections, information on the District Council and Local Council elections, which was also available, was not tabulated or published.

The Mission also observed scenes of disorder, along with elevated levels of tension at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo on May 26. This resulted primarily from the manner in which electoral materials from polling stations, including the Statements of Poll (SOPs), were received, and the condition of the cardboard boxes in which they were stored. Some boxes were not properly sealed, leaving their contents clearly visible. In some cases, electoral workers were obliged to re-seal the boxes to ensure that electoral materials did not spill out.

The Mission also noted delays in the official tabulation of the SOPs at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo. While this was originally scheduled to commence at 8:00 am on May 26, it was postponed to 2:00 pm that day and later re-scheduled to 10:00 am on May 27. The Mission was informed that the initial postponements resulted from the District Commissioner's inability to locate several SOPs for polling stations in the Paramaribo District and the requirement of Article 123 of the Electoral Law, that all official reports of polling stations be received before the determination of results could begin.

The physical integrity of the containers used to store electoral materials and an unbroken chain of custody of these containers and materials, are two of the absolute minimum requirements in ensuring trust in the credibility of electoral results. In its Preliminary Statement, the Mission urged the electoral authorities of Suriname to ensure that these issues did not occur in future electoral processes.

In general, the official tabulation of results at the Main Polling Stations progressed slowly; a situation that the Mission was informed resulted, at least in part, from the significant number of Statements of Poll that were received with incomplete information or mathematical inconsistencies. The delays resulted in a highly tense political environment, which was exacerbated by a lack of sufficient official communication regarding the progress of the count in the days immediately after the poll. The Mission notes that regular, clear and fact-based information by the authorities would have helped to allay the concerns of citizens during the extended post-electoral period and suggests greater efforts to communicate with the electorate in future electoral processes.

Following completion of the official tabulation of results at the district level, the Main Polling Stations submitted the official reports for their respective districts to the Central Polling Station (CPS), along with the Statements of Polls (SOPs). In most districts, except for Paramaribo and Wanica, the SOPs were scanned at the Main Polling Stations and transmitted, electronically, to the Central Polling Station. The Mission observed that the images of the SOPs were utilised solely as a means of backup and to begin the digitization of the results however. They were not posted on an official website for the information of citizens and political parties.

Based on the data received, the CPS determined the results of the elections for the National Assembly and the Local Councils, as well as the distribution of seats for the District Councils on the basis of the results of the Local Council elections.

On June 19, 2020, the Independent Electoral Council declared the results of the National Assembly Election binding, as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Results for the National Assembly**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Seats Obtained</b>
Alternatief 2020 / Alternative 2020 (A20)	4,501	-
Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij / General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP)	24,956	8
Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek / Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP)	6,835	2
Democratisch Alternatief '91 / Democratic Alternative '91 (DA '91)	659	-
De Nieuwe Wind / The New Wind (DNW)	70	-
Hervormings- en Vernieuwings Beweging / Reform and Renewal Movement (HVB)	7,423	-
Nationale Democratische Partij / National Democratic Party (NDP)	65,862	16
Nationale Partij Suriname / National Party of Suriname (NPS)	32,394	3
Partij voor Democratie en Ontwikkelings in Eenheid / Party for Democracy and Development through Unity (DOE)	2,375	-
Partij voor Recht en Ontwikkelings / Party for Justice and Development (PRO)	1,593	-
Pertjajah Luhur / Glorious Empire (PL)	16,623	2
Progressieve Arbeiders - en Landbouwers Unie / Progressive Workers' and Farmers' Union (PALU)	820	-
Sociaal Democratische Unie / Social Democratic Union (SDU)	254	-
STREI! / Struggle	700	-
Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid / Surinamese Labour Party (SPA)	922	-
Volkspartij voor Vernieuwing & Democratie / People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	349	-

Political Party	Number of Votes	Seats Obtained
Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij / Progressive Reform Party (VHP)	108,378	20
<b>TOTAL VOTES / SEATS</b>	<b>274,714</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, "Uitslag verkiezingen 25 mei 2020 De Nationale Assemblée" / Central Polling Station, "Election Results – National Assembly, 25 May 2020" ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

The Mission noted that no single political party achieved a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly elections. Four of the six political parties winning seats in the Assembly - Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij (VHP), Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij (ABOP), Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS) and Pertjajah Luhur (PL) - subsequently agreed to collaborate and to build a coalition.

With respect to the elections for Local and District Councils, the Independent Electoral Council also validated the results of 9 out of the 10 districts on June 19, 2020. The exception was District 1 - Paramaribo, where the Council advised it would undertake an investigation into the results of three polling stations<sup>14</sup> in the Pontbuiten "Ressort" and two polling stations<sup>15</sup> in the Tammenga "Ressort". The Independent Electoral Council validated those results upon completion of its investigation and declared them binding on July 3, 2020. The final results for the Local and District Council elections are shown in Tables 2 and 3:

**Table 2: Allocation of Seats – Local Councils**

Districts	ABOP	NDP	NPS	PL	VHP	Total
Paramaribo	31	54			115	<b>200</b>
Wanica					113	<b>113</b>
Nickerie		11			54	<b>65</b>
Commewijne		4		4	62	<b>70</b>
Sipaliwini	40	26				<b>66</b>
Brokopondo	28	32				<b>60</b>
Marowijne	47	9				<b>56</b>
Para	2	53				<b>55</b>
Saramacca		8			56	<b>64</b>
Coronie		21	2			<b>23</b>
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>772</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, "Uitslag verkiezingen 25 mei 2020, Ressortraden en Districtsraden", 16 juni 2020 / Central Polling Station, "Election Results – Local and District Councils, 25 May 2020", 16 June 2020, ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

<sup>14</sup> Polling station numbers 185,188 and 192.

<sup>15</sup> Polling station numbers 205 and 206.

**Table 3: Allocation of Seats – District Councils**

Districts	ABOP	NDP	NPS	PL	VHP	Total
Paramaribo	3	6			12	<b>21</b>
Wanica					21	<b>21</b>
Nickerie		2			9	<b>11</b>
Commewijne				1	10	<b>11</b>
Sipaliwini	7	4				<b>11</b>
Brokopondo	4	5				<b>9</b>
Marowijne	8	1				<b>9</b>
Para		9				<b>9</b>
Saramacca		1			8	<b>9</b>
Coronie		6	1			<b>7</b>
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>118</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, “Uitslag verkiezingen 25 mei 2020, Ressortraden en Districtsraden”, 16 juni 2020 / Central Polling Station, “Election Results – Local and District Councils, 25 May 2020”, 16 June 2020, ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

On July 13, 2020, during the first sitting of the Parliament since the polls, the leader of the Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij/Progressive Reform Party (VHP), Chandrikapersad Santokhi, was elected the new President of Suriname. Ronnie Brunswijk, the leader of the Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij/General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP), was elected Vice President.

## **E. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on its analysis of the electoral system, as well as the information it gathered through discussions with national and electoral authorities, political parties, civil society and the international community prior to the elections, and its observations on Election Day, the OAS Mission wishes to offer the following findings and recommendations.

### **i. Electoral System and Institutions**

Suriname’s electoral system assigns the responsibility for organizing and managing key aspects of the electoral process, including the preparation of the Voters’ List, selecting and training poll workers, tabulating results and declaring the final official results of the elections to bodies that fall either within the Government or whose leaders are appointed by the head of Government, the President. As in previous elections, the Mission noted the concern expressed by various stakeholders regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the Government organizes an election in which the ruling political party also competes.

The Mission also noted that the majority of the members of the bodies involved in the organization and supervision of elections only do so on a temporary basis during electoral periods and are typically otherwise employed; a circumstance that does not support the ongoing professionalization of the organization and administration of the elections.

Finally, as noted following the 2015 General Elections, the Mission also found significant disparities between the average number of persons represented in each electoral district. As advised by the 2015 Mission, such distortions undermine the democratic right of citizens to equal political access and representation.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Creating an independent electoral body that is responsible for the organization of the elections, including the appointment of poll workers.
- Implementing a system of professionalization for personnel involved in the organization of elections.
- Reviewing the current formula and criteria for the allocation of seats in order to achieve a more balanced representation of persons per district.

## **ii. Electoral Organization**

The work of Suriname's Ministry of Home Affairs, the Central Polling Station and the Independent Electoral Council to deliver the May 2020 General Elections, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, are to be commended. In its engagement with the different officials in these institutions, and during its observations on Election Day, the Mission discerned a strong commitment by these officials and by poll workers generally, to delivering their responsibilities in keeping with the existing legislation and regulations.

The Mission however noted several areas in which the organization of the elections could be enhanced and strengthened, and therefore recommends:

### ID Cards

- Implementing an urgent and sustained re-registration campaign to ensure that registered and first-time electors, who are not currently in possession of the new ID card, complete the renewal process, and thus submit their biometric data, before the next election takes place.

### Voters' List

- Reviewing the current procedures at the Civil Registry for processing a request for a change of address, ensuring that citizens provide supporting documents (2 forms of documentation) as proof of their new residence.

- Including photos of eligible voters in the printed Voters' List, which can significantly improve the accuracy of authentication controls at the polling station and support general confidence in the electoral process.

### Polling Cards

- As recommended by the 2015 OAS Mission, analyzing the use of polling cards and exploring different options for informing voters on the location of their respective polling stations.

### Electoral Materials

- Reviewing the design of all electoral materials, especially the Statements of Poll, with a view to facilitating the work of polling station workers.
- Revising the methods used to secure and transport electoral materials from the polling stations to the Main Polling Stations, in order to better guarantee the physical integrity of the containers used to store electoral materials and an unbroken chain of custody for these containers and materials.

### **iii. Electoral Technology**

Suriname's electoral system is a primarily manual one. However certain processes, including the transmission and dissemination of preliminary and official election results, do employ some technological tools.

Regarding the former, an official preliminary results system is not currently implemented by the Central Polling Station - the body responsible for tabulating and verifying the votes cast in the elections. However the Ministry of Home Affairs - the body responsible for organizing the elections - does process unofficial preliminary results, for the National Assembly only, and shares this information with the Independent Electoral Council, the political parties and the media. These results are not directly available to ordinary citizens, who can only follow the progress of the tabulation through the media.

For the official results, technology is implemented at certain points, including the electronic transmission of images of the Statements of Poll from the Main Polling Stations to the Central Polling Station and the use of software to tabulate results at the national and district levels. In the latter regard, the Mission noted that the software used to tabulate results at the national and district levels operated independently.

The Mission considers that steps to improve and streamline the existing technology solutions, along with policy decisions to expand the use and dissemination of the information that is already being captured, could strengthen Suriname's results tabulation and transmission system, and provide citizens, political parties and other stakeholders with more timely results following elections.



The Mission therefore recommends:

### Preliminary Results

- That the Central Polling Station considers the possibility of implementing its own system to collect and publish preliminary election results in order to increase transparency and public confidence in the electoral outcomes.
- Extending the scope of the preliminary results system to provide information on all levels of the election.
- Providing ordinary citizens with direct access to the preliminary results.

### Official Results

- Integrating the software used to tabulate results at the national and district levels, allowing both levels to operate in unison using a secure connectivity platform. This will facilitate automated cross-reference verification between districts and the national tabulation center and help reduce costs associated with developing, updating and maintaining two different software.
- Developing and implementing automated quality control mechanisms capable of detecting errors or missing information in Statements of Poll. The authorities should also create a digital record or log of the process undertaken to resolve inconsistencies and its outcome.
- Developing and implementing a double-entry mechanism to verify that the data from each Statement of Poll is entered and tabulated correctly. The Mission also suggests developing tabulation software with automated control mechanisms, which can warn the data entry operator of errors such as missing information, incorrect polling station codes, mathematical errors or duplicate entries, among others.
- Using the images of the Statements of Poll collected by the Central Polling Station to facilitate an official preliminary results process and uploading these images to an official website for the information of citizens and political parties.
- Frequently publishing updates on the progress of the official results tabulation process. These should be posted in an easily accessible website, allowing all stakeholders to track the progress of the count.

### **iv. Electoral Justice**

Suriname's Electoral Law identifies the different types of decisions that can be challenged. These are: (1) exclusion from the Voters' List; (2) the refusal of registration of a political organization; (3) the decision of a Main Polling Station on the validity of a list of candidates;

and (4) a polling station objection. Apart from these, the Mission noted the law includes no clear procedures to present any other complaint regarding electoral violations. Moreover, election complaints must first be presented to the entity that made the decision which resulted in the complaint itself.

The electoral legislation also specifies that complaints on some issues may be appealed to the President of Suriname, with the exception of voter registration, which may be appealed to the judiciary. The Mission was informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that, although it is not explicitly stated in the Electoral Law, electoral stakeholders, including political parties, always have access to the courts of Suriname to seek redress for their complaints. While this may be so, the Mission notes that the inclusion of the Executive among the authorities that are expected to resolve electoral disputes is specific to Suriname's institutional design and unique in the hemisphere.

Several stakeholders with whom the Mission met expressed concern regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the President is entrusted to resolve the disputes that arise in an election in which the ruling political party also competes. Those interviewed argued that it is counterintuitive to have an independent body established by the Constitution, when its head and members are appointed by the head of the Executive, and the head of the Executive also holds the authority to overturn that body's decisions. The Mission notes that several regional and international juridical standards<sup>16</sup> stipulate that legal disputes, including those related to a person's rights and obligations, should be addressed in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal. In this context, the independence of the tribunal is inextricably bound up in the separation of powers.<sup>17</sup> The Mission observes that Suriname's electoral dispute mechanism does not currently comply with international convention in this regard. The Mission therefore agrees that the country could benefit from including greater safeguards in the electoral system, while reducing the influence of the President over electoral disputes.

The Mission also noted that some stakeholders did not have clarity on the functions and responsibilities of the authorities that govern the electoral process nor on the legal remedies provided by the law. While the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) has ensured the election laws are available online, access to these may still be an issue for persons in rural areas or in the Interior, who do not have access to the internet, or who speak languages other than Dutch. Further, there seems to be no clear published procedure for the presentation and investigation of complaints for election law violations. Representatives from different

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<sup>16</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", Article 10, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>; "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights", Article 14, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>; "American Convention on Human Rights", Article 8, [https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties\\_B-32\\_American\\_Convention\\_on\\_Human\\_Rights.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.pdf); Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "Guarantees for the Independence of justice operators", Washington DC, OAS, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/justice-operators-2013.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 32, Article 14, Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to fair trial, 23 August 2007, CCPR/C/GC/32, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/478b2b2f2.html> (accessed 18 February 2021).

parties with whom the Mission met agreed that they would benefit from the publication of manuals or brochures providing information in this area.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Devising procedures for the presentation and resolution of election complaints and election law violations and including these procedures in the electoral law.
- Amending the relevant legislation to entrust the resolution of electoral disputes to a specific institutional body that has judicial functions. Such a step would be aligned with several international instruments by which Suriname is bound, which recognize the human right to have “an effective remedy before a competent, independent and impartial judge or tribunal”.
- Redefining the procedures for appointing members of the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) and limiting executive involvement in this process in order to guarantee the autonomy, independence, and objectivity of Council members. The mechanisms governing the financing of the Council should also be reviewed to ensure the OKB does not depend on financing granted by other powers to guarantee the successful execution of its functions.
- Developing a manual or other literature with clear and concise information regarding electoral justice institutions and rules of procedure. These products should be available in the different languages normally used by the citizens of Suriname and available both online and in hard copy in order to facilitate citizen’s access to justice.

## **v. Political Finance**

In Suriname political parties do not receive any form of direct or indirect public funding. While they are therefore dependent on private donations, there is no legislation that directly regulates private financing. Suriname’s legal framework does not include any prohibitions on anonymous or foreign contributions, whether direct or indirect, contributions from contractors and legal entities, including the media, are not explicitly restricted, and there are no caps on campaign expenditure.

In its engagement with stakeholders the Mission noted concerns regarding the use of state resources during the campaign and complaints of unequal airtime for opposition political parties on state media outlets. While the Mission was unable to independently verify these assertions, Suriname’s legal framework does not include specific provisions to prevent the use of public resources by ruling parties during electoral campaigns.

The Mission noted that although political organizations are required by law<sup>18</sup> to publish annual reports on their income and expenditure, and while compliance is a requisite for parties to be registered for the elections, there is no requirement to include in the reports

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<sup>18</sup> Articles 53 and 54 of the Constitution and Article 2 of the 1987 Decree on Political Organizations.

any information on sources of income. The Mission also noticed that neither the Electoral Law nor the Law on Political Organizations specifically address how the requirement to present annual reports applies to parties established less than one year prior to elections. The Mission was informed that, in general, political organizations only submit such reports during an election year and just prior to being registered to participate in the electoral process. The Independent Electoral Council advised that it did not have the capacity to ensure the timely submission or verify the contents of the reports.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Creating a regulatory framework for state funding for political parties and campaigns. The OAS model legislation on campaign finance may be a useful point of departure in this regard.
- Enacting legislation on the financing of political parties and campaigns to include clear limits on campaign spending, identification of the sources of funding, the prevention of anonymous donations, and the limitation of private and in-kind donations to political and electoral campaigns.
- Expressly prohibiting the use of state resources for campaigning and regulating access to/usage of state media outlets in the run-up to and during the immediate electoral campaign period. Also, as in any country that allows re-election, rules that ensure a more equal playing field should be implemented in Suriname, in order to mitigate the advantage of incumbency.
- Regulating the content of the financial reports that are to be submitted, including requiring political parties to identify their sources of income and provide documentation to validate the information contained in the reports.
- Clarifying the financial disclosure requirements that apply to the registration of political parties that form just before an election.
- Creating a specialized unit within the structure of the electoral authority to oversee political parties' financing. This department should be allocated the necessary resources to collect the financial information, ensure it is delivered by all parties in a timely matter and authenticate the contents of their reports.

#### **vi. Political Participation of Women**

In Suriname, there are no affirmative measures for the inclusion of women in candidate lists and in the National Assembly, although in meetings with the Mission, stakeholders agreed there has been progress in terms of women's political participation. In the 2020 elections, 42% of the candidates for the National Assembly (251 candidates) were women, and 47% of the total number of candidates for all three political administrative levels overall were women. The Mission noted, however, that the percentage of female candidates who were

eventually elected was lower – 16 women (31.37%) were elected to the National Assembly, one seat less than in the 2015-2020 term.

The Mission noted efforts by relevant institutions to encourage women's political participation, including efforts by the Bureau of Gender Affairs to organize awareness campaigns and other public activities prior to the 2020 elections aimed at promoting women's political participation and capacity building. These activities were not eventually implemented due to a lack of resources and COVID-19 related restrictions.

Academic experts and candidates with whom the Mission met suggested that the capacity of the Bureau of Gender Affairs to encourage women's political participation, to collect official gender data, and to promote gender parity in all sectors of the government is limited. The Mission noted that the human and financial resources allocated to the office are scarce.

In order to ensure equal representation in decision-making positions, the Mission recommends:

- As suggested in 2015, implementing a gender quota mechanism in order to progressively adopt parity measures and thus level the playing field for women who seek to offer their candidacies for political office. Complimentary measures to strengthen the effectiveness of such a quota, such as position mandates or alternation mechanisms, should also be considered.
- That electoral authorities produce and publish updated information on the percentage of female candidates registered for all levels of the election and their placement in the corresponding lists.
- Developing and implementing training initiatives to promote equality within political parties as well as actions to promote women's political leadership. Government agencies and political parties, should also consider affirmative action measures for the composition of their boards and for candidates' nomination processes.
- Strengthening the Bureau of Gender Affairs with more resources and decision-making power to ensure it has sufficient capacity to continuously support actions and programs that can effectively promote women's political participation and gender equality. In this regard, the Mission suggests strategies to this end should be coordinated among the institutions and areas responsible for supervising different aspects of the electoral process.

## **vii. Political Participation of Indigenous Communities**

The Mission engaged with representatives of Suriname's indigenous peoples<sup>19</sup> and noted their concerns regarding the political participation of this community, including limited information on how to vote, limited opportunities for registering and obtaining identification

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<sup>19</sup> The Association of Indigenous Village Leaders.

cards, delays in the delivery of polling cards and no provision for their participation in electoral processes that respects their traditional mobility within ancestral lands.

The Mission also heard concerns that political party campaigns in indigenous communities tended to be divisive and to exacerbate existing tensions.

The Mission recommends:

- The authorities conduct a rigorous analysis of the conditions in which indigenous people in Suriname exercise their political rights. Measures should be taken to promote the inclusion of these communities in all stages of the electoral process, ensuring they can freely participate both as electors and as candidates.

## **F. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Mission wishes to thank the Government of the Republic of Suriname, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the electoral authorities – including the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Independent Electoral Council and the Central Polling Station; the stakeholders with whom it met, both virtually and in-person, and all citizens, for their kind collaboration and their willingness to engage in open and frank discussions on matters related to the 2020 electoral process.

The Mission also thanks the Government of Suriname for its assistance in facilitating the arrival and work of the Mission in Suriname, despite the logistical, health and safety challenges deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Mission is also grateful to the governments of Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, France, Italy, The Netherlands and the USA for their financial contributions which made this Mission possible.

## **II. ANNEXES – REPORTS BY TOPICS**

### **i. ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Republic of Suriname became an independent country on November 25, 1975. The 1987 Constitution, later reformed in 1992, establishes that the “Republic of Suriname is a democratic state based upon the sovereignty of the people and on the respect and guarantee of their fundamental rights and liberties”<sup>20</sup> and that the “National Assembly represents the people of the Republic of Suriname and expresses the sovereign will of the nation”.<sup>21</sup>

The National Assembly is composed of 51 members, who are elected for five years by direct suffrage.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of National Assembly elections, Suriname is divided into ten electoral districts, of between 2 and 17 seats each, whose boundaries coincide with the boundaries of the ten administrative districts. For the election of the members of the Local Councils, the districts are sub-divided into 62 constituencies, whose boundaries are specified by separate decree.<sup>23</sup>

In Suriname, the President is the Head of State, Head of Government and Chairman of the Council of State and the Security Council.<sup>24</sup> Both the President and the Vice President are elected for five years by a two-thirds majority of the members of the National Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

The May 25 General Elections, in which seventeen political parties competed, were held with a Voters’ List comprising 383,333 electors, of which 192,055 (50.1%) were men and 191,278 (49.89%) were women.

#### **2. Legal Framework**

The legal framework for the 2020 elections in Suriname was provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 116), with 1992 reforms;<sup>26</sup> the Electoral Law of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 62) and amendments;<sup>27</sup> the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 No. 61) and its amendments;<sup>28</sup> and the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no.

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<sup>20</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>, Article 1.

<sup>21</sup> Constitution of Suriname, Article 55.

<sup>22</sup> Constitution of Suriname, Articles 56 and 61.

<sup>23</sup> Decree on the Division of Ressorts (General Decree A-26 of 16 October 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Constitution of Suriname, Article 90.

<sup>25</sup> Constitution of Suriname, Article 83, paragraph 3.

<sup>26</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Electoral Law of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 62) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61).

419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), which outlined specific measures to be taken for the 2020 elections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>29</sup>

### **3. Electoral Authorities**

The Electoral Law of 1987 identifies three authorities with responsibility for different aspects of Suriname's electoral management. They are:

- The Independent Electoral Council
- The Central Polling Station
- The Ministry of Home Affairs

#### **a. Independent Electoral Council (OKB)**<sup>30</sup>

The Independent Electoral Council (OKB) is the authority responsible for the supervision of all preparations related to the general elections and the binding determination of the election results. It is comprised of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and thirteen<sup>31</sup> members, along with three alternate members and a Secretary. All members are appointed for six years by the President,<sup>32</sup> who also selects the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman from among the members.

The principal tasks of the OKB include supervising the compilation and updating of the voter registers; supervising the registration of political organizations by the Central Polling Station; supervising the nominations of political organizations and observing the meetings of the Main Polling Stations; ensuring that uniform instructions are issued regarding the operation of polling stations and monitoring compliance with these instructions by polling station officials on Election Day; monitoring activities at polling stations on Election Day, including after the conclusion of voting; taking such measures as are necessary if complaints are received about the improper functioning of any polling station or Main Polling Station and declaring the results of the election binding or not, based on the findings regarding the entire process.

#### **b. The Central Polling Station (CPS)**

The Central Polling Station (CPS) is an independent electoral authority, established for the purposes of the election of the members of the National Assembly and the members of the Local Councils. The Central Polling Station is comprised of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman,

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<sup>29</sup> “COVID-19 Measures for Election of People’s Representative Bodies”, Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people’s representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>30</sup> OKB is the Dutch acronym for the Independent Electoral Council – the “Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau”.

<sup>31</sup> Article 1 of the Electoral Law establishes “The Electoral Council shall consist of at least 7 members”. For this electoral process, the OKB was comprised as indicated above.

<sup>32</sup> Electoral Law, Article 1.



ten members and a Secretary.<sup>33</sup> The law does not define the appointment process, but all members are chosen by the President.

The CPS registers political organizations which intend to participate in the elections, as well as the candidates that they nominate; implements the decision of the President where there is an appeal; and determines and publishes the results of the elections.

c. Ministry of Home Affairs

The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for organizing the elections, including generating the Voters' List, selecting and training poll workers, distributing polling cards, and designing and printing electoral materials. In fulfilling these tasks, the Ministry is supported by a number of commissions, composed of several ministers of government who, on account of their responsibilities and/or formal tasks, are directly involved in the elections and report directly to the President of the Republic of Suriname.

In addition to the above-mentioned tasks, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented a preliminary results transmission system for the 2020 elections. On election night, the Ministry used this system to share unofficial results from each of the polling stations with the Independent Electoral Council, political parties and the media.

It is notable that, in addition to the organization of the elections by the Ministry of Home Affairs, a government institution, the heads and members of the other two electoral institutions are also appointed by the President. Various stakeholders expressed concern to the Mission regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the Government organizes an election in which the ruling political party also competes.

The OAS Mission also noted that most of the members of the bodies involved in the organization and supervision of elections are only temporarily assigned to these tasks. In most cases, outside of the electoral period, these persons have a different job, usually at a governmental agency. This type of institutional design does not contribute to professionalizing the organization and administration of the elections.

d. Additional Electoral Authorities

*Main Polling Stations*

In addition to the authorities identified above, the electoral process is managed at the district-level by a Main Polling Station. The ten Main Polling Stations (one per district) comprise five members and three substitutes each.<sup>34</sup> The chairperson of the Main Polling Station is the District Commissioner who, along with all other members, is appointed by the President.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 29 – 30.

<sup>34</sup> Electoral Law, Article 26.

<sup>35</sup> Electoral Law, Article 26.

The responsibilities of the Main Polling Stations include the supervision of the polling stations in their electoral district and the evaluation of the lists of candidates for the elections of the members of the National Assembly, the Local Councils within its district, and the District Councils. The Main Polling Stations also play an important role in the transmission of official results, as they are responsible for determining the total number of votes cast for each candidate and political organization, per electoral district and constituency, and determining the allocation of seats on the District Council.<sup>36</sup>

### *Polling Stations*

Each constituency has at least one polling station, comprising five members and five substitute members,<sup>37</sup> all selected by the Ministry of Home Affairs. For this election 650 Polling stations were established.

As was the case in previous elections, various stakeholders expressed concerns to the Mission regarding a perceived bias in the selection and appointment of the members of polling stations. The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Mission that the recruitment process had complied with the profile requirements established for the position and that all polling station workers had been trained and evaluated.

## **4. The Electoral System**

The general elections comprise two direct elections (National Assembly and Local Councils) and one indirect election (District Councils). The 51 seats in the National Assembly are elected using proportional representation in ten multi-member constituencies containing between two and seventeen seats.<sup>38</sup> The National Assembly subsequently elects the president for a five-year term.

Elections for the Local Councils take place in the constituencies of the district concerned and candidates are elected by majority vote. Voting for the District Council is not direct; candidates are declared elected in proportion to the number of seats won by their political organization on the respective Local Council and the number of seats available on the District Council.<sup>39</sup>

On Election Day eligible voters are issued two ballots. The ballot for the National Assembly is blue and shows the lists of the candidates for that district. The voter may only select one candidate – which may be the person heading the list of candidates or any other listed candidate. The ballot for the Local Councils is white, and displays the maximum number of persons who may be chosen from among the candidates to fill the seats. If a voter selects more candidates than the maximum allowed, his/her ballot is rendered invalid.

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<sup>36</sup> Electoral Law, Article 124.

<sup>37</sup> Electoral Law, Article 25.

<sup>38</sup> Electoral Law, Article 131.

<sup>39</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 129 – 130.

While the distribution of seats at the district level for the National Assembly is established under Article 9 of the Electoral Law, the allocation of seats for the Local and District Councils is determined according to the number of residents in each district, in keeping with criteria established in Articles 10 and 11 of the Electoral Law.

**Table 1: Allocation of Seats by Election Level**

Districts	National Assembly	District Council	Local Council	Registered Voters
Paramaribo	17	21	200	166,102
Wanica	7	21	113	92,634
Nickerie	5	11	65	23,968
Commewijne	4	11	70	23,411
Sipaliwini	4	11	66	22,374
Brokopondo	3	9	60	7,935
Marowijne	3	9	56	14,102
Para	3	9	55	18,280
Saramacca	3	9	64	12,425
Coronie	2	7	23	2,102
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>383,333</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname.

The Mission noted that for the National Assembly elections the average number of people represented in each electoral district varied significantly. While the 2015 OAS Mission had recommended a review of the distribution of seats to ensure more balanced representation, no action has been taken in this regard. As a result, there are significant disparities between different districts. For example, a seat in Wanica represented 13,233 voters, while a seat in Coronie represented 1,051 voters.

## 5. Voters' List

The Civil Registry (Centraal Bureau voor Gurgerzken) of the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for maintaining a voters' register, in which the persons included in the Central Population Register, who are entitled to vote, appear.<sup>40</sup> In order to update the register, the Civil Registry takes into consideration death records and the information provided by the Ministry of Justice concerning those persons who have been excluded from exercising the right to vote by court order.

Voters' Lists are compiled from the voters' register and indicate those who are entitled to vote in an electoral district, as well as in a constituency, for members of the National Assembly and the Local Councils, respectively.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Electoral Law, Article 13.

<sup>41</sup> Electoral Law, Article 16.

**Table 2: Registered Voters, by District**

Districts	Male	Female	Total Registered Voters
Paramaribo	82,048	84,054	166,102
Wanica	45,916	46,718	92,634
Nickerie	12,579	11,389	23,968
Commewijne	12,202	11,209	23,411
Sipaliwini	10,807	11,567	22,374
Brokopondo	4,097	3,838	7,935
Marowijne	7,183	6,919	14,102
Para	9,448	8,832	18,280
Saramacca	6,596	5,829	12,425
Coronie	1,179	923	2,102
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>192,055</b>	<b>191,278</b>	<b>383,333</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

In accordance with Article 16 of the Electoral Law, the Voter's Lists are open for inspection from the thirtieth day before they become final, at the Ministry of Home Affairs, the offices of the District Commissioners and police stations. Every person entitled to vote may examine whether he/she has been included on the List for his/her district or constituency.<sup>42</sup> For the May 2020 elections, the Lists were available for viewing from February 14 to March 14.

If a citizen considers that he/she or someone else has not been properly included in the List, he/she may ask the Minister in charge of Home Affairs, in writing, to have a correction made<sup>43</sup>. This request must be submitted on the twenty-fifth day preceding Nomination Day, at the latest.

The OAS Mission observed that the process utilized at the Civil Registry, through which eligible persons are included in the Voter's List, uses unique biometric features to identify citizens. This biometric data is collected when citizens apply for and receive updated ID cards. In its discussions with the authorities, the Mission was informed that less than 50% of citizens (about 200,000) had updated their ID cards at the time of the elections, meaning that the Voter's List had not achieved its full biometric identification potential. Biometric information is not currently used to identify voters at polling stations. Also, although the Civil Registry's database contains images of registrants, the printed Voters' List includes only the personal information of each elector, not a photo.

When reviewing the registration process within the Civil Registry, the Mission also observed that the requirements to change a person's address do not include the submission of evidence to validate the person's claim. Registrants verbally provide an address, but no

<sup>42</sup> Electoral Law, Article 16.

<sup>43</sup> Electoral Law, Article 17.

supporting documentation or proof is required. The Mission notes that this information is crucial as a citizen's residential address determines the specific district and constituency in which he/she is assigned to vote.

## 6. Political Parties and Coalitions

In 2019 the National Assembly approved an amendment<sup>44</sup> to Article 7 of the Electoral Law of 1987, which had previously allowed political parties to form coalitions in order to contest elections. The amendment barred pre-electoral coalitions from the 2020 elections onwards and required all political organizations to register independently. Seventeen political parties were subsequently registered to participate in the elections, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Political Parties participating in the May 2020 Elections**

#	Political Party	Acronym
1	Alternatief 2020 / Alternative 2020	A20
2	Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij / General Liberation and Development Party	ABOP
3	Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek / Brotherhood and Unity in Politics	BEP
4	Democratisch Alternatief '91 / Democratic Alternative '91	DA '91
5	De Nieuwe Wind / The New Wind	DNW
6	Hervormings- en Vernieuwings Beweging / Reform and Renewal Movement	HVB
7	Nationale Democratische Partij / National Democratic Party	NDP
8	Nationale Partij Suriname / National Party of Suriname	NPS
9	Partij voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling door Eenheid / Party for Democracy and Development through Unity	DOE
10	Partij voor Recht en Ontwikkelings / Party for Justice and Development	PRO
11	Progressieve Arbeiders - en Landbouwers Unie / Progressive Workers' and Farmers' Union	PALU
12	Pertjajah Luhur / Glorious Empire	PL
13	Sociaal Democratische Unie / Social Democratic Union	SDU
14	Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid / Surinamese Labour Party	SPA
15	STREI! / Struggle	STREI

<sup>44</sup> "Official Gazette of the Republic of Suriname, 54/2020 – ACT of 23 May 2019 amending the Decree Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 no. 61).

#	Political Party	Acronym
16	Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij / Progressive Reform Party	VHP
17	Volkspartij voor Vernieuwing & Democratie / People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	VVD

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

Various stakeholders with whom the Mission met expressed the view that the ban on coalitions had been introduced to prevent strong opposition alliances and thereby favour the ruling party. Government officials, on the other hand, advised that the goal of the amendment was to guarantee voters could distinguish between different political organizations and make a responsible choice based on parties' programs and policy proposals. According to the officials interviewed by the Mission, pre-electoral coalitions imply a combination of ideologies, which make it impossible for the voter to know what normative principles will guide the political action of elected officials.

## 7. Polling Cards

According to Article 90 of the Electoral Law, every person who is eligible to vote should receive a polling card at least three days before the elections, from the District Commissioner of the District on whose Voters' List he/she appears. If the card is misplaced or, for any reason, a voter does not receive it, he/she can request one from the District Commissioner provided that he/she properly identifies him/herself. Also, on Election Day, polling stations are authorized to deliver polling cards to those properly identified voters who did not receive them in advance.

As shown in Figure 1, polling cards are personalized. Their main purpose is to inform voters about the location of their polling stations. On Election Day, every voter has to present their card along with their ID in order to be allowed to cast a ballot.

The Mission noted that the delivery of polling cards is a complex and logistically challenging process, as the cards must be designed, printed and distributed to the address of each registered voter. The Mission was informed that, as of May 22 (3 days before the election), 78,783 polling cards, representing 20% of the total, had not been delivered to voters. Previous OAS Missions also noted delays in the distribution of polling cards.

**Figure 1: Sample Polling Card**

OPROEPINGSKAART VOOR DE STEMMING OP MAANDAG 25 MEI 2020  
TER VERKIEZING VAN DE LEDEN VAN DE NATIONALE ASSEMBLEE  
- EEN DISTRICTSRAAD  
- EEN RESSORTRAAD

DISTRICT: PARAMARIBO      RESSORT: RAINVILLE ( 01E )      STEMBUREAU NR.: 134

De stemming vindt plaats van 7.00 uur tot 19.00 uur.  
Het stembureau houdt zitting in:  
**I.P.J. BERKENVELDSCHOOL , S.M. JAMALUDINSTRAT 2**

Gegevens van de kiezer:  
Id-kaart nr. : ED003499      Nummer op de kiezerslijst : 224537  
Naam : MENSQ

Voorna(a)m(en) : DENNIS EUGÈNE  
Geb. Datum : 08 09 1959  
Adres : APOLLOSTRAAT 31

Deze oproepingskaart en uw identiteitskaart, geldig paspoort of geldig rijbewijs mede te nemen ter overlegging bij het stembureau.

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

## 8. Precautionary Measures related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the official data provided by Suriname's authorities, the country had reported 11 cases of COVID-19 prior to Election Day, with only one of those cases reported in May itself. In order to manage and prevent the further spread of COVID-19 on Election Day, Suriname's president issued the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105)<sup>45</sup> on May 15, 2020, which outlined a series of special measures designed for this purpose. The Resolution specified actions, procedures and behaviours expected of all categories of persons participating in the elections and established steps to be taken by Government to facilitate the process, including those listed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Sample of Special COVID-19 Measures for Election Day**

#	Measure
A.	<p><b>Regarding the voters:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The voter decides whether or not to report to the polling station with a mouth and nose cover.</li> <li>▪ A minimum distance of 1.5 meters is maintained between voters.</li> <li>▪ Each voter's hands are sprayed with an alcohol solution of at least 60 percent prior to entering a polling station.</li> <li>▪ Voters with flu-like symptoms are advised to remain at home or, if opting to vote, take all precautions, including wearing a mouth and nose cover.</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> "COVID-19 Measures for Election of People's Representative Bodies", Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people's representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

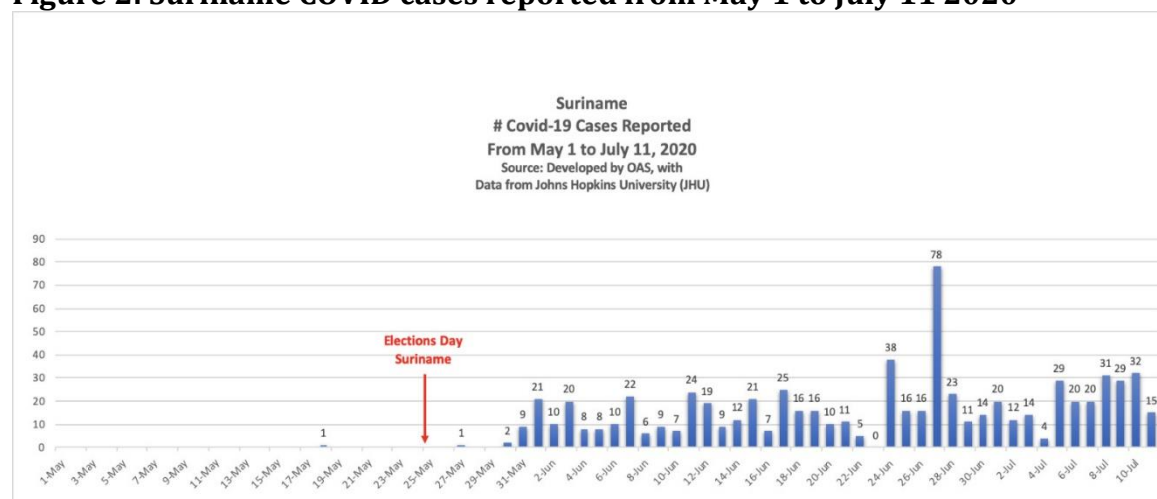
#	Measure
B.	<b>Regarding the election proceedings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All voters wait in line - at least 1.5 meters from each other.</li> <li>▪ A maximum of three voters are admitted to the polling station at a time.</li> <li>▪ A voter with a mouth and nose cover must remove it at the request of the chairman of the polling station in order to establish their identity and may then replace it.</li> <li>▪ Electoral ink is applied to the voter's finger with a cotton swab by a member of the polling station, after which the swab is immediately discarded in a container provided for that purpose.</li> <li>▪ A red pencil is given to each voter to mark the ballot papers. Immediately after use, the voter disposes of the pencil in a container provided for that purpose.</li> </ul>
C.	<b>Regarding polling stations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Polling stations are set up to ensure at least 1.5 meters is maintained between the members.</li> <li>▪ Persons working at a polling station wear a mouth and nose cover at all times and have access to hand sanitizer for their own use.</li> <li>▪ Political parties provide COVID-19 protective equipment for their own observers at the polling stations.</li> <li>▪ Independent Electoral Council supervisors are positioned inside the polling station and political observers are positioned outside the polling station during the voting process. Their placement allows them to easily observe every action in the polling station.</li> <li>▪ During the scrutiny of the vote (counting the votes cast), political observers are admitted to the polling station, depending on the space and while observing the minimum distance of 1.5 meters between persons.</li> </ul>
D.	<b>Regarding eligible voters in quarantine:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eligible voters in quarantine have the opportunity to vote.</li> <li>▪ They are provided with a mouth and nose cover and transported to their polling station and, after voting, returned to their respective quarantine facility.</li> </ul>
E.	<b>Regarding physically challenged voters:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physically challenged voters report to the polling station with their own attendant.</li> </ul>
F.	<b>Regarding international observers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All international observers adhere to the Quarantine Exemption Protocol for Special Travelers and wear a surgical mouth-nose mask when performing their duties.</li> </ul>

OAS observers reported that most of the measures established in the Resolution were rigorously and effectively implemented by electoral officials. However, social distancing requirements were not met in all polling stations and, as wearing a mouth and nose cover was only mandatory for poll workers, most citizens reported to vote without one.



The Mission noted that new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Suriname in the days following Election Day, as shown in Figure 2. Although it is not possible for the Mission to establish a direct causal relationship between the elections and the surge in the number of cases, this data should be taken into consideration by national authorities when reviewing the effectiveness of the precautionary measures implemented.

**Figure 2: Suriname COVID cases reported from May 1 to July 11 2020**



Source: Developed by OAS with data from Johns Hopkins University: [www.coronavirus.jhu.edu/](http://www.coronavirus.jhu.edu/)

## 9. Election Day

Polling stations observed by members of the OAS Mission generally opened on time, were fully staffed and possessed the required electoral materials. There was adequate space within the polling stations for the proper conduct of the poll and the secrecy of the ballot was properly maintained. Election workers, the majority of whom were women, were diligent in their duties and knowledgeable about the procedures.

There were very long lines and extended wait times in some locations during the day. While this led to complaints in some instances, voters generally waited patiently to exercise their franchise. Efforts were made at some polling stations to assist elderly persons and the disabled, although OAS observers reported this was not a standard procedure at all locations.

The Mission noted the presence of representatives of the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) at polling stations. As indicated earlier, these officials were tasked with ensuring that voting procedures were carried out in accordance with the law and mediating any disputes arising on Election Day. Some members of the Mission reported that they did not observe either the Council representatives or any of the other authorities collecting information on key issues such as whether polling stations opened and closed on time or if the electoral material was complete.

While the OKB representatives were located inside the polling stations, the Mission observed that political party representatives were allocated spaces outside of the polling stations to

facilitate social distancing. The Mission noted that the infrastructure of the polling stations did not always allow these party representatives to properly monitor the proceedings.

The Mission took note of several additional issues that unfolded on Election Day. First, reports were received that incorrect ballots had been delivered to and utilised in several polling stations.<sup>46</sup> Once the errors were detected the Main Polling Station delivered the correct ballots to those locations and voters were invited to return to cast their ballots once more. There were also some organizational challenges that affected the process and resulted in long lines at the end of the day. The Mission took note of the view of the Chair of the Independent Electoral Council reported in the national media, that there was “chaos” on Election Day. This was refuted by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, who nevertheless acknowledged that there were some issues on the day.

Towards the end of Election Day, as the voting process was still ongoing, the OAS team also observed a meeting between members of Suriname’s Executive, including the President, and the Chair of the Independent Electoral Council. While the Mission was subsequently advised that the meeting was not unusual in Suriname’s political context, where the law assigns a significant role in the electoral process to the Executive, such an interaction on Election Day could suggest that members of the Executive have a differentiated advantage over other candidates.

The Mission also noted the decision of the electoral authorities, just prior to the official close of the polls at 7 pm, to extend voting for a further two hours. While this measure sought to ensure that all eligible citizens had ample time to cast their ballot, in light of the organizational challenges mentioned earlier, the lateness of the decision created suspicion and confusion among the electorate. There was also confusion at the polling stations. Although the majority remained open, in a few cases, poll workers closed their respective stations on time, at 7 pm, asserting they had not been officially notified of any changes. The Mission was also informed that at least one polling station had to request a new ballot box, as it had already sealed the first one when the instruction to remain open was received.

After the voting was complete, the polling stations commenced the manual counting of the ballots. Elections results were tallied in the following manner: for the Local Council election, the polling stations determined the number of votes cast for each individual on the list; in the case of the National Assembly, the polling stations determined:

- The number of votes cast for each candidate;
- The number of votes cast for each political organization per polling station.

Pursuant to Article 122 of the Electoral Law, results were transcribed into the Statements of Poll (SOPs) which were then signed by all members of each polling station. The Mission noted

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<sup>46</sup> The “Report of the Session of the Independent Electoral Council for the Declaration of Elections of May 25, 2020 PART I”, issued on June 19, 2020, informed that the incorrect ballots for Ressor Council elections were distributed in Ressor Blauwgrond (polling station #8); Ressor Pontbuiten (polling stations #185, #188 and #192); Ressor Tammenga (polling stations #205 and #206) and Ressor Para – South (polling stations #574 and #575).

that the transcription process was quite long in some cases as each SOP had multiple pages. For example, the Statement of Poll in Paramaribo comprised 52 pages.

The Mission was also informed by the electoral authorities that numerous SOPs were not properly completed and were submitted either with missing information or with inconsistent figures. While the fatigue of poll workers likely played a part in these errors, the Mission notes that the SOPs were also lengthy and somewhat challenging documents.

## **10. Preliminary Results<sup>47</sup>**

While not required by law, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented an unofficial preliminary results transmission system, whereby media outlets were provided with information prior to the official tally. The data reported was not official and had no legal weight.

On election night, after the Statements of Poll had been completed, one poll worker at each polling station, who had been specifically trained for this task, was required to capture an image of the document using a mobile application designed exclusively to transmit images of the National Assembly results. Once transmitted, the data was digitized, validated, verified and consolidated at the Ministry of Home Affairs, producing partial results for each district, which were then uploaded in real-time to a special web site: <https://media.su2020.sr/login>. Due to the extension in voting and the time required to complete the Statements of Poll, the tabulation of the unofficial preliminary results was only begun by the Ministry of Home Affairs very late on election night.

The Mission noted a pause in the unofficial preliminary tabulation process at the Ministry of Home Affairs, at about 10:00 am on the day after the elections (May 26). As a result, political parties and the general public were deprived of information for about seven hours. While ministry officials advised that this was due to the fatigue of the officials processing the results, better planning would have prevented such a development, which should not happen in an electoral process. Nevertheless, the Mission observed that the processing of the results resumed later that day at the same percentage at which it was suspended (72% of Statements of Poll). The Ministry of Home Affairs was finally able to complete the unofficial tabulation process of the preliminary results on June 4, 2020.

## **11. Official Results<sup>48</sup>**

On election night, after the counting of the ballots at the poll stations was finalized, the Statements of Poll were sent to the Main Polling Station of each district, along with the valid and invalid ballots. Once these documents were received, each Main Polling Station began the tabulation for the specific electoral district under its responsibility.

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<sup>47</sup> For a complete explanation on the preliminary results system, please refer to Annex B (Electoral Technology).

<sup>48</sup> For a complete explanation on the conduct of the official count, please refer to Annex B (Electoral Technology).

The Mission observed scenes of disorder, along with elevated levels of tension at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo on May 26. This resulted primarily from the manner in which electoral materials from polling stations, including the Statements of Poll, were received, and the condition of the cardboard boxes in which they were stored. Some boxes were not properly sealed, leaving their contents clearly visible. In some cases, electoral workers were obliged to re-seal the boxes to ensure that electoral materials did not spill out.

**Figure 3: Electoral Material at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo**



**Source: OAS Electoral Observation Mission, Paramaribo, Suriname**

The Mission also noted delays in the official tabulation of the SOPs at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo. While this was scheduled to commence at 8:00 am on May 26, it was initially postponed to 2:00 pm that day and eventually re-scheduled to 10:00 am on May 27. The Mission was informed that the initial postponements resulted from the District Commissioner's inability to locate several SOPs for polling stations in the Paramaribo District and the requirement of Article 123 of the Electoral Law, that all official reports of polling stations be received before the determination of results could begin.

The Mission stresses that the physical integrity of the containers used to store electoral materials and an unbroken chain of custody of these containers and materials, are two of the absolute minimum requirements in ensuring trust in the credibility of electoral results.

The Mission observed that the counting at the Main Polling Stations progressed slowly. This was particularly the case in Paramaribo, where the number of SOPs to be processed was significantly higher than that of any other district. However even Main Polling Stations in smaller districts took longer than expected to complete the counting. The significant number of SOPs that had to be corrected and the need to conduct recounts in several cases partly explained the delays, which resulted in an overall highly tense political environment.

Despite the delays and tensions, the Mission noted that there was little to no official communication concerning the progress of the official counting in the two days after the elections. The Mission considers that regular, clear and fact-based information by the

authorities would have helped to allay the concerns of citizens during the extended post-electoral period.

Once the Main Polling Stations completed the tabulation of the results for their respective districts, they each prepared an official report that was sent to the Central Polling Station (CPS) along with the poll statements. Based on the data received, the CPS determined the results of the elections for the National Assembly and the Local Councils, and the distribution of seats on the District Councils.

On June 19, the Independent Electoral Council declared the results of the National Assembly Election binding, as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

The results indicated that no single political party achieved a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly elections. Four of the six political parties winning seats in the Assembly – Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij (VHP), Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij (ABOP), Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS) and Pertjajah Luhur (PL) – with a combined total of 33 seats, subsequently agreed to collaborate and to build a coalition.

With respect to the elections for Local and District Councils, the Independent Electoral Council also validated the results of 9 out of the 10 districts on June 19, 2020. The exception was District 1 - Paramaribo, where the Council advised it would undertake an investigation into the results of three polling stations<sup>49</sup> in the Pontbuiten “Ressort” and two polling stations<sup>50</sup> in the Tammenga “Ressort”. The Independent Electoral Council validated those results upon completion of its investigation and declared them binding on July 3, 2020. The final results for the Local and District Council elections are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

On July 13, 2020, during the first sitting of the Parliament since the polls, the leader of the Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij/Progressive Reform Party (VHP), Chandrikapersad Santokhi, was elected the new President of Suriname. Ronnie Brunswijk, the leader of the Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij/General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP), was elected Vice President.

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<sup>49</sup> Polling station numbers 185,188 and 192

<sup>50</sup> Polling station numbers 205 and 206

**Table 4: Distribution of Valid Votes for the National Assembly**

Political Party	Districts										Total Votes
	Paramaribo	Wanica	Nickerie	Commewijne	Sipaliwini	Brokopondo	Marowijne	Para	Saramacca	Coronie	
Alternatief 2020 (A20)	2,559	934	131	222	42	25	100	372	109	7	<b>4,501</b>
Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelings Partij (ABOP)	11,644				3,807	1,793	5,476	2,148		88	<b>24,956</b>
Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek (BEP)	1,872	1,217			1,876	1,223	351	296			<b>6,835</b>
Democratisch Alternatief '91 (DA '91)	414	114	70	45				16			<b>659</b>
De Nieuwe Wind (DNW)	56	14									<b>70</b>
Hervormings- en Vernieuwings Beweging (HVB)	2,571	1,390	952	980	171		128	606	625		<b>7,423</b>
Nationale Democratische Partij (NDP)	29,495	11,483	4,532	4,471	3,024	1,797	1,983	5,114	3,044	919	<b>65,862</b>
Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS)	21,654	4,592	775	1,043	900	357	111	1,870	703	389	<b>32,394</b>
Partij voor Democratie en Ontwikkelings in Eenheid (DOE)	1,657	597		66	16			39			<b>2,375</b>
Partij voor Recht en Ontwikkelings (PRO)	749	300			87		45	393		19	<b>1,593</b>
Pertjajah Luhur (PL)	2,616	8,413	1,482	3,673					439		<b>16,623</b>
Progressieve Arbeiders - en Landbouwers Unie (PALU)	429	244								147	<b>820</b>

Political Party	Districts										Total Votes
	Paramaribo	Wanica	Nickerie	Commewijne	Sipaliwini	Brokopondo	Marowijne	Para	Saramacca	Coronie	
Sociaal Democratische Unie (SDU)	111	108			35						254
STREI!	470	146		84							700
Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid (SPA)	363	198	30	31	152	32	14	85	17		922
Volkspartij voor Vernieuwing & Democratie (VVD)	226	80					13	30			349
Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij (VHP)	38,780	41,114	11,783	8,226	503	97	356	1,693	5,775	51	108,378
<b>TOTAL VOTES</b>	<b>115,666</b>	<b>70,944</b>	<b>19,755</b>	<b>18,841</b>	<b>10,613</b>	<b>5,324</b>	<b>8,577</b>	<b>12,662</b>	<b>10,712</b>	<b>1,620</b>	<b>274,714</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, “Uitslad verkiezingen 25 mei 2020 De Nationale Assemblée”, 16 juni 16, 2020 / Central Polling Station, “Election Results – National Assembly, 25 May 2020”, 16 June 2020 ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

**Table 5: Allocation of Seats – National Assembly**

Political Party	Districts										Total Seats
	Paramaribo	Wanica	Nickerie	Commewijne	Sipaliwini	Brokopondo	Marowijne	Para	Saramacca	Coronie	
ABOP	2				2	1	2	1			8
BEP					1	1					2
NDP	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	16
NPS	3										3
PL		1		1							2
VHP	7	5	4	2					2		20
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, “Uitslad verkiezingen 25 mei 2020 De Nationale Assemblée”, 16 juni 16, 2020 / Central Polling Station, “Election Results – National Assembly, 25 May 2020”, 16 June 2020, ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

**Table 6: Allocation of Seats – Local Councils**

Political Party	Districts										Total
	Paramaribo	Wanica	Nickerie	Commewijne	Sipaliwini	Brokopondo	Marowijne	Para	Saramacca	Coronie	
ABOP	31				40	28	47	2			<b>148</b>
NDP	54		11	4	26	32	9	53	8	21	<b>218</b>
NPS										2	<b>2</b>
PL				4							<b>4</b>
VHP	115	113	54	62					56		<b>400</b>
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>772</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, “Uitslad verkiezingen 25 mei 2020, Ressortraden en Districtsraden”, 16 juni 2020 / Central Polling Station, “Election Results – Local and District Councils, 25 May 2020”, 16 June 2020, ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

**Table 7: Allocation of Seats – District Councils**

Political Party	Districts										Total Seats
	Paramaribo	Wanica	Nickerie	Commewijne	Sipaliwini	Brokopondo	Marowijne	Para	Saramacca	Coronie	
ABOP	3				7	4	8				<b>22</b>
NDP	6		2		4	5	1	9	1	6	<b>34</b>
NPS										1	<b>1</b>
PL				1							<b>1</b>
VHP	12	21	9	10					8		<b>60</b>
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>118</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, “Uitslad verkiezingen 25 mei 2020, Ressortraden en Districtsraden”, 16 juni 2020 / Central Polling Station, “Election Results – Local and District Councils, 25 May 2020”, 16 June 2020, ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))



## 12. Findings and Recommendations

- As in previous elections, various stakeholders expressed concern to the Mission regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the Government organizes an election in which the ruling political party also competes. The Mission therefore recommends creating an independent electoral body that is responsible for the organization of the elections, including the appointment of poll workers.
- Most of the members of the bodies involved in the organization and supervision of elections are only temporarily assigned to these tasks during electoral periods. The Mission recommends implementing a system that focuses on the professionalization of the personnel involved in the organization of the elections.
- The average number of people represented in each electoral district varied significantly. The Mission therefore recommends reviewing the seat allocation formula and criteria in order to achieve a more balanced representation of persons per district.
- As a voter's biometric details are only captured when they renew their ID, less than 50% of citizens (about 200,000) have completed this process to date. As a result, the Voter's List has not achieved its full biometric identification potential. The Mission suggests implementing an urgent and sustained re-registration campaign to ensure that registered and first-time electors, who are not currently in possession of the new ID card, complete the renewal process before the next election takes place.
- Although the civil registry database contains images of registrants, the printed list of voters includes only the personal information of each elector, but not a photo. The Mission recommends including photos in the printed Voters' List. This could significantly improve the accuracy of authentication controls at the polling station and support general confidence in the electoral process.
- When reviewing the registration process within the civil registry, the Mission observed that the requirements to change a person's address do not include the submission of evidence to validate the new residence. The Mission suggests reviewing these procedures, ensuring that citizens provide supporting documents (2 forms of documentation) as proof of their new residence.
- The Mission was informed that, as of May 22 (3 days before the election), 78,783 polling cards, representing 20% of the total, had not been delivered to voters. As suggested in 2015, the Mission recommends analyzing the use of polling cards and exploring different options for informing voters on the location of their respective polling stations.
- The number of Statements of Poll processed by the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo was significantly higher than that of any other district. In order to speed

up the tabulation of the results, the Mission recommends dividing Paramaribo into three, and assigning the responsibility of conducting the official counting to three different Main Polling Stations.

- The Mission noted that poll statements had numerous pages and were not easy to complete. The Mission recommends reviewing the design of all documents, especially poll statements, with a view to facilitating the work of poll stations members.
- There were scenes of disorder, along with elevated levels of tension at the Main Polling Station in Paramaribo on May 26, which resulted primarily from the manner in which electoral materials from polling stations, including the Statements of Poll (SOPs) were received, and the condition of the cardboard boxes in which they were stored. The Mission recommends revising the procedures implemented to transport the electoral materials from the polling stations to the Main polling stations. It is of the utmost importance to guarantee the physical integrity of the containers used to store electoral materials and an unbroken chain of custody of these containers and materials.

## **ii. ELECTORAL TECHNOLOGY**

### **1. Introduction**

On May 25, 2020, Surinamese citizens were called on to elect the members of the National Assembly, the District Councils and the Local Councils. According to official data, the elections were held with a Voters' List comprising 383,333 electors, of which 192,055 were men (50.1%) and 191,278 were women (49.89%).

Suriname's electoral system is a primarily manual one. However certain processes, such as updating the voters' registry and consolidating the results, are carried out using a series of information technology tools. The use of biometric information as part of the voter registration process has already been analyzed in the Electoral Organization Annex of this report. Therefore, this section will focus on the technological aspects of the transmission and dissemination of election results.

The official tabulation of the votes is conducted at three different levels: at the polling stations, at the Main Polling Stations and at the Central Polling Station (CPS). While the counting process at polling stations is entirely manual, the tabulation of results at the Main Polling Stations and at the Central Polling Station involves the implementation of different technological tools. As indicated earlier in this report, the Ministry of Home Affairs also implements an unofficial preliminary results system, through which the Independent Electoral Council (OKB),<sup>51</sup> political parties and the media receive unofficial results from each of the polling stations. The transmission of the unofficial preliminary results also relies on technological solutions.

This report presents a detailed analysis of both the official and unofficial transmission and dissemination of results, and the technology implemented to support these processes. In addition, it includes various recommendations to further incorporate technology in this phase of the electoral process.

### **2. Legal Framework**

The legal framework for the 2020 elections in Suriname was provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 116), with 1992 reforms;<sup>52</sup> the Electoral Law of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 62) and amendments;<sup>53</sup> the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 No. 61) and its amendments;<sup>54</sup> and the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no.

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<sup>51</sup> For its Dutch acronym – Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau.

<sup>52</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Electoral Law of September 29, 1987 (S.B. 1987 no. 62) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61).

419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), which outlined specific measures to be taken for the 2020 elections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>55</sup>

### **3. Unofficial Preliminary Results**

Under Surinamese law, the responsibility for tabulating and verifying the votes cast in Suriname's general elections lies with the Central Polling Station (CPS). An official preliminary results system is not currently implemented by the CPS. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the entity that is responsible for the preparation of the electoral process, facilitated unofficial preliminary results on the night of the elections. This process allowed unofficial, preliminary data to be transmitted to the Independent Electoral Council, political parties and media outlets prior to the official tally. The data reported was not official and had no legal weight.

For this election, the unofficial transmission system was the only means through which election results could be accessed online. Political party representatives and members of the press who had previously registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, were able to view and download election results to disseminate to citizens nationwide.

#### **a. Transmission and Dissemination Process**

Upon the close of voting, the members of the 650 polling stations proceeded to tally the ballots, recording the results in the corresponding Statements of Poll (SOPs). Once completed, an image of the SOP was captured by a member of the polling station (who had been specifically trained for this task) using a mobile application designed exclusively to transmit the National Assembly results.

Although the technology implemented was robust, the Mission noticed that the images captured were not hashed<sup>56</sup> and that the photograph metadata was not recorded. These are common security measures which enhance the level of protection of the transmission system in the face of possible cyber threats.

Once the photos were transmitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs headquarters in Paramaribo, data entry clerks registered and transferred the data from the SOPs to the computer tabulation system. Following the transcription process, the data was validated, verified and consolidated, producing partial results for each district, which were then uploaded in real-time to a designated website <https://media.su2020.sr/login>.

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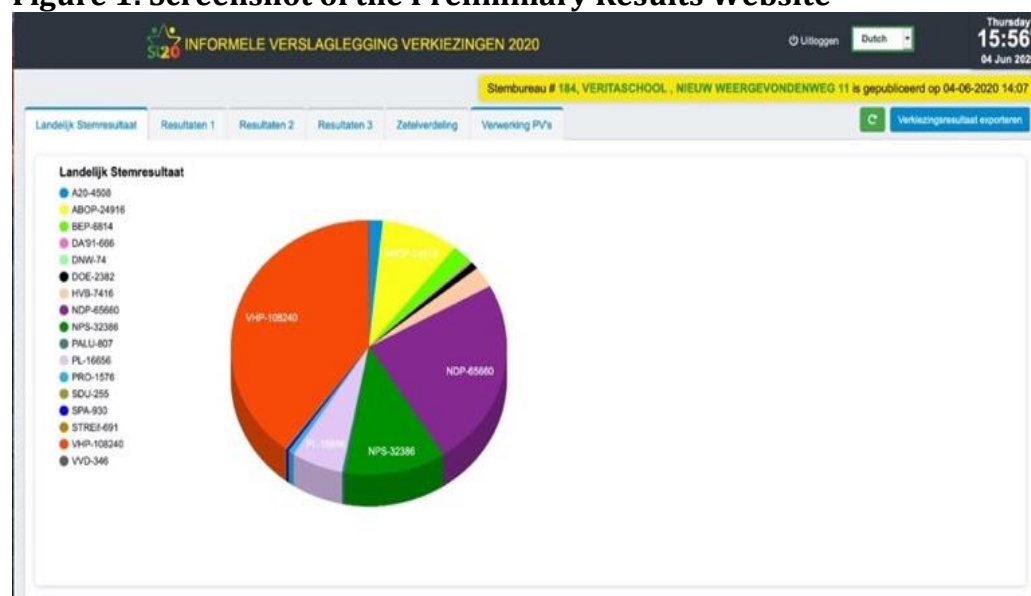
<sup>55</sup> “COVID-19 Measures for Election of People’s Representative Bodies”, Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people’s representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>56</sup> A hash algorithm is a one-way function that converts a data string, image file or other digital file into an alphanumeric string output. Hashing can help to verify that a received file is the same as the source file, thus ensuring that it was not corrupted or tampered with during transmission.

While this website was not accessible by the general population, media outlets with access transmitted the preliminary results to citizens. Using multi-factor authentication,<sup>57</sup> the media was able to access the web site and view election results in a graphical format or in the form of a flat Excel spreadsheet file that could be easily downloaded. It should be noted that the website only showed the results of the National Assembly elections; information on the District Council and Local Council elections was never tabulated or published, and was not part of the unofficial preliminary results system.

The Mission noted that the results were published down to the polling station level. However, images of the Statements of Polls for the respective polling stations were not uploaded to the website until after all results had been published. Figure 1 shows how the information was displayed on the Ministry of Home Affairs web page.

**Figure 1: Screenshot of the Preliminary Results Website**



**Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname.**

In its preparation of the preliminary results system, the Ministry of Home Affairs had proposed to commence transmission of the results at 7:00 p.m. – the official close of polls – and continue until 100% of the SOPs had been received. However, as voting was extended by two hours beyond the expected 7:00 pm closing, the tabulation of preliminary results did not begin until 9:00 pm on election night. The Mission observed that as of midnight on the night of the election, only 2.3 % of the polling station results had been processed.

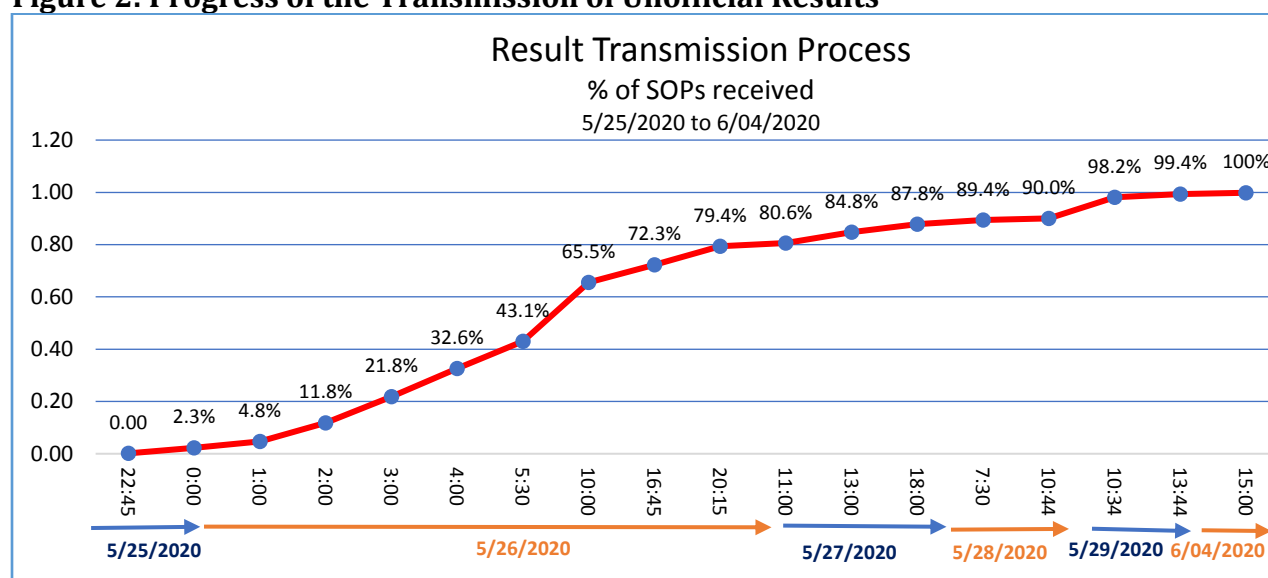
The Mission also noted a pause in the unofficial preliminary tabulation process at the Ministry of Home Affairs, at about 10:00 am on the day after the elections, May 26. As a result, political parties and the general public were deprived of information for about seven hours. As mentioned in the Electoral Organization Annex, officials of the Ministry advised that the

<sup>57</sup> In addition to entering a username and password, the media received a login code sent to them by SMS in order to access the system.

pause was due to the fatigue of the operators processing the results. The Mission reiterates that better planning would have prevented such an outcome.

The processing of the results resumed later that day (May 26) at the same percentage at which it was suspended (72% of Statements of Poll). Due to a number of factors affecting the tabulation process however, the Ministry of Home Affairs did not complete its processing of the preliminary results until June 4, 2020.<sup>58</sup>

**Figure 2: Progress of the Transmission of Unofficial Results**



Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname.

#### 4. Official Results

The tabulation and consolidation of the official results was conducted in three phases and for the most part through manual operations.

##### a. Phase 1 – At the Polling Stations

After voting was complete, the Chairman of each polling station commenced the manual counting of the ballots. For the election of the Local Council, the polling station determined the number of votes cast for each individual on the list. For the National Assembly election, the polling station determined the number of votes cast for each candidate and the number of votes cast for each political organization<sup>59</sup>. The entire process took place in public.

Once the counting was completed, the results were transcribed into the Statements of Polls, which were then signed by all members of each polling station. In keeping with Article 107 of the Electoral Law, the Statements, along with the valid and invalid ballots and other

<sup>58</sup> The special mobile polling station, which was established at the Zorghotel in Paramaribo to serve 187 persons in COVID-19 quarantine, was not included in the unofficial results system due to time constraints.

<sup>59</sup> Pursuant to articles 123-126 of the Electoral Law.

documents, were taken by the Chairmen of the polling stations to the Chairman of the Main Polling Station of the respective electoral district.

b. Phase 2 – At the Main Polling Stations (District Tabulation Centers)

In each electoral district, the Main Polling Station was responsible for determining:<sup>60</sup>

- The number of votes cast for each candidate on a list;
- The number of votes cast for each political organization per electoral district and constituency;
- The total number of votes cast for the candidates and the political organizations in the electoral district;
- The number of seats to be awarded to the different political organizations on the District Council, in proportion to the total number of seats gained on the Local Council.

Once the SOPs were received at the Main Polling Stations, they had to be reviewed to verify there were no errors or missing information. The Mission noted that the software used to process the SOPs did not include any control mechanisms to identify irregularities. Hence, quality control procedures were mainly manual: officials from the Main Polling Stations inspected the statements and, if they found any irregularities, they registered them on paper. In those cases where errors were detected, members of the corresponding polling station were summoned to make the necessary corrections. If the SOPs had no irregularities, they were sent to the tabulation center, where a group of data entry clerks transcribed the results into a computer application<sup>61</sup> designed for this task. The data was stored in a local area network database (not connected to the Internet) at the district level.

The Mission observed that the tabulation of official results was seriously affected by continuous postponements in several Districts, including Paramaribo. In this case, the tabulation, scheduled to commence at 8:00 am on May 26, was initially postponed to 2:00 pm that day and eventually re-scheduled to 10:00 am on May 27. The Mission was informed that the tabulation had to be postponed because the District Commissioner of Paramaribo was unable to locate several SOPs and, according to Article 123 of the Electoral Law, all official reports of polling stations had to be received before the determination of results could begin.

Once the Main Polling Station began tabulating the results, the Mission observed that there were considerable delays in the process. The Mission was informed that these resulted from the significant number of SOPs that had been received with incomplete information or mathematical inconsistencies. As noted in the Electoral Organization section of this report, the structure, length and content of the SOPs, which in some cases had more than 50 pages, could partly explain these errors.

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<sup>60</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 123-127.

<sup>61</sup> The process is completed by a group of operators (the number of operators varies from district to district) specifically trained for this task, all of them under the supervision of the main operator and IT agent.

The official vote count for Suriname's National Assembly in the Paramaribo District was suspended on the afternoon of May 27. The counting process resumed the next day, but was halted again to review the results of several polling stations that presented irregularities.<sup>62</sup>

The Mission observed that the progression of interim official results in all districts was never published for the inspection of political parties, the media, and citizens. The Mission considers that publishing updates on the progress of the tabulation would have helped to ease political tensions and increase stakeholder confidence in the process.

Once the Main Polling Stations completed the tabulation of the results for their respective district, they each prepared an official report to be sent to the Central Polling Station (CPS) along with the SOPs. The Mission observed that either hard copies or images of the SOPs, depending on the District, were sent ahead of the official SOPs so that the Central Polling Station would be able to begin the tabulation process.

In Paramaribo and Wanica, the Main Polling Stations physically transported hard copies of the statements directly to the Central Polling Station. In the remaining eight districts, once the results were tallied, SOPs were scanned and the images uploaded to a virtual storage space in the cloud (google drive). The Central Polling Station then accessed the cloud and used the uploaded images to begin its own digitization process while awaiting the original SOPs. The Mission observed that the images of the SOPs were utilized solely as a means of backup and to begin the digitization of the results - they were not published or posted on an official website for citizens and political parties to scrutinize.

c. Phase 3 – the Central Polling Station (National Tabulation Center)

The Central Polling Station was responsible for determining:<sup>63</sup>

- The results of the elections of the National Assembly;
- The results of the elections for the Local Councils in all constituencies;
- The distribution of seats for the District Council on the basis of the results of the elections for the Local Councils.

In order to fulfil their task, the members of the Central Polling Station began by examining the electoral documentation (SOPs) provided by the Main Polling Stations in each of the 10 districts. In those cases where discrepancies were found, the CPS advised the Chairman of the respective Main Polling Station to determine a course of action to resolve the matter. The latter would subsequently contact the members of the respective polling station and request them to make any necessary corrections. If no discrepancies were found, the SOPs were sent to the CPS' tabulation computer centre to be processed. The centre was equipped with desk-

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<sup>62</sup> The Independent Electoral Council (OKB) announced on June 23, 2020 that it would investigate irregularities that occurred during the election in three polling station in the Pontbuiten Ressort (#185, #188, #192) and two polling stations in the Tammenga Ressort (#205, #206). After the investigation was complete, the results were validated and declared binding by the OKB.

<sup>63</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 128-130.



top computers, linked by a local area network responsible for establishing and managing the national tabulation. The Mission observed that approximately 10 data entry clerks were present at the centre. This number, however, varied depending on the workload the centre faced.

Results were entered using a software application developed to run in the local hard drive of a laptop assigned to each data entry clerk. This application allowed operators to enter multiple elections results from various polling stations, which were then stored in a local database server. Tabulated results were collected from the database to prepare the official declaration of election results.

The Mission noted that the tabulation process was carried out without a double entry mechanism: the data was only entered once and no cross checking controls were implemented to verify the results. Moreover, the data entry process was not blind, meaning the operators in charge of entering the results into the system could see the names of the parties and candidates to whom votes were being assigned.

The Mission was informed that the software used to conduct the tabulation of results at a national and district level operated independently, with no integration or connectivity. In other words, the data collected at the district level was never entered into the tabulation system implemented by the Central Polling Station. Consequently, electronically and automatically cross-referencing processes between districts and the national tabulation center was not possible. Furthermore, the use of two different and independent systems generated a duplication of efforts, since the SOPs were processed and transcribed twice, negatively affecting the timely release of results.

As occurred at the district level, in spite of the fact that the tabulation of results at the CPS took place over several days, there was no official communication concerning the progress of the counting. The Mission reiterates that frequent updates on the consolidation of results would have helped to ease the tensions that occurred.

After multiple delays, results were released by CPS on June 16, 22 days after the elections. In light of the time it took to process and publish the results, it is clear there is a need to modernize and simplify the tabulation and consolidation process. The rigorous nature of the consolidation and verification of the results of the elections in three different stages provides for a high degree of precision. However, the quest for accuracy should not be an impediment to address the need of the citizenry for more timely results.

On June 19, the Independent Electoral Council declared the results of the National Assembly Election binding. The Progressive Reform Party/Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij (VHP), led by former Justice Minister Chandrikapersad "Chan" Santokhi, won 20 seats in Suriname's 51-seat Parliament. The ruling party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), won 16 seats, as can be observed in Table 1. According to official data, voter turnout was 71.56 percent.

**Table 1: Results for the National Assembly**

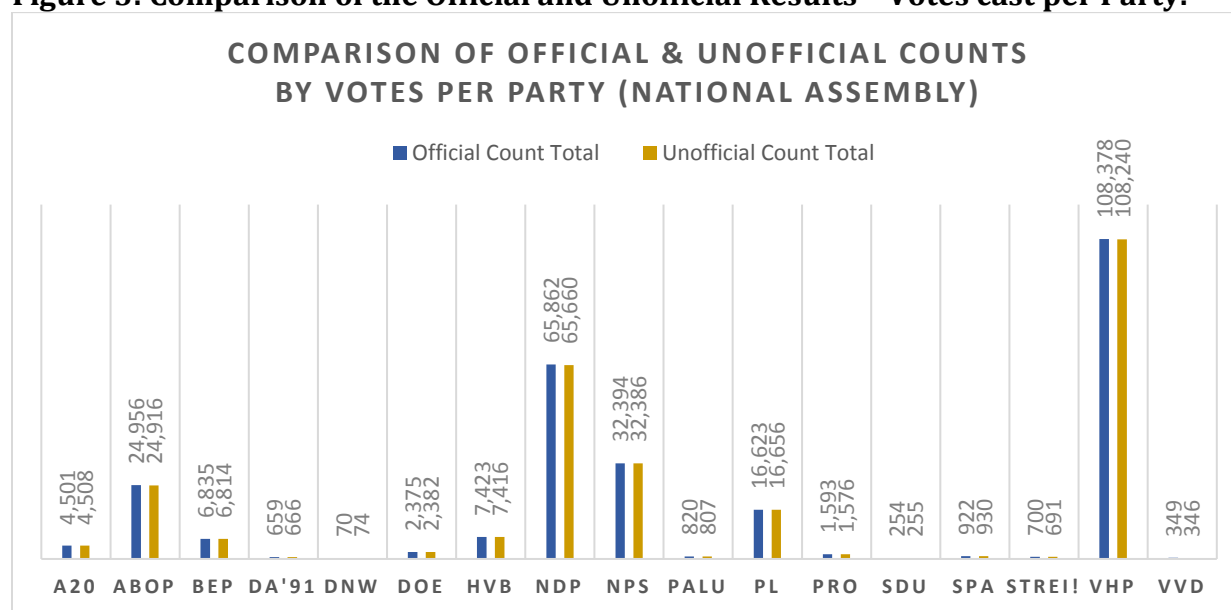
<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Seats Obtained</b>
Alternatief 2020 / Alternative 2020 (A20)	4,501	-
Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij / General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP)	24,956	8
Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek / Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP)	6,835	2
Democratisch Alternatief '91 / Democratic Alternative '91 (DA '91)	659	-
De Nieuwe Wind / The New Wind (DNW)	70	-
Hervormings- en Vernieuwings Beweging / Reform and Renewal Movement (HVB)	7,423	-
Nationale Democratische Partij / National Democratic Party (NDP)	65,862	16
Nationale Partij Suriname / National Party of Suriname (NPS)	32,394	3
Partij voor Democratie en Ontwikkelings in Eenheid / Party for Democracy and Development through Unity (DOE)	2,375	-
Partij voor Recht en Ontwikkelings / Party for Justice and Development (PRO)	1,593	-
Pertjajah Luhur / Glorious Empire (PL)	16,623	2
Progressieve Arbeiders - en Landbouwers Unie / Progressive Workers' and Farmers' Union (PALU)	820	-
Sociaal Democratische Unie / Social Democratic Union (SDU)	254	-
STREI! / Struggle	700	-
Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid / Surinamese Labour Party (SPA)	922	-
Volkspartij voor Vernieuwing & Democratie / People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	349	-
Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij / Progressive Reform Party (VHP)	108,378	20
<b>TOTAL VOTES / SEATS</b>	<b>274,714</b>	<b>51</b>

Source: Centraal Hoofdstembureau, "Uitslad verkiezingen 25 mei 2020 De Nationale Assemblée" / Central Polling Station, "Election Results – National Assembly, 25 May 2020" ([www.chs.gov.sr](http://www.chs.gov.sr))

## 5. Comparison of the Official and Unofficial Results

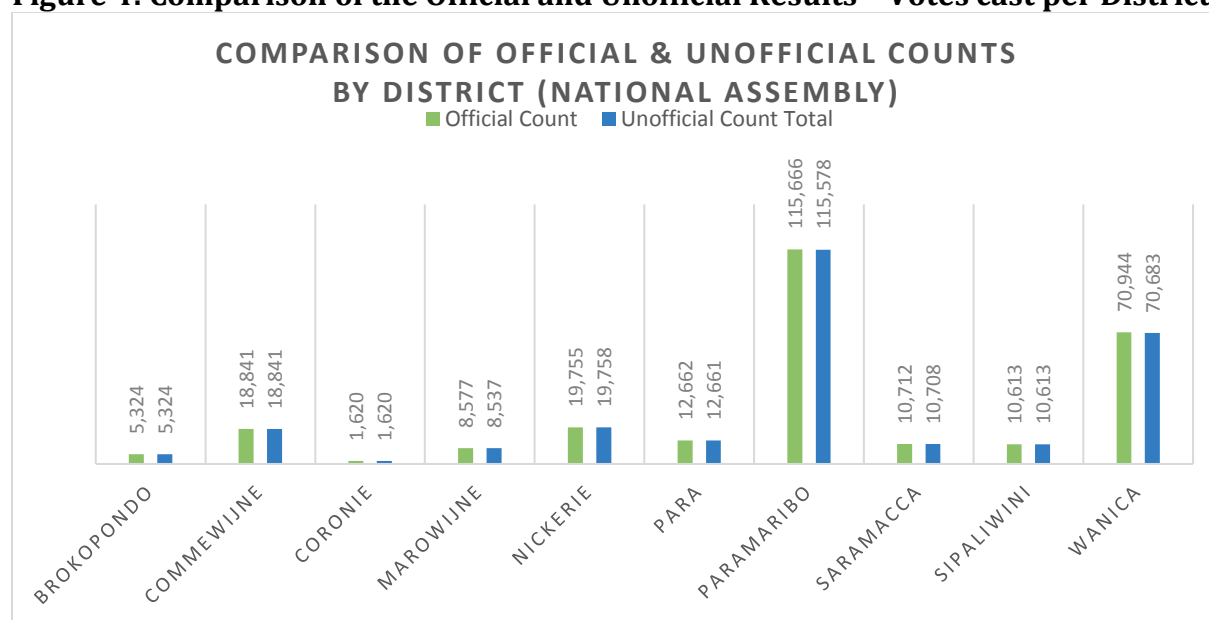
To assess the strength of the unofficial preliminary results system, the Mission compared the official and unofficial results. As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the results announced by the Central Polling Station on June 16, 2020 closely matched the preliminary results presented by the Ministry of Home Affairs on June 4, 2020.

**Figure 3: Comparison of the Official and Unofficial Results – Votes cast per Party.**



Source: Prepared using data from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Independent Electoral Council

**Figure 4: Comparison of the Official and Unofficial Results – Votes cast per District**



Source: Prepared using data from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Independent Electoral Council

## **6. Findings and Recommendations**

### **Preliminary Results**

- While the responsibility for tabulating and verifying the votes cast in Suriname's general elections falls under the Central Polling Station (CPS), a preliminary results system is not currently implemented by the CPS. In order to increase transparency and public confidence in the electoral outcomes, the Mission recommends that the Central Polling Station (CPS) considers the possibility of implementing its own system to collect and publish preliminary election results.
- The Mission observed that the unofficial results webpage was not accessible to the general population. In order to strengthen the transparency of the process the Mission recommends providing regular citizens with access to the unofficial results website.
- The Mission noticed that the preliminary results system implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs did not include any information on the District Council and Local Council elections, although this data was also available. The Mission recommends extending the scope of the preliminary results system to all levels of the election.
- Although the Ministry of Home Affairs has been able to develop a robust technology platform for tabulating unofficial results, opportunities for improvement remain. To continue enhancing system security, the Mission suggests hashing the digital images of Statements of Poll and including the photograph metadata to guarantee an enhanced level of protection from potential cyberthreats.
- The Mission confirmed that the images of SOPs were not uploaded to the website until after the final results were published. The Mission recommends planning interim points in the tabulation process for uploading and posting the images of the Statements of Poll so they can be published simultaneously with the results transcribed by the data entry personnel.

### **Official Results**

- The Mission noted that the members of the Main Polling Stations had to manually review each Statement of Poll to verify they did not contain any discrepancies. The Mission recommends developing and implementing automated quality control mechanisms capable of detecting errors or missing information in SOPs. In addition, authorities should create a digital record or log (trace) of the process taken to resolve inconsistencies and its outcomes.
- The Mission was informed that the software used to tabulate results at the national and district levels operated independently. The Mission recommends integrating the software to allow both levels to operate in unison, using a secure connectivity

platform, thus facilitating automated cross-reference verification between districts and the national tabulation center. This would help reduce costs associated with developing, updating and maintaining two different software.

- The Mission observed that, at the tabulation centers, the data from each Statement of Poll was only entered once and no cross-checking controls were implemented. The Mission recommends developing a double-entry mechanism to verify that results are tabulated correctly. In addition, the Mission suggests developing a tabulation software with automated control mechanisms, capable of warning the operator of any mistakes such as missing information, wrong polling station codes, mathematical errors or duplicate entries, among others.
- The Mission observed that the operators in charge of entering the election results into the Central Polling Station Database could see the names of the parties and candidates to whom votes were being assigned. The Mission recommends implementing blind data entry mechanisms to increase the confidence of all stakeholders in the process.
- The Mission observed that the progression of the official count was never published for the information of political parties, the media, and citizens. In order to reduce post electoral tensions, the Mission recommends frequently publishing updates on the progress of the official results tabulation. These should be posted on an easily accessible web page, thereby allowing all stakeholders to track the progress of the count. Authorities should also consider introducing a dedicated control management system for observers and party agents to run queries in order to track every SOP (including SOPs images) to pinpoint exactly how many and which SOPs are still outstanding or present irregularities. Once the counting is completed, in addition to uploading flat “.pdf” files of election results, the authorities should consider displaying the data in a graphical format to better illustrate the outcome of the election.

### **iii. ELECTORAL JUSTICE**

#### **1. Introduction**

Electoral justice may be defined as a series of protective means and mechanisms designed to uphold the principles of free, fair and legitimate elections, as well as to safeguard the political-electoral rights of all people.<sup>64</sup> An electoral justice system, therefore, should guarantee: (1) that the electoral process operates in accordance with the law, including international standards; and (2) that there are fair mechanisms for restoring electoral rights when they may have been violated.

The mechanisms that make up Suriname's electoral justice system are established in the Electoral Law. This law identifies the different types of decisions that can be challenged including (1) exclusion from the Voters' List; (2) the refusal of registration of a political organization; (3) the decision of a Main Polling Station on the validity of a list of candidates; and (4) a polling station objection.

Election complaints must first be presented to the entity that made the decision which resulted in the complaint itself. The electoral legislation also specifies that complaints on some issues may be appealed to the President of Suriname, with the exception of voter registration, which may be appealed to the judiciary. Although not explicitly stated in the Electoral Law, the Mission was informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that electoral stakeholders, including political parties, always have access to the courts of Suriname to seek redress for their complaints. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Suriname's Executive among the authorities that are expected to resolve electoral disputes is unique in the hemisphere.

This report evaluates the system for electoral dispute resolution in Suriname. It includes a detailed analysis of the processes for filing complaints, the time frame set for their resolution, and the independence of the authorities that form the electoral justice system. It also includes several recommendations that may support enhancements to the electoral dispute resolution mechanisms.

#### **2. Legal Framework**

International legal treaties, to which Suriname is a state party, guarantee the full exercise of political rights and provide legal and technical guarantees for their adequate protection. They include: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 8); The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (Article XVIII); The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 3); General Comment 25 adopted by the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations: the Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights, and the Right to Equal Access to Public Service (Article 25, ICCPR, 1996); and Article 8(1) of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

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<sup>64</sup> Organization of American States, "Observing Electoral Justice Systems: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions".

At the national level, political and electoral rights are enshrined in Suriname's 1987 Constitution (S.B. 1987 No. 116), with 1992 reforms.<sup>65</sup> The country's supreme law provides the right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as to a fair hearing and protection of the law, which are the bases of electoral justice.

Other fundamental legal instruments in Suriname's electoral system include the Electoral Law of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 62) and amendments,<sup>66</sup> which is based on Articles 60 and 61 of the Constitution; the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 No. 61) and its amendments,<sup>67</sup> based on Article 53 of the Constitution; and the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), which outlined specific measures to be taken for the 2020 elections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>68</sup>

The Constitution and the Electoral Law of Suriname are the bedrock of the essential constitutional and statutory framework which governs the holding of elections in Suriname as well as the basis of the electoral justice framework.

The Constitution of Suriname provides that the Electoral Law shall regulate everything relating to universal suffrage and the creation of an independent electoral council and its authority. The Electoral Law is the key to the practical organization of the elections. The institutions, authority, terms, manner of voting and the manner in which results are to be determined, are laid down therein. The Electoral Law also outlines the qualifications of candidates, the procedure of appointment and the tenure of members. It also identifies aspects which are key to voters, including the composition of the Voters' List, remedies available to the electorate and the governing of polling stations within districts.

### **3. Authorities**

#### **a. The President**

The President is the highest government authority in Suriname and is responsible for (a) the organization of elections for the members of the public representative bodies and (b) maintaining political democracy in Suriname. All appeals in matters concerning the elections go to the President, who is directly advised by the Legal Affairs Committee in the exercise of this responsibility.

#### **b. The Ministry of Home Affairs**

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<sup>65</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Electoral Law of September 29, 1987 (S.B. 1987 no. 62) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61).

<sup>68</sup> "COVID-19 Measures for Election of People's Representative Bodies", Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people's representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elections in Suriname are organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). This institution is responsible for generating the Voters' List, selecting and training the poll workers, distributing polling cards, and designing and printing electoral materials.<sup>69</sup> Requests to have a correction of and/or supplement to the Voters' Lists must be presented first to the Minister in the Ministry of Home Affairs, whose decision can subsequently be appealed to the President.<sup>70</sup>

c. The Central Polling Station (CPS)

The Central Polling Station (CPS) is an independent electoral authority which is responsible for the registration of political organizations which intend to participate in the elections and the candidates that they nominate. The CPS also implements the decision of the President where there is an appeal and determines and publishes the results of the elections.<sup>71</sup>

d. The Independent Electoral Council (OKB)<sup>72</sup>

The main function of the Independent Electoral Council is to supervise the general elections and declare the results of the elections legally binding for the country. The jurisdiction of the OKB set out in Article 2 of the Electoral Act, includes ensuring that the registers of voters are carefully compiled and are continuously updated; ensuring that every voter receives a polling card at least three days before Election Day; ensuring that the District Commissioner facilitates the receipt of polling cards by voters on Election Day; ensuring that uniform instructions are issued regarding the operation of polling stations and monitoring compliance with these instructions by polling station officials on Election Day; keeping a public register of political organizations; and taking such measures as are necessary if complaints are received about the improper functioning of any polling station or Main Polling Station. Challenges against the council's decisions must first be brought to the president.

e. The Judiciary

Article 133 of the Constitution states that the Judicial Power is formed by the President and the Vice-President of the Court of Justice, the members and the deputy members of the Court of Justice, the Attorney-General with the Court of Justice, and the other members of the Public Prosecutors Office, and of other judicial courts.

The Electoral Law does not spell out a clear role for the judiciary in the election process except in the case of appeals regarding the Voters' List. In this instance, a person may appeal his exclusion from the Voters' List with the Judge of the First Cantonal Court by means of a petition under Article 20 of the Electoral Law. The Mission was informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that electoral stakeholders, including political parties, always have access to

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<sup>69</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 16, 25 and 26.

<sup>70</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 16, 25 and 26.

<sup>71</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 31, 38, 123 and 124.

<sup>72</sup> OKB is the Dutch acronym for the Independent Electoral Council – the “Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau”.



the courts of Suriname to seek redress for their complaints. However this is not explicitly stated in the prevailing legislation.

#### **4. Independence and Impartiality of Electoral Dispute Resolution Bodies**

An important criterion for any electoral justice system is the credibility of the justice system tasked to resolve conflicts. This credibility is based on the impartial nature of the oversight body, which should be independent of political or partisan interests. In the common law legal tradition, the independence of the judiciary ordinarily girdles democracy. However, where an oversight body is constituted to oversee elections, its credibility will be determined by whether it can be considered independent and impartial.

There are several regional and international juridical standards<sup>73</sup> which speak to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial. General Comment No. 32 on Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which speaks to equality before courts and tribunals and to a fair trial, noted the importance of judicial independence and the obligation of states parties. It noted: “States should take specific measures guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary, protecting judges from any form of political influence in their decision-making through the constitution or adoption of laws establishing clear procedures and objective criteria for the appointment, remuneration, tenure, promotion, suspension and dismissal of the members of the judiciary and disciplinary sanctions taken against them.”<sup>74</sup> While electoral oversight bodies are not strictly judicial, they are tribunals within the meaning of Article 14. Furthermore, they exercise a judicial element in light of the fact that they are settling disputes surrounding elections.

General Comment No. 32, also makes it clear that the independence of tribunals is inextricably bound up in the separation of powers, noting that “a situation where the functions and competencies of the judiciary and the executive are not clearly distinguishable or where the latter is able to control or direct the former is incompatible with the notion of an independent tribunal.”<sup>75</sup> In this regard the Mission notes that Suriname’s electoral dispute mechanism does not currently comply with international convention.

##### **a. Selection and Appointment Procedures**

##### *Members of the Independent Electoral Council*

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<sup>73</sup> “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, Article 10, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>; “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, Article 14, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>; “American Convention on Human Rights”, Article 8, [https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties\\_B-32\\_American\\_Convention\\_on\\_Human\\_Rights.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.pdf); Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “Guarantees for the Independence of justice operators”, Washington DC, OAS, 2013. <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/justice-operators-2013.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 32 (paragraph 19), Article 14, Right to equality before courts and tribunals and to fair trial, 23 August 2007, CCPR/C/GC/32, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/478b2b2f2.html>.

<sup>75</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 32.

Article 1 of the Electoral Law states that the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) shall consist of at least 7 members and 3 substitute members who are appointed by Suriname's President for a term of six years. The President also appoints the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman from among the members.

Article 1.7 of the Electoral Law provides that to qualify as a member of the OKB, a person must be:

- i. a resident of Suriname;
- ii. a Surinamese national;
- iii. at least 23 years of age; and
- iv. have not been excluded from their right to vote.

An adequate process for the selection and designation of authorities is crucial in order to guarantee the independence of the authorities responsible for the administration of electoral justice. The Mission considers that the lack of minimum professional requirements to become a member of the OKB, and the role the executive plays in the selection process, are inconsistent with principles of judicial independence.

#### *Members of the Courts*

Article 142 of the Constitution establishes that members of the Judicial Power are appointed by the Government, after consultation with the Court of Justice. Article 141 of the Constitution provides that in order to be appointed as a member of the judiciary entrusted with the administration of justice, candidates must be at least thirty years of age, possess Surinamese nationality and have domicile and main and real residence in Suriname.

Regarding the independence of the judiciary, the Mission notes that the Constitution contains a prohibition on interference in the investigation, prosecution or judicial consideration of cases. Article 131 (3) of Suriname's supreme law states: "Any interference in the investigation or prosecution of cases, and those pending in court, shall be forbidden."

#### **b. Security of Tenure of Members**

#### *The Independent Electoral Council (OKB)*

The President of Suriname has the legal power to dismiss members of the Independent Electoral Council if:<sup>76</sup>

- i. they have been sentenced for a criminal offense;
- ii. they have been declared bankrupt or have been given moratorium or have been imprisoned for debts;
- iii. in case of misbehaviour or apparent continuous negligence in filling their office;

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<sup>76</sup> Electoral Law, Article 1.

- iv. if they stay outside Suriname for a period exceeding five months, other than by virtue of leave of absence.

Removal procedures constitute one of the main mechanisms for guaranteeing independence. The Mission notes that the power granted to the president to dismiss members of the OKB has the potential to undermine both the independence of the council and electoral justice. It must also be noted that while the Electoral Law outlines the causes for which a member of the Independent Electoral Council may be removed, it does not identify the procedures which should be followed in dismissing the member. Moreover, it does not give members the right to appeal the decision, as it does in other areas.

### *The Courts*

Article 141 of the Constitution provides that the appointment of the President, Vice-President, the members of the Court of Justice and the Attorney-General shall be for life. Article 142 of the Constitution provides that the member of the Judicial Power and the Attorney General with the Court of Justice can be discharged by the Government on their request or when reaching the age of retirement. It also provides that a judge or the Attorney General can also be discharged on the initiative of the Court of Justice:

- i. when they have been placed under legal restraint;
- ii. in case of proven continuous mental disorder;
- iii. if they have been sentenced to irrevocable detention for having committed a punishable act;
- iv. if they have been declared bankrupt;
- v. when they have obtained a moratorium or are under court custody for their civil debts; or
- vi. on the grounds of serious misconduct or immorality or in case of proven continuous negligence in the fulfilment of their office.

A judge can be suspended if the President is of the opinion that one of the reasons for discharge as mentioned in Article 142 exists. The President can, in turn, provide for a temporary replacement in that office.<sup>77</sup>

### c. Financial Autonomy

An important factor in determining the degree of independence of a separate electoral dispute resolution body is their authority in budgetary and administrative issues. Expenditure control provides an avenue for financial coercion and could be used to seek partisan advantages. The question of who allocates the budget thus becomes crucial for independence of the body.

The Mission noted that the expenses of the Independent Electoral Council, which include the remuneration of the Executive and the other members, are determined by state decree. State

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<sup>77</sup> Constitution of Suriname, Article 143.

decrees in Suriname are promulgated by the President. The reliance of the OKB on financing granted by the executive may therefore undermine the perception of the council's independence.

## 5. Access to Justice

### a. Legally Challengeable Actions

As stated in the introduction, Suriname's Electoral Law identifies four different types of decisions that can be challenged. These are: (1) exclusion from the Voters' List; (2) the refusal of registration of a political organization; (3) the decision of a Main Polling Station on the validity of a list of candidates; (4) a polling station objection. Apart from these, the Mission noted the law includes no clear procedures to present any other complaint regarding electoral violations.

#### *Challenge against Exclusions from the Voters' List*

Article 16 of the Electoral Law states that Voters' Lists are compiled from the voters' register maintained by the Civil Registry. The lists are closed on the twenty-fifth day before the day of the nomination of candidates.<sup>78</sup> A person entitled to vote may make a request in writing that the Minister of Home Affairs make a correction of and/or supplement the Voters' Lists on the basis that he or someone else has not been properly included thereon.<sup>79</sup>

Articles 18 and 19 of the Electoral Law provide a regime for the hearing and determination of objections to names on the Voters' List. After the Minister makes a determination under Article 18, such decisions may be appealed to the President within five days after the public notice. Then, the President must decide within five days after submission of the appeal, stating the reasons on which his decision has been based.

If petitioners are dissatisfied with the President's decision, they may appeal the decision with the Judge of the First Cantonal Court.<sup>80</sup> The Cantonal Court shall then notify the Minister in charge of Home Affairs within three days after receipt of the petition and, if the decision concerns someone other than the petitioner, the person concerned, by means of registered letter.<sup>81</sup> This is the only instance specifically identified in the law in which the decision of the President concerning an electoral dispute may be appealed to the judiciary.

#### *Challenge against the Refusal of Registration of a Political Organization*

Article 31 of the Electoral Law states that "any political organization may, for the election of members of the representative bodies, request the Central Polling Station to enter its name or an indication thereof, or both, as well as a party symbol, if so desired, in a public register

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<sup>78</sup> Electoral Law, Article 16.

<sup>79</sup> Electoral Law, Article 17.

<sup>80</sup> Electoral Law, Article 20.

<sup>81</sup> Electoral Law, Article 20.

which is kept by the Polling Authority. At the time of registration, a seat in Suriname must also be stated.” Political organizations may, however, be refused registration.

Article 35 of the Electoral Law sets out the reason for the refusal. It states that a political organization may be refused registration if:

- i. submission did not take place within the term laid down for such;
- ii. if in the symbol offered for registration, the coat of arms or the flag of Suriname have been used, or if the symbol is contrary to public order or good manners;
- iii. if an objection has been made against the registration of a name, abbreviation or symbol and this objection has been found to be legitimate; and
- iv. if the conditions as described in the decree concerning rules for political organizations have not been met.

Appeals against the decision of the Central Polling Station are heard by the President, who decides the merits of the decision and who is required to state his reasons. The Central Polling Station is responsible for executing the decision of the President.<sup>82</sup> The political organization whose registration is refused in the first instance or on appeal, may once more make a submission, during three working days following receipt of the decision of the Central Polling Station or the President. The Central Polling Station must take a decision as soon as possible, to which the provisions of Article 35 apply. According to Article 37(2) of the Electoral Law, this decision “cannot be appealed in any manner”, suggesting there is no recourse to court for parties that believe they have been unlawfully denied registration.

### *Challenges against the Validity of a List of Candidates*

On the eighth day at the latest after the lists of candidates have been submitted, the Main Polling Stations must decide in a public session on the validity of the lists as well as on maintaining the candidates thereon<sup>83</sup>. The lists which are not in accordance with Article 54 of the Electoral Law must be declared invalid.<sup>84</sup> In addition, individual candidates can be removed from the list(s): if no certificate of a candidate has been submitted stating that he accepts his nomination; if a candidate appears on more than one list; if more candidates have been placed on the list than the number permitted; or if a candidate has been placed on a list of a constituency in which he does not live.

Under the Electoral Law, every signatory to a list of candidates can appeal a decision on the validity of the list or maintaining the candidates to the President within three days after the day on which the decision of validity was made.<sup>85</sup> The President must decide eight days at the latest after the appeal has arrived, stating the reasons for his decision. There is no further appeal on this matter.

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<sup>82</sup> Electoral Law, Article 36.

<sup>83</sup> Electoral Law, Article 50.

<sup>84</sup> Electoral Law, Article 66

<sup>85</sup> Electoral Law, Article 52.

### *Challenge against a Polling Station Determination*

Under Article 122 of the Electoral Law, the voters who are present in a polling station may raise objections against the determination of the results, which must be stated in the official report. Article 126 indicates that the Main Polling Station may not ignore the complaints of the voters, which have been included in the official reports of the polling stations. The Article specifies that a recounting of the votes by the Main Polling Station must take place in certain circumstances.

As indicated, under Suriname's current legal framework the main activities associated with the administration of elections are subject to review in the event of being challenged by a dissatisfied party. The legal framework provides the means, procedures, and persons authorized to challenge electoral activities and places limits on the timeframe in which this should be done. The electoral system, therefore, facilitates the expeditious hearing of electoral disputes.

This, however, may be for naught if disputes are not treated within the framework of independent and impartial tribunals. The administration of electoral justice in Suriname is unique among member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in that the Executive is included among the authorities that are expected to resolve electoral disputes. While it is not necessary to have a judicial body determine disputes, this responsibility should be assigned to independent institutions.

As previously explained, while litigants in Suriname have the right to petition the Independent Electoral Council on specific electoral issues, that decision is subject to a review by the President. Similarly, while the Mission was informed by the Ministry of Home Affairs that electoral stakeholders, including political parties, always have access to the courts of Suriname to seek redress for their complaints, this is not explicitly stated in the Electoral Law.

Several stakeholders with whom the Mission met expressed concern regarding the potential for conflicts of interest where the President is entrusted to resolve the disputes that arise in an election in which the ruling political party also competes. Those interviewed argued that it is counterintuitive to have an independent body established by the Constitution whose decisions can be overturned by a member of the Executive, the President. The Mission agrees that Suriname could benefit from adding greater safeguards to the electoral systems and reducing the influence of the President over electoral disputes.

#### **b. Conventionality and Constitutional Control**

Article 144 of the 1987 Constitution establishes that: "There shall be a Constitutional Court which is an independent body composed of a President, Vice-President and three members, who - as well as the three deputy members - shall be appointed for a period of five years at the recommendation of the National Assembly". Despite this provision, until 2019, the court had not been set up. On October 4, 2019, the National Assembly passed the legislation for the establishment of a Constitutional Court and the judges were appointed on May 7, 2020.

According to Article 144 of the Constitution, the new court has jurisdiction to determine (1) whether Acts or parts thereof are consistent with the Constitution or applicable international agreements and (2) whether decisions of government institutions are inconsistent with the fundamental rights and freedoms mentioned in Chapter V of the Constitution.

Where the Constitutional Court decides that an Act is inconsistent with provisions of the Constitution or an applicable international agreement or those decisions of the government institutions are inconsistent with the fundamental rights and freedoms, the law or action will be declared non-binding. The Mission notes that the establishment of the Constitutional Court may usher in a new avenue for complaints surrounding election laws.

## **6. Fair, Effective and Transparent Process**

In accordance with international and constitutional rights, everyone has the right to an effective remedy that swiftly and effectively protects him or her against acts that violate their fundamental rights. Likewise, the processing of electoral disputes must be adequate to resolve the case in a timely manner and provide an effective remedy to the affected right.

### **a. Deadlines and Appeals**

International standards and best practices in the field indicate that electoral judicial adjudication should be addressed in a timely, prompt and expeditious manner within the legally established timeframes.<sup>86</sup> It is important that the legal framework sets out specific timelines for filing complaints and appeals to ensure that everything is resolved in a timely fashion.

A decision taken outside this timeframe may be considered unfair, and may make it impossible to correct the damage done to some electoral rights. A balance must however be struck between the short electoral timeframes, the right to a defence of the person or body against whom the complaint is made, and the imperatives related to the timely administration of justice. The relevant electoral dispute body must have time to process, hear and resolve the respective challenges correctly but ensure there is efficiency in imparting electoral justice.

In Suriname, the Electoral Law categorizes all available remedies into a time calendar. The result is that all actions by persons affected and the government are time sensitive. No action can be maintained by an individual if it is not made within the relevant time limits. Similarly, where the government did not produce its decisions within the time frame, they would be acting outside of the scope of the Electoral Law.

In relation to the Voter's List, the timeline for complaints and appeals is as follows:<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Organization of American States, "Observing Electoral Justice Systems: A Manual for OAS Electoral Observation Missions".

<sup>87</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 17-22.

- i. The Minister must decide on any written request for a correction or a supplement to the Voters' List within five days.
- ii. An appeal against a decision of the Minister of Home Affairs must be lodged with the President five days after publication in Gazette.
- iii. The President must provide his decision to the interested parties and have it published in the Gazette within five days.
- iv. An appeal to the President's decision must be filed at the First District Court judge within ten days after being published in Gazette.
- v. The First District Court judge must make a decision no later than twenty-one days after the petition has been submitted.

Concerning the challenges related to the registration of political organizations, the timeline specified in the electoral law is as follows:<sup>88</sup>

- i. The Central Polling Station must make a decision on any objection with respect to the registration of a political organizations and inform the interested party within 2 days.
- ii. After receiving the Central Polling Station's decision, political organizations have the option to file an administrative appeal with the President of the Republic of Suriname within 2 working days.
- iii. The President must decide the appeal within 3 days of its filing with the President, stating the reasons for his decision.

Regarding the removal of candidates from the candidate's list, the time frame set to challenge this decision is specified as follows:<sup>89</sup>

- i. Every signatory to the list of candidates can appeal the decision to the President within three days after the day on which the decision was made.
- ii. The President must decide eight days at the latest after the appeal has arrived.

The Mission considers that the timeframes provided in Suriname for resolving the challenges that have been filed are short and reasonable to give an effective response to the complaint or appeal. Further, the timeframes all allow the decisions to be issued before the elected person or body is installed into office.

#### b. Accessibility of Laws

Ensuring the accessibility of electoral justice laws helps citizens hold electoral justice institutions accountable while promoting efficiency. Accessibility of the laws and rules of procedure also promotes the accessibility of institutions overall.

The availability of clearly written laws and rules of procedures, in print and online, is an important practice. Another good practice is to develop manuals, brochures or information in other user-friendly formats to ensure that frequently asked questions regarding electoral

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<sup>88</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 34, 36 and 37.

<sup>89</sup> Electoral Law, Article 52.



justice institutions and related laws and rules of procedures, are available in clear, concise language. Users of electoral justice must also know where to look to find laws and rules of procedure. A good practice in this regard is to include copies of the laws and rules online and in annual or other periodic reports of an institution responsible for electoral justice.

While the Mission noted that the election laws are available online, and that hard copies were available at the Ministry of Home Affairs prior to the election for anyone who wished to request them, access to these documents may still be an issue for persons in rural areas or in the Interior, who do not have access to the internet, are unable to regularly visit the capital, or who speak languages other than Dutch. Further, there seems to be no clear published procedure for the presentation and investigation of complaints for election law violations.

The Mission noted that various stakeholders did not have clarity on the functions and responsibilities of the authorities that govern the electoral process nor on the legal remedies provided by the law. Representatives from different parties with whom the Mission met agreed that they would benefit from the publication of manuals, brochures or a website providing information regarding electoral justice institutions, related laws and rules of procedures.

#### c. Substantiation

For the system of electoral justice to uphold the principles of public accountability and transparency, authorities should be required to publicly provide an explanation for their decision. This guarantee protects the right of citizens to be judged according to the motives that are provided for in the Law, and gives credibility to legal decisions.

In line with international standards, Suriname's legal framework establishes that final decisions concerning disputes that arise from the election must be substantiated. Article 19 of the Electoral Law provides that, when making a decision relating to an appeal, the President is required to provide reasons. Furthermore, the Mission notes that all decisions of the appeals process are published in the Suriname Gazette.

## **7. Findings and Recommendations**

- The Mission considers that the role the Executive plays in the selection process of the members of the Independent Electoral Council (OKB) does not contribute to strengthening the impartiality of this body. Therefore, the Mission recommends redefining appointment procedures and limiting executive involvement in order to guarantee the autonomy, independence, and objectivity of OKB members. Moreover, the Mission suggests that the selection and appointment process be based on the personal merit and professional capacity of the candidates.
- The Mission observed that, while the Electoral Law outlines the causes for which a member of the Independent Electoral Council may be removed, it does not identify the procedures which should be followed in dismissing the member. Moreover, it

does not give members the right to appeal the decision. The Mission recommends ensuring that disciplinary proceedings against those that form part of the Council fully adhere to due process and legal principles.

- The Mission noted that the expenses of the Independent Electoral Council are determined by state decree, which is promulgated by the President. The Mission suggests reviewing the current legislation with a view to ensuring the OKB does not depend on financing granted by other powers to guarantee the successful execution of its functions.
- Several stakeholders with whom the Mission met expressed concern regarding the role the President plays in deciding electoral disputes. The Mission notes that such a mechanism does not comply with international standards and recommends amending the relevant legislation to entrust the resolution of disputes to a specific institutional body that has judicial functions. Such a step would be aligned with several international instruments by which Suriname is bound, which recognize the human right to have “an effective remedy before a competent, independent and impartial judge or tribunal”.
- The Mission noted that there is no procedure for the presentation and investigation of election complaints and election law violations. The Mission recommends devising clear procedures on these matters and ensuring they are included in the electoral law and widely publicized.
- The Mission noted that various stakeholders did not have clarity on the functions and responsibilities of the authorities that govern the electoral process nor on the legal remedies provided by the law. The Mission suggests developing a manual or brochure with clear and concise information regarding electoral justice institutions and rules of procedure in order to facilitate citizen’s access to justice.

#### **iv. POLITICAL FINANCE**

##### **1. Introduction**

Political financing is an important issue in electoral processes. Parties require funds to maintain their regular operations and to reach the electorate whose votes they hope to obtain at elections. Owing to the geographical dispersion of the population, campaigns in Suriname can be expensive and the need for parties to source funds, particularly to reach the electorate in remote areas of the country, is imperative. During an election campaign, how funds are raised and what they are spent on are important issues for the transparency of the electoral process.

In Suriname, political parties are recognized in the country's Constitution as important entities that contribute to the democratic and electoral process. As such and as part of this contribution, political parties are obliged to report annually on their income and expenditure. However, there is no requirement to include information on sources of income and the disclosure is applicable only to political organizations, not to candidates. Furthermore, there are no restrictions on campaign expenditures and no regulation of private financing.

Unregulated financing from unidentifiable sources has the potential to impact the transparency of the electoral process. The following report analyses Suriname's legal framework and the gaps in regulations relating to political financing. It includes various recommendations, based on international electoral standards, intended to assist Suriname in developing a more transparent and equitable framework for the financing of political campaigns.

##### **2. Legal Framework**

The legal framework for the 2020 elections in Suriname was provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 116), with 1992 reforms;<sup>90</sup> the Electoral Law of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 62) and amendments;<sup>91</sup> the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 No. 61) and its amendments;<sup>92</sup> and the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), which outlined specific measures to be taken for the 2020 elections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> Electoral Law of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 62) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61).

<sup>93</sup> "COVID-19 Measures for Election of People's Representative Bodies", Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people's representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3. Political System**

The general elections in Suriname comprise two direct elections (National Assembly and Local Councils) and one indirect election (District Councils). The 51 seats in the National Assembly are filled using proportional representation in ten multi-member constituencies which contain between two and seventeen seats. The National Assembly subsequently elects the president for a five year term of office. In the event a candidate fails to obtain a two-thirds majority for the presidency of the country after two rounds of voting in the Assembly, the matter is referred to the United People's Assembly (which gathers the members of the National Assembly, the District Councils and the Local Councils) where a simple majority is required.

Elections for the Local Councils take place in the constituencies of the district concerned and candidates are elected by majority vote. Voting for the District Council is not direct; candidates are declared elected in proportion to the number of seats won by their political organization on the respective Local Council and the number of seats available on the District Council.<sup>94</sup>

In previous elections, party combinations or coalitions, based on ideology, subject issue and/or ethnicity, had been common. However, for the May 25, 2020 elections an amendment was made to the 1987 Electoral Law placing restrictions on such combinations prior to the elections. Political parties were only permitted to form coalitions after the elections.

According to several stakeholders interviewed by the Mission, the amended electoral law potentially reduced the ability of parties within certain coalitions to pool financial resources and/or to raise funds jointly. They expressed the view that the amended law could also impact political financing for future elections, if political parties were not able to collaborate prior to an election.

Over 6,000 candidates representing 17 political parties participated in the May 25, 2020 elections. They contested 51 seats in the National Assembly, 772 seats in the Local Councils and 118 seats in the District Councils, for a total of 941 elective offices. With such a large number of candidates and political parties, the issue of campaign financing was crucial.

### **4. Equity in Financing**

#### **a. Public Funding**

Direct public financing of campaigns is considered an effective means of ensuring more competitiveness during elections. It allows newer and smaller parties access to some form of finance, reducing the need for private fundraising and, in its ideal form, allowing more exposure for parties with less fundraising abilities.

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<sup>94</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 129 – 130.

In Suriname, political parties do not receive any form of direct or indirect public funding. Prior to the 2015 elections, a draft Law<sup>95</sup> was formulated by members of the University of Suriname Democracy Project. It was championed at that time by a parliamentarian from the opposition benches (Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS)) and introduced to the National Assembly, but not discussed. The draft law proposed a form of direct public finance for political parties, not only during campaigns, but also throughout the year.

Several political party representatives and other stakeholders with whom the Mission met, acknowledged the importance of state funding of political parties as a means of introducing more equity in electoral processes. In this regard stakeholders considered it critical that if such a system were to be implemented, that careful consideration be given to the criteria used to distribute resources, in order to ensure that smaller parties were not disadvantaged.

#### b. Restrictions on Private Funding

In Suriname, there is no specific legislation or regulation that directly addresses the issue of how parties should finance their campaigns. The legal framework does not include any prohibitions on anonymous or foreign contributions, whether direct or indirect, and contributions from contractors and legal entities, including the media, are not explicitly restricted. Political parties and candidates are therefore at liberty to raise resources from different sources.

In discussions with various political parties and stakeholders, the Mission was informed that the majority of political parties in Suriname derive their funds from voluntary contributions by members of the party, specific donations from party representatives who are members of parliament or local councillors and from the business community. In some instances, especially at election time, special fundraising events are held or certain expenses, such as advertising or the production of flyers and other campaign materials, are provided by individuals sympathetic to that party.

#### c. Limitation of Campaign Spending

Suriname's legal framework does not include any caps on campaign expenditure. Due to the lack of regulation and control mechanisms, the electoral authorities do not have sufficient information on the breadth of income and expenditure by parties during electoral processes.<sup>96</sup> However, there are several factors that make political campaigns in Suriname potentially expensive.

First, three of Suriname's ten electoral districts are located in the interior of country. These three electoral districts represent 10 out of the 51 seats in Parliament; approximately 40,000

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<sup>95</sup> The law was drafted by Hans Breeveld and August Boldewijn, two Surinamese academics, in collaboration with several political parties after a 2010 seminar on political financing.

<sup>96</sup> An OAS-IDEA Study in 2005 on Political Party Financing in Suriname suggested the following income/expenditure range of parties during the general elections that year: Most established parties: US\$400,000-800,000; More established parties: US\$150,000-400,000; Less established parties: US\$50,000-150,000; Least established parties - Less than US\$50,000.

voters. Engaging with these voters involves high costs, meaning that a political party must expend substantial resources to adequately reach these voters and thus have an opportunity to win their votes.<sup>97</sup>

Second, as Suriname is a multi-ethnic society, political parties need to develop campaigns that target different groups and varied interests. For example, it is not enough to place a radio or TV advertisement in Dutch alone, the same advertisement has to be placed in at least three other languages. The mission was informed that the need to address different nuances in seeking the support of voters in such a diverse society can result in high costs.

#### d. Use of Public Resources

In its engagement with opposition political parties, the Mission noted concerns regarding the use of state resources during the campaign. Various stakeholders complained about an overlap between government reporting on the successful implementation of projects and campaign advertising by the governing Nationale Democratische Partij (NDP). They also complained of unequal airtime on state media outlets. In this regard it should be noted that, except for one private media outlet, APENTE, Suriname's state radio and television stations have the broadest coverage throughout the country's territory and, therefore, the potential to reach a larger number of voters.

The Mission was unable to independently verify these assertions. However, the Mission notes that Suriname's legal framework does not include specific provisions to prevent the use of public resources by ruling parties during electoral campaigns.

### **5. Transparency in Financing**

Articles 53 and 54 of the Constitution and Article 2 of the 1987 Decree on Political Organizations oblige political organizations to publish annual reports of their income and expenditure in Suriname's Official Gazette and in at least one local media outlet. Submitting this information is a requisite for parties to be registered for the elections.

As noted in report of the 2015 OAS Mission, the disclosure requirements are a positive element of Suriname's legal framework. However, the lack of specifications regarding the publications that are to be made, make these provisions less effective. The Mission noted that, at present, there is no requirement to include in the reports any information on sources of income. The Mission also noted that neither the Electoral Law nor the Law on Political Organizations specifically address how the requirement to present annual reports applies to parties established less than one year prior to elections.

It should also be noted that the disclosure provision is applicable only to political organizations, not to candidates.

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<sup>97</sup> Results from the 2020 elections show that the seats in these areas were won by ABOP, NDP or VHP - some of the larger parties in Suriname.

The Mission was informed that the majority of political parties participating in the May 25, 2020 elections had submitted their most recent statements of income and expenditure. Officials from the Independent Electoral Council (OKB)<sup>98</sup> and party representatives with whom the Mission met agreed that, generally, political organizations only submit such reports during an election year and just prior to being registered to participate in the electoral process. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated that the reports, especially with respect to the larger political parties, do not reflect the amount spent on campaigns. While the Mission made efforts to obtain the reports of the five major parties in Suriname, these were unsuccessful.

Officials from the OKB indicated that, although the Council has responsibility for the registration of political parties (per Section 7 of the Decree on Political Organizations) it does not regulate the requirement for the submission and publication of the annual reports of the finances of political parties. Moreover, the OKB noted that it did not have the capacity to ensure that all parties submitted their reports in a timely manner nor to verify the contents of the reports.

Several stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of transparency regarding the source of income of political parties and recognized the need for legislation to regulate their financing. In this regard, the Mission was informed that in 2019, the Government entered into a partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) regarding the elections and that this included developing regulations on the financing of political parties and campaigns. This effort would involve stakeholder consultations to discuss and draft regulations on political party financing with the aim of having political party funding laws and a code of conduct on elections.

## **6. Findings and Recommendations**

- In Suriname, political parties do not receive any form of direct or indirect public funding. In keeping with the recommendation of the 2015 OAS Mission, consideration should be given to the creation of a regulatory framework for state funding for political parties and campaigns. The OAS model legislation on campaign finance may be a useful point of departure in this regard.
- The Mission noted that there are no restrictions on the source of campaign finances or on campaign expenditures and no regulation of private financing. The Mission recommends enacting legislation on the financing of political parties and campaigns to include clear limits on campaign spending, the prevention of anonymous donations, and the limitation of private and in-kind donations to political and electoral campaigns.
- The Mission noted that Suriname’s legal framework does not include specific provisions to prevent the misuse of public resources. The Mission suggests expressly prohibiting the use of state resources for campaigning and regulating access to/usage

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<sup>98</sup> OKB is the Dutch acronym for the Independent Electoral Council – the “Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau”.

of state media outlets in the run-up to and during the immediate electoral campaign period. Also, as in any country that allows re-election, rules that ensure a more equal playing field should be implemented in Suriname, in order to mitigate the advantage of incumbency.

- While political organizations are obliged to publish annual financial reports, there are no rules regarding what information these reports should include and how they should be presented. The Mission recommends regulating the content of the financial reports that are to be submitted, including requiring political parties to identify their sources of income and provide documentation to validate the information contained in the reports.
- The Mission noted that neither the Electoral Law nor the Law on Political Organizations specifically address how the disclosure requirements apply to parties that have been established less than one year prior to elections. The Mission recommends that steps be taken to clarify the requirements that apply in these circumstances.
- The Mission observed that, at present, there is no entity directly responsible for the supervision of political financing. The Mission recommends creating a specialized unit within the structure of the electoral authority to oversee political parties' financing. This department should be allocated the necessary resources to collect the financial information, ensure it is delivered by all parties in a timely manner and authenticate the contents of their reports.
- According to the Decree on political organizations, political parties' financial reports have to be published in Suriname's Official Gazette and in at least one local media outlet. In order to improve the accountability of political parties, the Mission recommends that, in addition to publishing the reports in the aforementioned media, the electoral authorities upload the complete information on political parties' incomes and expenditures to a website that is easily accessible by the general public.



## **v. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN**

### **1. Introduction**

The Republic of Suriname is a constitutional democracy with a 51-seat unicameral system. The President and the Vice-President are elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term. The President heads the executive branch and the Vice-President is both the leader of the cabinet and the Prime Minister. The National Assembly and the President together hold legislative power.

According to available data, there is a significant underrepresentation of women in political life in Suriname, especially in decision-making positions. Despite the fact that women represent 49.7% of the entire population,<sup>99</sup> they will occupy only 16 of the 51 seats (31%) in the National Assembly for the 2020-2025 term. That is, one seat less than in the 2015-2020 term. Despite this marked underrepresentation, sustained over time, to date there has not been a decision to introduce a legislated quota system or any other affirmative action measure.

This report reviews the current regulatory framework in order to identify the limitations and other factors that affect women's political participation. It also includes a number of recommendations aimed at achieving equitable participation by men and women throughout the electoral process.

### **2. Legal Framework**

The legal framework for the 2020 elections in Suriname was provided by the Constitution of the Republic of Suriname of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 116), with 1992 reforms;<sup>100</sup> the Electoral Law of 1987 (S.B. 1987 No. 62) and amendments;<sup>101</sup> the Decree on Political Organizations (S.B. 1987 No. 61) and its amendments;<sup>102</sup> and the Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), which outlined specific measures to be taken for the 2020 elections as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>103</sup>

The Government of Suriname has also signed or ratified the following international agreements and action plans related to gender equity:

- i. Charter of the Organization of American States (1977).

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<sup>99</sup> The World Bank Data Catalog, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SR>

<sup>100</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 116), with amendments of S.B. 1992 no. 38, <http://www.verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/GRONDWET.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> Electoral Law of Suriname (S.B. 1987 no. 62 and S.B. 1987 no. 82) and amendments, <http://verkiezingen.sr/storage/app/media/wetten/Kiesregeling.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> Decree on Political Organizations (SB 1987 No. 61).

<sup>103</sup> "COVID-19 Measures for Election of People's Representative Bodies", Resolution of May 15, 2020, Kb. Pres. no. 419/RP (S.B. 2020 no. 105), concerning measures to be taken at the elections of the people's representative bodies and in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ii. Nairobi World Conference on Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985).
- iii. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1993) - optional Protocol not yet signed.
- iv. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).
- v. The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) (2002).
- vi. Plan of Action to 2005: Framework for Mainstreaming Gender into Key CARICOM Programs (2005).
- vii. Action Program of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-ECLAC).
- viii. 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015).

Neither the Constitution nor other national legislation includes a definition of discrimination against women; political rights and qualifications are established on a gender-neutral basis. Chapter V of the Constitution establishes that no one shall be discriminated on the grounds of birth, sex, race, language, religion, origin, education, political beliefs, economic position, or any other status. The Constitution also speaks to the principle of equality and to guaranteeing the political participation and representation of all Surinamese people. Article 35 establishes that men and women are equal before the law.

Concerning participation in the elections, Articles 57 and 58 of the Constitution grant all citizens over 18 years of age the right to vote, with the exception of people who have been denied this right by an irrevocable judicial decision or deprived of their freedom. In the same vein, Article 59 of the Constitution establishes that persons eligible to be elected to the National Assembly are those who have Suriname nationality, who have reached the age of twenty-one and who have not been deprived of their right to vote.”

### **3. The Electoral System**

The General Elections comprise two direct elections (National Assembly and Local Councils) and one indirect election (District Councils). The 51 seats in the National Assembly are elected using proportional representation in ten multi-member constituencies containing between two and seventeen seats.<sup>104</sup> The National Assembly subsequently elects the President for a five-year term of office.

Elections for the Local Councils take place in the constituencies of the district concerned and candidates are elected by majority vote. Voting for the District Council is not direct; candidates are declared elected in proportion to the number of seats won by their political organization on the respective Local Council and the number of seats available on the District Council.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Electoral Law, Article 131.

<sup>105</sup> Electoral Law, Articles 129 – 130.

**Table 1: Allocation of Seats by Election Level**

Districts	National Assembly	District Council	Local Council	Registered Voters
Paramaribo	17	21	200	166,102
Wanica	7	21	113	92,634
Nickerie	5	11	65	23,968
Commewijne	4	11	70	23,411
Sipaliwini	4	11	66	22,374
Brokopondo	3	9	60	7,935
Marowijne	3	9	56	14,102
Para	3	9	55	18,280
Saramacca	3	9	64	12,425
Coronie	2	7	23	2,102
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>383,333</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname.

#### 4. Gender Equity in Voter Registration

The Civil Registry (Centraal Bureau voor Gurgerzken) of the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for maintaining a voters' register, in which the persons included in the Central Population Register, who are entitled to vote, appear.<sup>106</sup> Voters' Lists are compiled from the voters' register and indicate those who are entitled to vote in an electoral district, as well as in a constituency, for members of the National Assembly and the Local Councils, respectively.<sup>107</sup>

According to official data, there were 383,333 voters for the 2020 elections, of which 192,055 (50.10%) were male and 191,278 (49.89%) were female.<sup>108</sup> These figures, which largely resemble the estimates on sex distribution for the entire population,<sup>109</sup> indicate there are no significant issues that affect the registration of women.

**Table 2: Registered Voters, by Gender and by District**

Districts	Male	Female	Total Registered Voters
Paramaribo	82,048	84,054	166,102
Wanica	45,916	46,718	92,634
Nickerie	12,579	11,389	23,968
Commewijne	12,202	11,209	23,411

<sup>106</sup> Electoral Law, Article 13.

<sup>107</sup> Electoral Law, Article 16.

<sup>108</sup> Data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs

<sup>109</sup> World Bank, "The World Bank Data Catalog," <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SR>

Districts	Male	Female	Total Registered Voters
Sipaliwini	10,807	11,567	22,374
Brokopondo	4,097	3,838	7,935
Marowijne	7,183	6,919	14,102
Para	9,448	8,832	18,280
Saramacca	6,596	5,829	12,425
Coronie	1,179	923	2,102
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>192,055</b>	<b>191,278</b>	<b>383,333</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

## 5. Gender Equity in Voter Participation

Voter turnout for the 2020 elections was 71.6 percent, 0.93 points lower than the turnout for the 2015 elections. As of the writing of this report, official information was not available on the number of women who voted.

During meetings with the Mission, some stakeholders expressed their concerns regarding women being intimidated by their male partners to vote for a specific party or candidate. However, on Election Day, the Mission's observers did not report any restrictions on the exercise of women's suffrage. The Mission also noted that while efforts were made at some polling stations to prioritize visibly pregnant women, persons with disabilities and senior citizens (60 and above), it was not a standard practice at all locations.

## 6. Gender Equity in Electoral Bodies

### a. Participation of Women in the Electoral Authorities

Three different entities are in charge of managing, organizing, coordinating, and supervising the elections in Suriname: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Independent Electoral Council (OKB)<sup>110</sup> and the Central Polling Station (CPS). Suriname's legal framework does not provide for gender balance in the composition of any of these institutions.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for organizing the elections. For the 2020 elections, the Ministry coordinated the **Sub Council Elections 2020**, which operated on a political administrative level, and was responsible for managing and steering the organization of the elections. This Sub Council is chaired by the Vice-President of the Republic of Suriname and composed of six ministers, of which one was a woman.

<sup>110</sup> OKB is the Dutch acronym for the Independent Electoral Council – the “Onafhankelijk Kiesbureau”.

The Independent Electoral Council (OKB) is in charge of the supervision of the general elections and the binding determination of the election results.<sup>111</sup> The members of the OKB are appointed for six years by the President.<sup>112</sup> Its current chair is a woman, Jennifer van Dijk-Silos, and seven of its 13 members are women. The fact that the majority of the members of the OKB are women is a positive element considering the relevance of its functions within the electoral process.

The Central Polling Station (CPS) is an independent electoral authority with the responsibility of determining the results of the elections for the National Assembly, the District Councils and the Local Councils.<sup>113</sup> The CPS is also responsible for the registration of political organizations who want to participate in the elections and of candidates. It is composed of 12 members, all appointed by the President, of whom four are women.

#### **b. Participation of Women at the Polling Stations**

On Election Day, the OAS Mission visited 96 polling stations in 53 polling centers. In these polling stations, the Mission observed that the large majority of poll workers were women. Notably, the majority of party representatives at these polling stations were also women, confirming the information received by the Mission regarding the active participation of women in campaigning and mobilizing support for their political parties.

### **7. Gender Equity Initiatives**

The Mission was informed of efforts by relevant institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) to raise awareness of the importance of women's political participation. In this regard, the Mission noted that the Bureau of Gender Affairs of the Ministry of Home Affairs had launched a Gender Vision Policy Document, 2021 – 2035, which identified long term goals for Suriname, including the development of a comprehensive strategy to support the participation of women in all levels of political and public life. The strategy seeks to establish a legal quota for political appointments, accelerate the recruitment of women in decision-making positions and provide financial incentives to political parties to include equal numbers of women and men on their lists of candidates.<sup>114</sup>

The Mission was also informed that, in order to promote women's political participation and capacity building, the Bureau of Gender Affairs planned different public activities to be held prior to the election. The Bureau indicated to the Mission that some of these activities would be awareness campaigns to improve gender balance within the electoral bodies' staff, and to promote the importance of equal participation of men and women in political parties. However, due to a lack of resources and the restrictions implemented to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities had to be cancelled.

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<sup>111</sup> Electoral Law, Article 2.

<sup>112</sup> Electoral Law, Article 1.

<sup>113</sup> Electoral Law, Article 29.

<sup>114</sup> Bureau of Gender Affairs, "Gender Vision Policy Document 2021-2035", Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname, June 2019.

Academic experts and candidates with whom the Mission met suggested that the capacity of the Bureau of Gender Affairs to encourage women's political participation, to collect official gender data, and to promote gender parity in all sectors of the government is limited. The Mission noted that the human and financial resources allocated to the office are scarce.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has acknowledged these limitations. In a document titled "The Development Plan of Suriname 2017–2021", the Ministry identifies problems such as "insufficient capacities to develop, execute, monitor and evaluate a gender strategy and policy."<sup>115</sup> The Bureau of Gender Affairs also recognizes it does not have sufficient staff to implement nation-wide awareness initiatives on gender issues.

The Mission was informed that other governmental agencies<sup>116</sup> face similar constraints. According to the National Report Situation Analysis of Women and Men in Suriname,<sup>117</sup> due to a lack of financial and human resources, expertise, and well-defined objectives for data collection, most government agencies do not have sex-disaggregated data and gender-related data to design pertinent policies. Furthermore, according to the aforementioned document, the government does not have a specific budgetary allocation for gender issues.

Regarding civil society initiatives, the Mission observed that months before the election *STATS International*, a strategic communications organization, launched a media awareness campaign called "Balance in 2020", supported by the UNDP and the Dutch Embassy in Suriname. This campaign aimed at obtaining a gender balance in candidates' lists for the 2020 elections, and advocated for equal representation of men and women, the young and the old in leadership positions, in particular within the National Assembly and the Council of Ministers. The slogan of the campaign was "equal opportunities, real progress" and targeted young people and first-time voters. The campaign facilitated live television political debates among candidates and political representatives, where maintaining the gender balance was a priority.

## **8. Gender Equity in Candidate Nomination**

Over the past twenty years, numerous countries in the Americas have implemented measures aimed at eliminating barriers that prevent women from gaining access to public decision-making spheres,<sup>118</sup> including quotas in order to progressively adopt parity measures. These mechanisms have proven to be effective in improving women's political representation and ensuring that the composition of legislative bodies accurately reflects the entire population.<sup>119</sup> Despite civil society efforts, to date Suriname has not introduced a

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<sup>115</sup> Bureau of Gender Affairs, "Gender Vision Policy Document 2021-2035", Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname, June 2019.

<sup>116</sup> The different ministries are jointly responsible for gender mainstreaming general policies through the Gender Focal Points that were created in 2002 as part of the Gender Management System.

<sup>117</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, "National Report Situation Analysis of Women and Men in Suriname", Ministry of Home Affairs, 2018

<sup>118</sup> Organization of American States, "Manual to Incorporate a Gender Perspective into OAS Electoral Observation Missions", [https://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual\\_gender\\_e.pdf](https://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual_gender_e.pdf)

<sup>119</sup> World Bank, "The World Bank Data Catalog", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=SR>

legislated quota system or any other affirmative action measure for candidate nomination processes.

During meetings with the Mission, all stakeholders interviewed agreed that there has been progress in terms of women's political participation in Suriname. According to the information received, for the 2020 elections, there was a significant improvement in the number of female candidates, representing 47 percent of the total number of candidates for all three political administrative levels. For the election of the National Assembly, there were 251 female candidates (42%) and 346 male candidates (58%). Compared with the 2015 elections, the participation of women as candidates for the Assembly increased by nine percentage points.<sup>120</sup>

**Table 3: Total Number of Candidates by Sex**

	<b>National Assembly</b>	<b>District Councils</b>	<b>Local Councils</b>	<b>Total Candidates</b>
Men	346	2612	561	3519
Women	251	2511	343	3105
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>597</b>	<b>5123</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>6624</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname.

It should be noted that prior to Election Day, official data on candidates, disaggregated by sex, was not publicly available. The Mission was only able to obtain it days after the election.

**Table 4: Number of Women Candidates for the National Assembly by Political Party**

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Total Women Candidates</b>
Alternatief 2020 / Alternative 2020 (A20)	25
Algemene Bevrijdings-en Ontwikkelings Partij / General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP)	13
Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek / Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP)	19
Democratisch Alternatief '91 / Democratic Alternative '91 (DA'91)	14
De Nieuwe Wind / The New Wind (DNW)	4
Hervormings- en Vernieuwings Beweging / Reform and Renewal Movement (HVB)	17
Nationale Democratische Partij / National Democratic Party (NDP)	17
Nationale Partij Suriname / National Party of Suriname (NPS)	17
Partij voor Democratie en Ontwikkeling door Eenheid / Party for Democracy and Development through Unity (DOE)	13

<sup>120</sup> According to official data, in these elections only 33% of all candidates were women.

Political Party	Total Women Candidates
Partij voor Recht en Ontwikkelings / Party for Justice and Development (PRO)	14
Progressieve Arbeiders - en Landbouwers Unie / Progressive Workers' and Farmers' Union (PALU)	13
Pertjajah Luhur / Glorious Empire (PL)	7
Sociaal Democratische Unie / Social Democratic Union (SDU)	18
Surinaamse Partij van de Arbeid / Surinamese Labour Party (SPA)	19
STREI! / Struggle (STREI)	11
Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij / Progressive Reform Party (VHP)	19
Volkspartij voor Vernieuwing & Democratie / People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>251</b>

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

Although there has been progress in terms of women's political participation in Suriname, there are still significant issues that should be addressed. According to experts, "discriminatory stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society" are still an obstacle for female candidates.<sup>121</sup> Several stakeholders informed the Mission that some women refrain from active participation in politics because they are afraid of the potential consequences it could have for their personal life.

Another factor affecting women's political participation is the difficulty they encounter in fund raising. In Suriname, political parties are financed by private donations, since there is no direct public financing. During meetings with the Mission, representatives of political parties and female candidates mentioned that, as a result of socioeconomic asymmetries and the sexism that feeds the country's political culture, women are less likely to obtain financing for their campaigns.<sup>122</sup>

## 9. Gender Equity in Elective Public Office

The official results of the May 25, 2020 general elections in Suriname were published by the Central Polling Station on June 16, and declared binding by the Independent Electoral Council on June 19. According to the official results, 16 women were elected to the National Assembly, which represents 31.37% percent of the parliament's seats - one seat less than in

<sup>121</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, "Concluding observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Suriname", CEDAW, March 2018.

<sup>122</sup> It should be noted, however, that some stakeholders expressed to the Mission that media outlets are usually equally accessible to both men and women, and that in most cases, there is gender balance within the public political debates broadcasted on radio and TV.



the 2015-2020 term. All districts have female representatives, with the exception of Saramacca.

**Table 5: Number of Women Elected to the National Assembly by Political Party**

Political Party	Number of Seats	Number of Women	% of Women
ABOP	8	2	25%
BEP	2	0	0
NDP	16	6	37.5%
NPS	3	1	33.3%
PL	2	1	50%
VHP	20	6	30%
<b>TOTAL SEATS</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>16</b>	

Source: Prepared using data provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Suriname

## 10. Findings and Recommendations

- Despite civil society efforts, to date Suriname has not introduced any affirmative action measure for candidate nomination. As suggested in 2015, the Mission recommends implementing an effective gender quota mechanism in order to progressively adopt parity measures and thus level the playing field for women in elections.
- Prior to Election Day, official data on candidates disaggregated by sex was not publicly available. The Mission recommends electoral authorities produce and publish updated information on the percentage of female candidates registered for all levels of the election and their placement in the corresponding lists.
- Although there has been progress in terms of women's political participation, decision-making positions within political parties and government agencies are disproportionately occupied by men. The Mission suggests implementing training initiatives to promote equality within political parties as well as actions to promote women's political leadership. Further, government agencies and political parties, should consider affirmative action measures for the composition of their boards and for candidates' nomination processes.
- The Mission observed that the capacity of the Bureau of Gender Affairs to encourage women political participation, to collect official gender data, and to ensure gender mainstreaming in all sectors of the government is very limited. The Mission recommends strengthening the Bureau with more resources and decision-making power to ensure it has sufficient capacity to continuously support actions and programs that can effectively promote women's political participation and gender equality. It is also suggested that coordination strategies be planned with other areas and offices that supervise different aspects of that electoral process.

**MEMBERS OF THE MISSION**

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Gerardo De Icaza	Mexico	Director, Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation	M
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Luisa Ferreira	Colombia	General Coordinator	F
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Maria Fernanda Story	United States	Financial Specialist	F
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