



MSG OBSERVATION GROUP

SOLOMON ISLANDS GENERAL ELECTION REPORT 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

01

The MSG Observer Group (MSGOG) mission to observe the 2024 National General Election in Solomon Islands would not have been possible with the assistance of MSG Member Governments.

The MSGOG would like to express its most profound gratitude to respective Governments for the trust placed upon them to undertake the mission and for the financial support provided to enable their participation.

The MSGOG would like also to express its sincere gratitude to the Government of Solomon Islands for the invitation to the MSG to participate in observing the 2024 Solomon Islands National General Elections.

The MSGOG would also like to thank the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) for the tremendous assistance as well as accreditation which enabled the MSGOG to undertake the observation of the elections.

Finally, the MSGOG was indeed very grateful to all the stakeholders for the courtesies accorded to them, in particular Government officials, electoral and polling officials, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) and the voters whom the Group met and talked to throughout the course of the observer mission.

This mission would not have been possible without the support and assistance of all the people and institutions mentioned and for that the MSGOG was indeed truly grateful.



Mrs. Jeannette Bolenga,
Team Leader of the MSGOG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. At the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government, the MSG mounted a mission to observe the Solomon Islands National Elections from 9-22 April 2024. The MSGOG was led by Vanuatu as the current Chair of the MSG and comprised of representatives from Fiji, FLNKS, and Solomon Islands. The MSGOG was supported in its observer mission by staff of the Secretariat. Given our size – seven (7) in all, the group had only managed to observe polling in Honiara (West, Central, and East Constituencies) and Gizo/Kolombangara Constituency in the Western Province. The MSG Observer Group was tasked to provide an independent assessment of the conduct of the elections.

2. The general observation of the MSGOG (team) that the elections were conducted in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. The various polling stations visited were manned by committed polling officials who performed their duties judiciously. The team observed the presence of political party agents and election observers, which allowed for appropriate scrutiny of the voting process. The voter turn-out for the elections was high at approximately 80% voting rate. There were a total of 334 candidates who contested the elections, under which, 219 candidates were affiliated to the 13 political parties, while 115 candidates contested as independent candidates. The team noted that 21 (twenty-one) which constitute (6%) of the total number of candidates were women candidates which represented a reduction in the number of women candidates for this election compared to the previous elections held in 2019.

3. The team encountered few voters who expressed dissatisfaction with how the elections were conducted. The team received isolated complaints by some dissatisfied voters on the out-of-constituency and cross-constituency voting and some allegation of voter manipulation. The team noted the gaps in the existing electoral process and the need to conduct more awareness of the election laws. However, the team noted that there are more room for improvement to the voting system and the overall conduct of the elections, which will be covered in the recommendations section of this Report.

4. Overall, the Team found that the 2024 Solomon Islands National General Elections (SINGE) was successfully conducted and that the Group was encouraged by the manner in which the elections were conducted. The MSGOG observer mission is part of the MSG's efforts to assist Members in strengthening their electoral processes.

5. The MSGOG fully endorsed the recommendations put forward in this report and trusts that they will be fully considered by the Solomon Islands Government to them improve on the conduct of future elections.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. This Report contains the independent observations of the MSGOG Team during the 2024 Solomon Islands National General Elections. The Report is divided into four (4) parts. Part 1 - the introduction; Part 2 – provides background information on the political and electoral system in Solomon Islands; Part 3 – outlines the observations of members of the MSGOG; Part 4 – contains the Recommendations.

INVITATION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

1.1 On 15th January 2024, the Government of Solomon Islands extended an invitation to the MSG to participate in observing the SINGE. The invitation was conveyed to the Office of the Director General and coordinated in accordance with the 2024 Secretariat Work Program & Budget attachment under the Political, Security and Legal Affairs Programme. A copy of the invitation letter is attached as **Annex I**.

MEMBERS OF THE MSGOG

1.2 The MSGOG was led by Mrs. Jeannette Bolenga, a Former Principal Electoral Officer (PEO) of the Vanuatu Electoral Office. The other members of the team includes the Solomon Islands High Commissioner to Fiji, H.E Joseph Maáhanua, Mr Lasaro Naivalu, Senior Election Officer of Fiji Elections Office, Mr. Rodrigue Tiavouane representative of the FLNKS and supported by the MSG Secretariat staff comprising Dr. Gregoire Nimbtkik, Deputy Director General, Mr. Ilan Kiloe Programme Manager Political, Security & Legal Affairs and Mr. Christopher Waiwori, Senior Executive Advisor.

MSG OBSERVATION OF SOLOMON ISLANDS GENERAL ELECTIONS

2. This is the second time for the MSG to observe the elections in the Solomon Islands. The first observation mission to the Solomon Islands was undertaken during the 2019 elections. The experiences gained from the previous observation mission proved to be helpful as background knowledge. During this mission, the MSGOG team did benefited from the wealth of experience and knowledge amongst the team, which comprised of some technical electoral officials from member countries. This made the task a lot easier to coordinate.

MSG OBSERVATION PERIOD

1.4 Members of the MSGOG Team were in Honiara from 9 April to 22 April 2024.

1.5 The SIEC conducted a briefing session for the MSGOG on the 15th of April, 2024, at the Heritage Park Hotel. There were also presence of other International Observers comprising of teams from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFs), the European Union (EU), the Australian High Commission to Solomon Islands (AHC), the New Zealand High Commission to Solomon Islands, the US Embassy, Japan Embassy and the Australian National University including other national or domestic observer teams.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1.6 The Secretariat conducted several short briefings for the MSGOG Team prior to the Polling. The Team paid a courtesy call to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Mr Collin Beck, and had a briefing with the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr Jasper Highwood Anisi, purposely to gather background information on the new joint-election exercise to be operationalized in the upcoming election.

SCOPE OF OBSERVATION

1.7 The MSGOG observation was conducted in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Elections provided by the SIEC. A copy of the Code of Conduct is attached as Annex II

1.8 The MSGOG Observer Mission scope of activities and size of its teams was dictated by the available resources and the number of observers.

1.9 The Members of the MSGOG Team were divided into three (3) teams to observe the election on selected constituencies, namely East Honiara, Central and West Honiara, and Gizo/Kolombangara. The MSGOG limited its observation to these selected constituencies. They covered areas of distinct geographical locations and provided for a broader analytical observation and comparison.

The table below shows the distribution of members of the MSGOG Team.

Table 1: MSGOG Teams

Team	Members	Deployment Area
MSGOG Team 1	1. Mrs. Jeannette Bolenga (Team Leader); 2. H.E Joseph Ma'ahanua	East Honiara
MSGOG Team 2	1. Rodrigue Tiavouane (FLNKS) 2. Dr. Gregoire Nimbtik, 3. Ilan Kiloe	Western Province (Gizo/Kolombangara).
MSGOG Team 3	1. Lazara Naivalu (Fiji) 2. Christopher Waiwori	West Honiara Central Honiara

PART I: INTRODUCTION

OBSERVATION FORMS

1.10 Observation forms with a set questionnaire were distributed to each of the Members of the observation Team to fill out during the actual observation. The Observation forms contain the following;

- a) polling station environment
- b) authorized persons
- c) opening of polling stations
- d) polling process
- e) number of voters
- f) closing of polling stations.

1.11 Members of the Team recorded their observations under each of those sections. The forms were then collated, and the results tabulated and compiled to form information that are contained in this report. A copy of the observation form is attached as **Annex III**.

STATEMENT BY MSGOG

1.12 The Head of delegation (HOD) for the MSGOG Team issued a statement before the election day applauding the Solomon Islands Government for the extensive preparations undertaken for the elections. The HOD in her statement also briefly highlighted the anticipated outcome of the elections.

1.13 The MSGOG Team also released an Interim Statement after the elections, commending the Government and the people of Solomon Islands for the conduct of the Elections. (Copies of the statements are attached in **Annex IV**, and **Annex V**, respectively.)

PART II: BRIEF BACKGROUND ON SOLOMON ISLANDS ELECTORAL SYSTEM

06

NATIONAL PARLIAMENT OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

2.1 The National Parliament of Solomon Islands is a unicameral legislature and comprises of 50 Members, representing 50 defined constituencies. These members are elected to Parliament by their constituents to serve a four (4) year term as their representative in the National Legislature.

REVIEW OF CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES

2.2 The Solomon Islands Constitution requires that a review of constituency boundaries be conducted by the Constituency Boundaries Commission at least every 10 years. The most recent redrawing of constituency boundaries took place in 1997, which resulted in the number of constituencies increasing from 47 to 50. A copy of the distribution and defined boundaries of the 50 constituencies is attached as Annex VI.

ELIGIBILITY TO CONTEST

2.3 A Candidate who wishes to contest the national general elections must fulfill the following requirements:

- a) be a citizen of the Solomon Islands;
- b) must attain the age of 21;
- c) be nominated by at least three (3) registered voters; and
- d) must pay the prescribed nomination fee.

VOTING SYSTEM

2.4 The voting system adopted in Solomon Islands is the First – Past - the – Post (FPP) Electoral system. The FPP electoral system is used for both the national and provincial elections. This is also referred to as the “winner takes all” electoral system. This means that any candidate who receives the highest number of votes casted in a particular constituency for the National Elections and wards for the provincial elections is declared as the elected representative.

2.5 If two or more candidate receive an equal number of votes, an addition of one vote would entitle any of the candidates to be declared elected. In such a situation the Returning Officer must undertake a recount. If, after the completion of a recount, and there is still an equal number of votes, the Returning Officer must report the fact to the Governor-General, who shall order that another election is conducted for that particular constituency at a date the Governor-General determines.

ELECTORAL LAWS

2.6 This is the first joint election conducted under the new Solomon Islands Electoral Act No. 6 of 2018 which provided for the amalgamation of the elections under the authority of the Electoral Commission.

2.7 The Electoral Act, procedures, and regulations provides the basis upon which the election is to be conducted by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, including provisions on the rights and responsibilities of the voters, political parties, candidates, election agents, observers, and the media.

2.8 The Solomon Islands' Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and the freedom to participate in elections.

2.9 Other Laws in the Solomon Islands that provides for the legal and regulatory framework for the conduct of elections include the National Parliament Electoral Provisions Act (Cap.87), National Parliament (Electoral Provisions) Regulations 2005, Political Parties Integrity Act 2014, and the Election Petition Rules 1976.

ELECTORAL OFFENSES

2.10 The main electoral offenses as highlighted in the various electoral laws includes the following:

- a) threatening;
- b) bribery;
- c) undue influence;
- d) impersonating;
- e) illegal voting;
- f) false statements; and
- g) intimidation.

2.11 Each offense is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.

ELECTION PETITIONS

2.12 An interesting aspect of the Electoral Act 2018 is that it provides mandates not only to a candidate, but also to a voter to lodge an election petition. A voter or candidate may file an election petition with the High Court. An election petition is heard in an open court. The Court may summarily dismiss a petition if the Judge considers that there are insufficient grounds for the petition.

2.13 A petition must be submitted within one month after the publication of the official results of the election. A decision of the High Court on an election petition is final and cannot be challenged on appeal.

BY ELECTIONS

2.14 A by-election is an election that is organized to fill a vacancy in the National Parliament or the Provincial Assembly. Such a vacancy can arise as a result of the expulsion, resignation, or death of an elected Member in between general elections. A provision of law also exists for a by-election to be called if there is a tie in the results of a constituency.

2.15 After the Governor General is notified of the vacancy by the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, the law requires the Governor General to issue a proclamation calling for a by-election at a date determined by the Governor General.



This Election Observation Report is divided into four key thematic areas observed by the MSGOG. The key objective of the observations was to ascertain whether the conduct of elections was done in adherence to the electoral laws and regulations of Solomon Islands.

The MSGOG Team observed the various key election processes which included the conduct of the voting process against determinations such as; whether voters are properly recorded on the Electoral list, whether fingers were properly examined before they were allowed to vote or whether the name was properly checked and verified before voters were allowed to cast their ballot papers; whether the ink is indelible and fingers dipped properly in the ink container, whether polling booths/compartment does protect voters secrecy, whether after the polling station has closed, the presiding officer in the presence of candidates, political party agents, and observers, did account for all the ballot papers used and were sealed (closed) in the ballot boxes,, and whether the counting process was transparent and was done in strict compliance to the prescribed process in the Electoral Law of Solomon Islands.

POLLING STATIONS

OPENING OF POLLING STATIONS

3.1 The Team observed that the polling stations opened at 7 am in all the polling station visited. It was encouraging to observe the high number of voter turnout at the polling stations well before the opening of the polling station at 7.00 am. The Team observed that voters queued and waited calmly, and within the first five hours after the opening most electoral voters on the register had voted. By 2.30 PM the polling stations were generally empty and quiet. Minutes towards the close of polls, there were not any person left to vote.

POLLING STATION AND ENVIRONMENT

3.2 Generally, all the polling stations visited were situated in locally known locations mostly in places where polling was previously been done. The environment around the polling stations were peaceful and calm, and there were no signs of unauthorized persons in the vicinity trying to influence or intimidate voters or the polling officials. It was observed that the Police presence played an important role in maintaining security orderliness and enhancing a general peaceful environment.

3.3 The Presiding Officer and Assistant Polling Officers, Queue Controller, Ballot Box Guard, Police Officers, and Party/Candidate Agents are required to be stationed in the polling station and be visible to voters, the Police, Agents, and Observers. Their identity, including their roles and responsibilities must be made clear to the voters, Agents, Police Officers, and Observers to avoid potential confusion.

CLOSING OF POLLING STATIONS

3.4 The Team observed that Polling Officials complied with closing procedures. After announcing the close of voting at 4 pm, the Polling Officials invited the election observers and political party agents to observe the verification and sealing processes of the ballot boxes. The team noted that the verification and sealing process were undertaken professionally and thoroughly.

AWARENESS MATERIALS

3.5 The Team noted useful election and awareness materials on the voting process and electoral offenses prepared by the SIEC were clearly displayed at the Polling Stations. These materials provide guidance to ensure voters are well informed about the process for elections. In addition, the Polling Officials who were responsible at each Polling Station took time during the opening of the voting to explain the procedures for voting.

3.6 During Polling Day, the Team observed no political campaign materials were displayed in all the polling stations visited as required by law

POLITICAL PARTY AGENTS

3.7 Although political parties and candidates are required to appoint and nominate to the Returning Officer of the constituency or ward two agents per polling station, it was observed by the Team that some of the eight candidates of East Honiara had no agents.

3.8 The Team noted that only four agents were present in the polling stations, observing and witnessing both the opening, the voting process itself, and the closing of polling. The Team observed that one candidate had only two agents available to cover the four polling stations in Panatina in East Honiara.

3.9 In some polling stations Agents consulted the observers with questions enquiring about the process for the opening of polling including the closing processes of the ballot boxes and the voting procedures. In most cases the observers kindly directed them to seek clarification from the Presiding Officers. In some isolated incidents Agents did not receive the assistance required largely because the Presiding Officers were too busy.

3.10 All the necessary election materials, including the electoral list, ballot papers and boxes, and the indelible ink, and stationeries were available and ready prior to the opening of Polling.

3.11 The Polling Officials also explained to the voters the voting procedures, emptied the ballot boxes, and verified the ballot boxes' seal serial numbers before declaring the voting open.

3.12 The Team observed that the Polling Officials appeared not only capable and confident but, at the same time, courteous in the exercise of their duties. The voting that followed afterward was managed in an orderly manner by polling officials. Overall, the Team did not notice any serious logistical or administrative challenges during the opening of polling.

POLLING PROCESS

a) Standardization of the voting process

3.13 At most polling stations visited, the Team consulted with the Presiding Officers, Political Party Agents, and voters to identify any concerns about voting irregularities.

3.14 The Polling Officials displayed good knowledge of the voting process and demonstrated adequate levels of competence and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Team noted that the agreed procedures were generally adhered to.

3.15 However, there were times when certain decisions had to be dealt with, based on consensus and convenience rather than in compliant with the prescribed election processes. The standardization of the various stages of the voting process could better improve and clarify the voting process.

3.16 The Team also observed that voters' fingers were marked before proceeding to cast their ballot papers. Overall, it was observed by the Team that the electoral processes were generally adhered to at the Polling Stations and that there was no sign of any intimidation or apparent electoral misconduct. The overwhelming presence of Election Observers and Political Party Agents perhaps allowed for this appropriate scrutiny.

3.17 The Team observed a smooth process in the identification of voters on the electoral list without significant irregularities. Voters were verified by determining the validity of their identification cards before they could be allowed to vote. The electoral roll also has pictorial identification to assist the Polling Officials to properly verify the voters.

3.18 Despite the smooth process of identifying voters on the electoral roll, the Team, however, encountered instances of people from other constituencies being able to register and vote in another constituency. This cross-constituency registration and voting, to some extent, posed challenges to the election process and can create potential disputes. The Team noted that while efforts may have been developed to address such matters, there is an urgent need to further improve the current voter registration system.

Bottleneck in the Voter Verification Process

3.19 It was observed by the Team that only one person is voting at a given time in nearly all the polling stations visited. Although there are four available voting screens/booth in the voting section of the polling station, only one is mostly used and occupied at a time. This was due to the bottleneck in the voter verification process where a grid-style template was used for the voter list. A List-style voter list template presents voter information in sequential order, typically alphabetically by name or voter ID number. This List-Style Voter list template will greatly assist election officials to easily locate individual voter records quickly, especially when verifying voter eligibility.

ACCESSIBILITY

People with disabilities

3.20 Most Polling Stations were schools, irrespective of whether the actual voting areas were physically accessible to all types of voters, including people with disability.

3.21 The Polling Officials assisted the partially blind, the dumb and deaf, and voters on crutches to cast their votes when they are identified from among those in the queue.

3.22 Some people were given priority to vote before others. These priority groups consist of the disable voters. Immediate family Members also assisted their disabled relative to cast their votes. However, persons who were confined to wheelchairs found it difficult to access the polling stations. Thus, it would have been convenient for appropriate facilities to be made available. For future elections considerations for easy access to wheelchairs be made available to assist people with disabilities to freely cast their votes.

Elderly people/Senior Citizens

3.23 The Team observed elderly people were assisted by the Polling Officials to cast their votes. In the future, it would appear more convenient to provide the necessary supporting facilities or otherwise allocate a separate queue specifically for the elderly people, including those persons with disability to use and vote.

SECURITY

Security of Election materials

3.24 Although there was security (Police) presence within the vicinity of most of the Polling Stations which the Team visited, there was absence of the presence of security officers in some polling stations, during polling processes such as the sealing of ballot boxes, before and after polling, and during the packing of the ballot boxes, into bags.

3.25 It was observed that Police Personnel were present to ensure of the security of the venue, voters, and Polling Officials, but not much emphasis was placed on the security of election materials. It is very important to ensure security also covers proper recording is maintained for the chain of custody of election materials from polling to sealing and to transportation and storage

3.26 The Team noted that a Memorandum of Understanding between the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) was signed on 18 March 2023 to provide security for ballot boxes and electoral officials. The role of the Police is to provide security in the vital stages of the elections, particularly voter registers, ballot papers, and ballot boxes at polling stations, and at the opening and closing of polling.

3.27 It was observed by the Team that at the close of polling, the Police were outside, and not inside the room, to witness with party/candidate agents and observers, the sealing of ballot boxes and the packaging of polling materials by the Polling Officials. The Police were not present to record or take note of the serial numbers of the security seals in case of irregularities. The Team considers that it is the duty of the Police to provide security all throughout the different stages of the election process. The Team observed that Police officers were present in the polling station but were seen sitting outside inactive more than five meters away.

3.28 More robust security measures and protocols should be implemented so election authorities can mitigate risks and vulnerabilities associated with handling election materials, thereby safeguarding the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process. A handbook or guide for Police Officers should be developed to assist security personnels on their role during elections.

Security risks

3.29 It was observed by the Team that in some polling stations, ballot boxes were left unattended without any visible police presence after the ballot boxes were sealed and are awaiting transportation of the ballot boxes to be stored at the counting centers. However, it is the Team's expectations that Police officers should assist in the transportation, distribution, and safeguarding of election materials, such as ballot boxes, voting machines, and voter registers. Police presence is vital to ensure that these election materials are securely transported to polling stations and protected from tampering theft, or unauthorized access.

3.30 The involvement of the Police in the custody of election materials is critical for the following reasons;

Protection from External Threats

3.31 Police presence provide a robust security presence to safeguard election materials from external threats such as theft, vandalism, or sabotage. Their presence helps deter potential perpetrators and ensures safe transportation and storage of sensitive election materials.

Prevention of Tampering

3.32 Police supervision of election materials minimizes the risk of tampering or manipulation during transit and storage. They ensure that ballot boxes, voting machines, and other critical items are securely sealed and protected from unauthorized access, reducing the possibility of interference with the electoral process.

Maintaining Chain of Custody

3.33 Police Officers play a crucial role in maintaining the chain of custody for election materials, by ensuring that they are secured and accounted for. Police are expected to properly document the movement of election materials from its production facilities to the Polling Stations, to the Counting Centers, and to their Storage Facilities, thus establishing a clear record of accountability. (Documentations by the police can be used to cross-check the EMB records of Ballot Boxes, seals, receivers,' and dispatchers' names, etc.)

Responding to Security Incidents

3.34 In the event of security incidents or breaches involving election materials, Police Officers should be trained to respond swiftly and effectively. They must conduct investigations, gather evidence, and take appropriate action to address any security breaches or attempts at tampering of election materials, to preserve the integrity of the electoral process.

Ensuring Fairness and Impartiality

3.35 Police involvement in the custody of election materials reinforces the principle of fairness and impartiality in the electoral process. Their supervision helps instill confidence among political stakeholders, candidates, and voters that the election is being conducted with impartiality and transparency.

Facilitating Secure Transportation

3.36 Police provide security escorts for the transportation of election materials, particularly in places that are regarded as high-risk areas and are prone to conflicts and social disorder. Their presence ensures that materials safely reach their intended destination and creating a conducive environment whereby election officials can perform their duties without fear of intimidation or interference.

Building Public Trust

3.37 Police presence in the custody of election materials reassures the public that measures are in place to protect the integrity of the electoral process. Their visibility demonstrates the commitment to upholding democratic values and to ensuring that elections are conducted fairly and transparently thus, fostering the public trust in the electoral system.

COUNTING AND VERIFICATION OF RESULTS

3.38 The Team observed that the counting of ballot papers was conducted under the supervision of the Returning Officer. Once the ballot boxes have been received and stored at the counting center from all polling stations, counting commences. Each ballot box was counted individually, in a sequential order in accordance with the polling station numbers. The seals on the ballot box were then verified and cut.

3.39 All the ballot papers in the ballot box are then removed and its empty box is presented for inspection by counting agents and observers. The Ballot papers were then counted in 'batches, and the total number of ballot papers removed from the ballot box was recorded on the counting form. The ballot papers are then sorted according to the candidates.

Rejected Ballot Papers

3.40 There is a process for 'rejected ballot. The Returning Officer may reject a ballot paper if the official mark is missing, or if it contains writing or a mark by which an elector might be identified or is presented inconsistent with the prescribed instructions.

3.41 The number of rejected ballot papers, are recorded on the Ballot Paper Count form.

The Team did not observe any significant irregularities in the counting process. The Returning Officer and all counting officials were competent in undertaking their responsibilities.

3.42 The Team observed that there has been very long delays and prolonged counting process and announcements of the election results after the election. These rather long delays can pose several risks and challenges. The key risks identified by the Team are as follows:

- a) **Loss of Trust:** Extended delays in announcing election results can lead to public skepticism and loss of trust in the electoral process. This lack of confidence may undermine the legitimacy of the election outcome.
- b) **Heightened Tensions:** Uncertainty surrounding the election results delays may escalated tension among political parties, candidates, voters, supporters and the general public.
- c) **Perception of Manipulation:** Prolonged counting processes can create speculation about electoral fraud or manipulation.
- d) **Economic Impact:** Delayed of election results can disrupt economic activities and investment decisions, particularly if political uncertainty persists.
- e) **Legal Challenges:** Lengthy counting processes may trigger legal challenges and disputes over the validity of the election results. This can result to litigation processes, thereby prolonging the election results.
- f) **Election authorities** should strive to ensure transparency, efficiency, and adherence to an established electoral timeline that clearly specifies the cut off time for the verification and counting process. This will prevent complacency from the election officials.

OTHER OPERATIONAL MATTERS:

Identification of Polling Officials

3.43 The Team observed that in all the polling stations visited, all Polling Official seemed to be wearing the same color of BIBs vests and ID's which were only legible if one is at proximity of at least 2 meters in front of them. The Team expected that the Presiding Officer should have different colors of BIB (vests) to distinguish him or her from the other polling staff in the polling station. The Team is of the view that such clear distinctions would create the following.

Enhanced Visibility:

3.44 Different-colored bibs make it easy for voters to identify and distinguish between the various roles and responsibilities of polling officials. such visibility helps streamline the voting process by directing voters to the appropriate personnel for assistance or guidance.

Clear Role Identification:

3.45 Clear role identification minimizes confusion among both voters and polling officials, ensuring that tasks are delegated efficiently and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Quick Reference:

3.46 The use of distinct colors provides a quick visual reference for both voters and Polling Officials, enabling them to easily identify and locate the appropriate personnel when needed. This in turn fosters effective communication and assistance, allowing for faster resolution of inquiries or issues that may arise during voting.

VIOLATION OF THE ELECTORAL LAW AND IRREGULARITIES IN THE POLLING PROCESS

3.47 The Team observed that there were no major incidents of a serious nature in violations of the electoral law or irregularities that occurred at the opening of the Polling, during polling, and throughout the close of polling in the polling stations visited.

3.48 The Team observed that the people freely exercised their rights and voted in a peaceful and orderly manner. No attempts of impersonation, coercion and fraudulent voting were existent and officially recorded.

3.49 However, in one particular polling station the Team was informed by the Presiding Officer of one incident of impersonation. The Team was informed that a young man attempted to vote using the name of a senior relative but, the physical appearance did not match that of the voter particulars on the register.

3.50 In another polling station, the Presiding Officer shared with the Team her experience in sealing both ballot boxes with two sets of seals for the Parliamentary Ballot Boxes at the opening of Polling at 7.00 am. The Team was informed that the sequencing of the serial numbers were inconsistent. Nevertheless, it was resolved that the incident was not intentional but perhaps an inadvertent mistake made by the logistics and distribution team.

Conclusion

4.1 Overall, the Solomon Islands National General Elections were conducted in a calm and peaceful environment and eligible citizens were able to freely exercise their right to vote. The Election was relatively well organised by the SIEC with committed polling officials who administered the conduct of various stages and aspects of the elections with professionalism.

4.2 However, this does not rule out the fact that there is still room for improvement with regards to the administration of the election processes. The MSGOG fully endorses the recommendations put forward in the Report and trust that they will be considered helpful by the Solomon Islands Government to further strengthen and improve the conduct and consequently enhance further the legitimacy of the results of future elections in the country.

Recommendations

The MSG Observer Group offer the following recommendations for consideration:

Polling Station	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The need to provide more accessible and inclusive polling stations venues for the convenience of voters who are either senior citizens or those with disability, especially those on crutches and wheelchair.2. Suitable polling infrastructures to be provided to foster visibility, credibility, and respect for elections as a democratic process delivered to citizens.3. The need to introduce multiple check-in points at each of the polling station voting rooms to reduce and long queues, and to make sure that all voting screens are utilized by all voters.
-----------------	---

Voting process	<p>4. The need to develop a Standard Operating Procedures for all polling officials to follow when conducting and administrating the election process. This is vital to avoid officials taking decisions unilaterally.</p> <p>5. The usage of signposts to indicate the different stages of the elections process is also highly recommended.</p>
Registration of Voters	<p>6. In the registration period, voters should be allowed to register their most preferred polling station within their constituency</p> <p>7. National IDs and the electronic Identification cards to be developed and used for verification processes during elections</p> <p>8. A Provision to be developed to enable voters to vote anywhere in the country for their candidates by presenting their National ID Cards without being forced to be physically present to vote in their designated polling station in accordance to the electoral list.</p>

Polling Officials	<p>9. Polling officials need to have proper identification. This is critically important and was absent in every Polling Station which the Team visited. The name tag for instance will allow persons to properly identify and file complaints properly when the need arise.</p> <p>10. All record books should be properly developed to document the process correctly.</p> <p>11. The Presiding Officer should wear bibs(vests) of a different color to the other polling staff in the polling Station to clearly distinguish the Presiding Officer from the bibs Vest of the Polling Officials.</p>
-------------------	--

Transportation of polling materials	<p>12. Police officers must assist in the transportation, distribution, and safeguarding of election materials, such as ballot boxes, voting machines, and voter registers. Police must ensure that these materials are securely transported to polling stations and protected from tampering theft, or unauthorized access.</p> <p>13. Police high visibility and presence all throughout the polling process should be encouraged.</p>
-------------------------------------	--

Electoral Roll	<p>14. The Electoral Roll needs to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.</p> <p>15. It is recommended that an electronic system is developed to allow for remote operation and voter support. Such a system can be effective considering the division of the Country into constituencies that are relatively small, isolated and widespread.</p>
Identification of voters	<p>16. A List-Style Voter Template should be developed. A LSVT will present voter information in a sequential order, typically in an alphabetical order by name or voter ID number. This will greatly assist election officials to locate individual voter records quickly, especially when verifying voter eligibility before he or she is able to vote.</p>

Capacity building for Police	<p>17. There is a need for capacity building training for the Police by the Electoral Commission on the importance of democracy and the democratic elections, its processes, operations, and the role of Police in the election process.</p> <p>18. A handbook or guide for Police Officers should be developed to assist Police and all accredited security personnels of their roles and responsibilities during elections.</p>
------------------------------	---

Security for Polling materials	<p>19. More robust security measures and protocols should be identified and put in place so to assist election authorities mitigate risk and vulnerabilities associated with the handling of election materials, thereby safeguarding the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process.</p> <p>20. A proper mechanism should be in place to ensure that the chain of custody of election materials are efficiently recorded. This should start from the SIEC to the Polling Stations and back to the Counting Centers. Each person who has custody of the election materials during each of the various stages should be properly recorded.</p>
--------------------------------	--

The Counting
Process

21. Election authorities should strive to ensure transparency, efficiency, and adherence to an established electoral timeline that specifies cut-off time for the verification and counting process. This will avoid complacency from the election officials.

22. The counting process can be simplified considerably to avoid potential complaints. The current system appeared to be lengthy. If the current system is retained, it is suggested that the staff open all ballots, sort the votes by candidate and then count per candidate. The party agents can be allowed to stand close to the counting table to observe the process. It is important to firstly count the number of ballots in the box and compare it against the turnout before proceeding with the rest of the count.

23. There is also the need for transparency in the handling and counting of ballot papers.

Progressive announcement of results	<p>24. A centralized counting centers for each constituency with progressive results announced to the public at the should be considered for future elections. Announcements of results should be done as soon as counting is completed.</p>
Voter Awareness	<p>25. A more robust measure needs to be undertaken to improve voter awareness on their rights to vote, the importance of voting during elections, voters' powers to elect Members of Parliament and Members of the Provincial Assembly,</p> <p>Greater Awareness of the overall election process must be undertaken by the SIEC in between the election cycle to ensure voters are confident and are fully aware of their obligations and responsibilities during the election period.</p>

Political Parties and Party agents' awareness	26. To ensure a level playing field is developed for all political parties and independent candidates, well informed persons should be appointed as agents. The Electoral Commission should conduct specific training on the role of political parties and candidate agents to all existing political parties and other stakeholders of elections during the electoral cycle in good time before elections.
Previous Election reports	27. Provide immediate attention and consideration to the recommendations contained in previous Election Reports including the 2019 MSGOG Observer Report to the Solomon Islands National General Election.

OUR MSG OG TEAM



MSG Secretariat
2024
Port Vila, VANUATU
www.msgsec.info

