

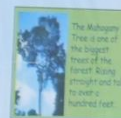


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2025 General Elections in Belize

PRELIMINARY REPORT

OAS Electoral Observation Mission

Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission for the General Elections of March 12, 2025 in Belize

March 14, 2025

The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM) in Belize, congratulates citizens and electoral authorities on the peaceful and successful conduct of the 2025 General Elections.

The OAS/EOM, which was led by Ms. Maricarmen Plata, member of the Cabinet of the OAS Secretary General, comprised twelve experts¹ and observers from seven countries, one of whom worked virtually. On Election Day the team was present in twelve of the 29 electoral divisions holding elections and observed the process from the opening of polling stations, through to the transfer of ballot boxes to the counting stations, the tabulation of ballots and the transmission of results. The Mission also analysed several core aspects of the electoral process, including electoral organization, electoral technology, electoral justice and political-electoral financing.

During its deployment, the Mission engaged with key stakeholders, including the electoral authorities, government officials, political parties and candidates and civil society actors, to gather perspectives on the organization of the elections and the overall electoral framework. The Mission's experts also analysed existing electoral legislation, regulations and procedures to ensure a full understanding of the context in which the polls were held.

PRE-ELECTORAL CONTEXT

On Tuesday, February 11, 2025, Prime Minister John Briceño announced that general elections would be held on March 12, 2025. Nomination Day was set for February 24, 2025. In keeping with Belize's political tradition, the pre-electoral period remained largely peaceful, although the rhetoric on the campaign trail was at times heated. In its engagement with stakeholders, the Mission was informed of several issues of concern, some of which impacted the 2025 process.

Matters before the Court

¹ Of the twelve team members, eight (66.7%) were women and four (33.3%) were men.

Of significant interest were several cases that were brought before the courts, among them two cases which sought to redefine the boundaries of Belize's electoral divisions prior to the polls, determine the legality of the election in the absence of boundary adjustments, and halt the election until this could be done. These cases, (name of BPM case] and *Jeremy Enriquez v The Attorney General of Belize and The Elections and Boundaries Commission*. In the first case, the court deferred its ruling until after the election, on the grounds that the plaintiff had only asked the court to rule on a matter of law and had failed to argue that the case should be heard urgently. The second case was dismissed by the Supreme Court on the grounds that it had not been properly pleaded and was not supported by "any admissible and coherent evidence." Appeals to the Court of Appeal and Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) were also unsuccessful (see Section IV).

Cases were also filed with the Court regarding the leadership of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP) and its representation on the ballot (see below), as well as the transfer of more than 100 electors to the Cayo North division, prior to the election. These cases remained before the court as of Election Day. In the case of the leadership of the UDP, the matter is scheduled to be heard on March 31, 2025, post-election. Some stakeholders expressed concern to the Mission, that matters directly related to the election, with particular relevance for candidates and voters, were not fully adjudicated before the polls.

Leadership of the Opposition United Democratic Party

A matter attracting considerable attention in the pre-electoral period related to the leadership of the opposition UDP. The Mission was informed that conflict within the party regarding the legitimate political leader had led to the presentation of two opposing candidate slates for the general election. One slate, led by Moses 'Shyne' Barrow, successfully nominated 25 candidates for the general election, while another slate, led by Tracy Panton nominated 15 candidates. Another member of the UDP also self-nominated, under the UDP banner, for a total of 41 UDP candidates in the 29 divisions in which elections were contested. Twelve divisions had two UDP candidates in direct competition, while one division, Port Loyola, had three UDP candidates.

The question of the leadership of the UDP had an impact on the design of the ballot for the 2025 general election. In Belize, the Representation of the People Act² provides that the ballot to be used in an election should include such colours or symbols opposite the names of the candidates, as the Commission may decide. The Commission may consult the political parties contesting the election in allocating the different colours or symbols. The United Democratic Party traditionally uses the colour red to identify their candidates and for these polls.

In its meeting of February 25, 2025, following Nomination Day, to determine the allocation of colours for the election, the Election and Boundaries Commission considered different options for the allocation of colours to the 41 candidates contesting the election under the UDP. These were:

1. Assigning traditional UDP red to all 41 candidates applying under the UDP.
2. Assigning traditional UDP red only to the 25 candidates listed by Moses “Shyne” Barrow.
3. Assigning traditional UDP red only to the 15 candidates listed by Tracy Panton.

By a majority vote of 4-1, the EBC opted to allocate the traditional UDP red to all 41 candidates applying under the UDP banner. In a press release issued on the matter, the EBC highlighted the importance that it remain neutral on the issue and pointed out that the question of the legitimate leader of the UDP was before the courts. The EBC also pointed out that, in a decision issued by the High Court the same day, Ms. Panton had not been restrained from the use of the UDP name and symbols, further reinforcing the need for an impartial stance by the body.³

While stakeholders who supported the EBC decision advised the Mission that it was the responsibility of the UDP slates to conduct their own voter education activities to ensure their supporters were informed and prepared to vote accordingly, the Mission also heard from critics, who opined that the presence of multiple candidates with red colours on the ballots would lead to voter confusion and possibly the unintended spoiling of ballots for UDP candidates.

² Schedule III, Election Rules, Rule 15(4), states that: “The spaces on the ballot papers opposite the names of the candidates shall be printed in such colour or colours or with such symbols as the Commission may decide. The Commission, after consulting the political parties contesting the election, may if it thinks fit, allocate different colours or symbols to different parties and shall publish in the Gazette, not less than seven days before any election, the colours or symbols which have been allocated to the different parties.

³ Elections and Boundaries Commission, “EBC Allocates Colours to Candidates applying Under the United Democratic Party to Contest the 12th March 2025 General Election,” <https://elections.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Press-Release-the-Elections-and-Boundaries-Commission.pdf>

The OAS/EOM recognized that the issues affecting the UDP in the 2025 elections were internal to the party, and that the EBC had limited capacity to make decisions involving these issues, particularly when they were before the courts. The Mission however notes that the system of political parties or organizations is a central element of representative democracy. This system guarantees plurality and equal competition in elections and facilitates the exercise of citizens' political rights. It is essential that such a system also guarantee that political rights are upheld within the party, provide legal certainty and be rooted in plurality and tolerance.⁴

Nomination Day

Nomination Day took place on February 24, 2025 and saw 90 candidates successfully nominated in Belize's 31 electoral divisions - 31 for the People's United Party (PUP), 41 for the United Democratic Party (UDP), seven for the Belize Justice Movement (BJM), four for the People's Democratic Party (PDP), two for the People's National Party, one for the Good Opportunity Development Party (GODP) and four independent candidates.

In two electoral divisions, Fort George and Pickstock, only one candidate, had been nominated by the end of the day. In this regard, Rule 3(4) of the Election Rules under the Representation of the People Act states that if at the end of Election Day, only one candidate has been nominated in an electoral division, the returning officer shall declare that candidate to have been elected.

As a result, the sole candidates in Fort George and Pickstock, Henry Charles Usher and Anthony Mahler, respectively, who had both been nominated by the People's United Party (PUP), were declared duly elected in their divisions on Nomination Day. This was an unprecedented event in the political history of Belize.

The general election on March 12 was therefore held in the remaining 29 divisions with the remaining 88 candidates. Official information provided by the Elections and Boundaries Department, indicated that there were 197,018 voters.

⁴ OAS, "Electoral Good Practices Guide for Strengthening Electoral Processes",
https://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/FV_OEA_good_practices_eng_WEB.pdf

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day the members of the OAS/EOM were present in 12 of the electoral divisions holding elections and observed the process from the opening of the polling stations through to the tallying of results at the counting stations and announcement of preliminary results. Members of the Mission visited 108 polling stations in those divisions during the day and reported that the process unfolded in a calm and efficient manner, and in accordance with the provisions of the law.

Polling stations observed by the OAS/EOM generally opened punctually at 7 AM and had all the equipment and materials necessary to conduct the polls. The OAS/EOM noted that the different locations had sufficient space to guarantee the secrecy of the vote. Election workers, the majority of whom were women, were well versed in the required procedures, efficiently assisted voters in casting their ballots and were responsive to general queries posed by members of the OAS/EOM.

In the morning, lines of voters were visible in most locations. In general, however, voters waited patiently to exercise their franchise, and voting progressed smoothly throughout the day.

OAS observers found that voters were able to identify their respective polling stations, and that signage at each location provided information and assistance to citizens as needed. Representatives of the People's United Party and the United Democratic Party were present at the polling stations visited by the OAS/EOM. In some instances, members of the OAS/EOM also saw agents for other candidates in the electoral process. The Mission did not encounter any non-partisan citizen observers during the day.

The OAS Mission congratulates the electoral authorities, election staff, representatives of the political parties and the security services who were present at the polling stations, for their hard work on election day.

Although the law provides for pregnant women, people with disabilities and the elderly to be prioritized in casting their ballots, this was not always observed in practice in the locations visited by members of the OAS/EOM. Furthermore, the OAS/EOM noted that some polling stations lacked proper access for persons with disabilities, who in some cases had to walk long distances to their polling station. The Mission notes that ensuring access to the vote for physically

disadvantaged communities is an important requirement in the execution of inclusive electoral processes.

The OAS/EOM observed significant levels of campaign activity occurring near to polling places, in the presence of large numbers of animated political party supporters. While the OAS/EOM recognizes that this is an expression of Belize's political culture, the congregation of these groups of has the potential to create an intimidating atmosphere for voters from opposing parties. OAS Missions in 2012 and 2015 have previously spoken to this issue and have recommended stricter and more uniform enforcement of the law that prohibits political activity within a 100-yard boundary around polling stations.

During its observation, the OAS/EOM was informed of instances where incentives were offered to voters as a means of encouraging their electoral participation. The OAS/EOM was also advised that these incentives could increment during the course of the day, with the result that some prospective voters might hold their franchise until the later hours, to add greater value to their ballot. If this is the case, this type of practice would create an extremely negative dynamic between voters, political parties and the political system, and would not align with the democratic culture that should be promoted in electoral processes. The Mission suggests exploring strategies to continue promoting a voting culture that fosters genuine civic engagement instead of bartering practices. An option in this regard is the implementation of compulsory voting, which would establish the casting of one's ballot as an exercise of civic and political rights, rather than a transaction from which individuals benefit. This would also help to address the declining voter participation numbers evident in the 2025 elections.

At the end of Election Day, OAS observers were present for the close of polling stations and the transfer of the ballot boxes to the counting stations. At the locations visited by the Mission there were no voters in line at this stage. Members of the OAS/EOM reported that polling stations generally closed promptly at 6 PM.

Following the close of the polls, the results were tabulated in accordance with established procedures and the ballot boxes were transported to the counting stations for the 29 electoral divisions. Results began to be transmitted through the media at approximately 8 PM, with returning officers announcing the results to the population through the media, once electoral divisions were declared. The results for all electoral divisions were available at 11:30 PM, and the

ballot boxes with the results transported to Belmopan to facilitate the centralized tabulation process at the EBD.

The results indicated that the People's United Party won 26 electoral divisions overall, while the United Democratic Party won five divisions. The final figures published by the EBD indicated that 128,262 ballots had been cast in the process, for a voter turnout of 64.97%. According to data shared by the EBD, this was the lowest voter turnout for Belize since independence in 1981.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

I. Electoral Authorities

The Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) in Belize comprises a Chairman and four members. The Chairman and two members are appointed by the Governor-General in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, following consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. The remaining two members are appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister with the concurrence of the Leader of the Opposition. This formula essentially provides the government with a majority role in the composition of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

The Elections and Boundaries Department (EBD), which administers and implements the electoral process, reports to the EBC on technical matters and to the Public Service Commission on administrative matters.

During consultations with various stakeholders, the OAS/EOM heard some concerns regarding a perceived lack of independence of these electoral bodies. Stakeholders expressed the view that the current structure of the EBC did not provide sufficient guarantees of neutrality, and that this perception had the potential to negatively affect public confidence in the electoral process.

Past OAS/EOMs in Belize, in 2012 and 2015, have issued recommendations to strengthen the autonomy of electoral management and to ensure adequate oversight. Recognizing that Belize is

currently engaged in a constitutional reform process led by the People's Constitution Commission (PCC), and that this process offers an opportunity to consider and update provisions of the current Constitution, the OAS/EOM reiterates the following recommendations made by past OAS/EOMs, including:

- Enhancing the neutrality of electoral administration by prohibiting Elections and Boundaries Commissioners and members of the Elections and Boundaries Department from simultaneously holding leadership positions within political parties.
- Implementing technical criteria for the selection of Commissioners and considering the inclusion of representatives from third parties and civil society organizations in the selection process.

II. Electoral Organization

Use of the Voter ID

In 2018, Belize engaged in a significant national effort to re-register electors. This effort involved the registration of eligible Belizean and non-Belizean nationals, in keeping with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act (ROPA),⁵ the deletion of deceased electors from the Voters' List and the correct assignment of voters to their electoral division.⁶ This process also included the issuance of new and improved Voter ID cards, which include the personal information of the voter and their photograph. As a result, Belize now has a reliable standardized means of identification which supports the reliable identification of voters during elections.

In its engagement with the electoral authorities however, the OAS/EOM was advised that presentation of the Voter ID during voting procedures was not mandatory. If a voter presents themselves to vote, without a Voter ID, the presiding officer at the polling station has the option to identify the voter by other means, including verifying that their information corresponds with the data contained in the Voters' List and/or the registration documents held by the electoral and polling station officials.

⁵ Representation of the People Act, Article 9, <https://elections.gov.bz/law/>

⁶ The San Pedro Sun, "July's Re-registration regulations explained by Elections and Boundaries", <https://www.sanpedrosun.com/government/2018/05/19/julys-re-registration-regulations-explained-elections-boundaries/>

Given the importance of ensuring the accurate identification of voters during electoral processes, the Mission recommends:

- Amending the ROPA to require voters present their Voter ID card at the polling station when seeking to exercise their franchise. This will add greater efficiency and reliability to the voter identification process.
- Including the photograph of electors in the Voters' List, to provide polling station officials with an additional mechanism to verify the identity of voters.

Proxy Voting

Section 19 of the Election Rules provides voters with the option to cast their ballot by proxy; a mechanism through which an elector is appointed to vote on behalf of another voter. Persons eligible to appoint proxy voters include officials posted at Belize's diplomatic posts overseas, along with their spouses and dependents, members of the Belize Defence Force, members of the Belize Police Department who will work on Election Day, election officers and persons required to assist election officers in any way. In order to vote by proxy, a voter must submit an application to the Chief Elections Officer, who prepares a proxy register that includes the identity of the proxy as well as of the person who appointed them. Proxy voters can vote on behalf of only one voter and, when voting, shall not dip their finger into the indelible ink in order to safeguard their own right to vote.

Applications to vote by proxy are received by the EBD up to 5 PM on the evening before a poll, after which the EBD creates a proxy register. The heads of the EBD's registration offices throughout the country are then instructed to download the final proxy list for each polling station and deliver them, along with the paper ballot books, to the polling stations on the morning of Election Day. The completion of these processes late on the day before the polls places undue pressure on the electoral authorities at a critical time and provides opportunities for errors and the potential disenfranchisement of voters.

Also, while the system of proxies plays an important role in safeguarding the franchise of those who are unable to access the ballot in person, due to their official duties on Election Day, it is not a solution for those voters who may wish to have the opportunity to cast their ballots directly.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Establishing a deadline for the registration of proxy voters prior to Election Day, as existed previously, to allow sufficient time for electoral authorities to properly compile a final Proxy Register.
- Considering a mechanism for advance voting by persons who are required to work on Election Day, but who may wish to exercise their own franchise.

III. Electoral Technology

Publication of the Hourly Voter Turnout

The Elections and Boundaries Department has made a significant technological effort to track and monitor the election process. For the 2025 election, the EBD provided hourly updates on voter turnout through its website. This tracking was made possible using an electoral technology tool that consisted of a central computerized tracking center to which hourly voter turnout rates were transmitted by telephone from the various polling stations around the country. Its design consisted of a computer system at the national level to collect, process, and display turnout totals, percentages, and graphs broken down nationally, and by district, division, and polling station, in a map-based graphical user interface.

For these elections, the data was managed by a group of 48 staffers in the EBD central office in Belmopan who entered the voter turnout information received by phone from the presiding officers. The same app was used to receive and publish division-level election results and images of the Count 1 form from the returning officers, who were equipped with a Microsoft Surface Pro Tablet and a portable cellular internet device. The EBD did not however consider this information official until the signed paperwork arrived from the divisions at their central office in Belmopan.

The Mission recommends:

- That, having made a significant effort to implement an efficient electoral information system to track the hourly count for voter turnout, the EBD also uses this infrastructure to fully implement a preliminary results system, including the preliminary winning candidate in every

division and the preliminary number of seats, in order to provide citizens with an official source of preliminary election results, currently first known through the media.

Publication of Official Results

For the consolidation and publication of election results and statistics, the EBD utilizes a web-based dashboard, which displays information such as the number of registered voters, the ballots cast in the elections, and different categories of available election information nationally, by district, by division, by polling area and by candidate. The dashboard includes a well-designed and intuitive graphical interface, with a search feature, which allows viewers to filter and collect different types of data on the electoral process. The OAS/EOM noted that while the dashboard includes a variety of images maps, charts and even the photos of candidates, it does not include images of documents generated during the electoral process, such as the Statements of Poll.

The Mission therefore recommends:

- That the EBD publish in the results dashboard, images of the Statements of Poll and other downloadable files with results, which can add transparency and reliability of the official results, thus offering the public the opportunity to perform additional analyses on the results of the election.

IV. Electoral Justice

The ROPA provides that all election petitions are to be tried by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court or another judge of that court by nomination of the Chief Justice. The ROPA states that an election petition “shall be tried as expeditiously as possible,” and within two months after the presentation of the petition, if possible.⁷ The decisions of the Election Judge can be appealed to the Court of Appeal only on questions of law and must be filed within one month of the decision; a security deposit of \$1200 is required. Such appeals shall “as far as practicable be given priority over other business of that Court”⁸ and the decision of the Court of Appeal “shall be final and conclusive.”⁹

⁷ Representation of the People Act, Article 52(2)

⁸ Representation of the People Act, Article 55(4)

⁹ Representation of the People Act, Article 57(5)

For the 2025 General Election in Belize, several election-related cases had either already been adjudicated or remained before the court on Election Day.

Re-districting

Two of the cases, which were dealt with prior to the election, sought the adjustment of electoral division boundaries (re-districting) prior to the election. In the first instance, in November 2024, the Belize PEACE Movement (BPM) filed Claim 730 (*Roody Lewinsky Wave, et al v. The Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Attorney General of Belize*) alleging electoral malapportionment. This case followed an unsuccessful effort to review boundaries after the 2020 election. In this regard, Section 90 of the Constitution establishes that Belize's electoral divisions "shall have as nearly as may be an equal number of persons eligible to vote."¹⁰ The BPM argued that if the election took place without addressing significant population deviations in the electoral divisions the EBC would be in violation of the Constitution and requested the Court's ruling on whether or not Schedule I of the ROPA, which defines the boundaries of electoral divisions, was constitutional.¹¹ The court did not rule on this matter in advance of the election, on the basis that the BPM had only asked the court to rule on a matter of law, and had failed to argue that the case should be heard urgently.

The second case, *Jeremy Enriquez v The Attorney General of Belize and The Elections and Boundaries Commission*, which sought to halt the election until new electoral districts could be drawn, was also unsuccessful. The Supreme Court dismissed the application for interim relief "on the grounds that it is inadequately pleaded and is not supported by any admissible and coherent evidence."¹² Mr. Enriquez appealed the decision to the Court of Appeal, and, following a March 3 case management order in that court, filed a special leave application with the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to appeal the case management order. The CCJ denied the special leave application on March 7, on the basis that the application had no merit and therefore had no real prospect of success.¹³

¹⁰ Section 90(1) of the Constitution states that "The Elections and Boundaries Commission shall, after considering the distribution of the population throughout Belize, make proposals from time to time for dividing Belize into electoral divisions in such a way that- (a) each electoral division shall have as nearly as may be an equal number of persons eligible to vote"

¹¹ See, e.g., <https://edition.channel5belize.com/bpm-provides-update-on-unconstitutional-voters-list/>

¹² *Jeremy Enriquez v The Attorney General of Belize and The Elections and Boundaries Commission* <https://www.belizejudiciary.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/High-Court-Claim-67-of-2025-Jeremy-Enriquez-et-al-vs-Attorney-General-of-Belize.pdf>

¹³ Caribbean Court of Justice, "Special Leave denied in Belizean Appeal of Case Management Order", <https://ccj.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Media-Release-Jeremy-Enriquez-v-AG.pdf>

In its conversations with a range of stakeholders the Mission noted a consensus across government, political parties, and in civil society that redistricting was urgent, as recommended by OAS Missions in 2012 and 2015. The Mission also noted in this regard, that the highly technical nature of the subject, and the costs associated with retaining experienced counsel to plead such cases before the court, presented a high bar for ordinary citizens to clear, in their efforts to promote and ensure timely redistricting. While accessing examples of past court rulings could be instructive to support the development of a successful case, it was also difficult to find relevant court rulings online.

The Mission was pleased to note, in its meeting with the Honourable Prime Minister, his commitment to address the redrawing of boundaries early in his next term, should he be successful at the polls.

Representation of Political Parties on the Ballot

Two additional matters, which concerned the leadership and representation of the United Democratic Party (UDP) on the ballot, remained before the court as of Election Day. As noted earlier in this report, internal disagreement regarding the leadership of the UDP had resulted in the presentation of two opposing candidate slates by the party for the general election, along with one unaffiliated UDP candidate, for a total of 41 candidates. In one case, the heads of the two UDP factions applied to the court for a determination on who was the legitimate political leader of the UDP. Despite the general election being set for March 12, the case was set to be heard on March 31. In the second, related, case, one faction of the UDP sought judicial review of the EBC's decision to allow the use of the traditional UDP red to represent candidates of both UDP factions on the ballot. That case had also not been decided at the time of the election. Some stakeholders expressed their concern regarding the inability of the court to rule on an urgent election matter prior to the polls.

Transfers of Voters

In the final case, the validity of the transfer of 124 electors to the Cayo North division was challenged in court in advance of the election. Following the annual transfer period during which voters could indicate their move from one division to another, one party challenged the validity of the transfer of voters to Cayo North. The magistrate judge in the receiving district conducted

an investigation of the transfers and ordered 101 voters struck from the list. That decision was appealed to the Supreme Court, which did not rule on the issue in advance of the election. Therefore, those voters remained on the Cayo North list. Several stakeholders expressed concern about this matter specifically, as well as the general issue that the Voters List might not be entirely accurate as a result. Stakeholders also expressed frustration that the court did not rule on this issue in advance of the election.

To resolve election-related disputes in a timely matter and guarantee electoral justice for the people of Belize, the Mission recommends:

- As advised by the OAS Missions in 2012 and 2015, urgently advancing the redrawing of electoral boundaries following the 2025 election, so that the next election can be conducted with electoral districts that better reflect the distribution of voters across Belize, thus ensuring that each vote has equal weight in the House of Representatives.
- Prioritizing the establishment of a comprehensive, regularly updated, and easily searchable database of court documents on the judiciary's website to facilitate better access to court rulings and filings.
- Exploring opportunities, through regulation or the ongoing Constitutional reform effort or otherwise, to tighten timelines with respect to the adjudication of election-related cases. This could include the development of a more formal administrative complaints process, through an Election Ombudsman or similar, so that election-related complaints can be first addressed through a regulated administrative process, thus reducing the number of election-related disputes that must be resolved through the Supreme Court.

V. Political Finance

Campaign Finance Rules

There are currently no regulations governing election campaign financing in Belize. There are no limits on campaign financing, no regulations prohibiting illicit, anonymous, or foreign donations, no reporting requirements or submission timelines, and no oversight mechanisms for verifying and investigating campaign disclosures and expenses.

The Mission noted that Section 64(1)(a) of Part VII (Miscellaneous) of the Representation of the People Act (ROPA)¹⁴ states that the Minister may create regulations to implement the provisions of the Act, including the reporting of election-related expenses. Paragraph (c) of this section allows the Minister to set a cap on election expenses, while paragraph (e) provides that the Minister may require the submission of expense returns and prescribe the format for reporting and verifying disclosures. In its discussions with stakeholders however, the Mission was informed that there were no mandatory obligations regarding election campaign financing. Without supporting regulations, political parties and candidates are not legally bound to adhere to these provisions.

The absence of laws regulating and monitoring campaign contributions means stakeholders have no legal obligation to report funding sources or amounts. The lack of oversight also opens the way for the entry of "dark" money into elections and the erosion of transparency in the electoral process.

In its engagement with stakeholders in Belize, the Mission noted agreement across the political spectrum and within civil society, that a clear and enforceable legislative framework for campaign financing is essential. The Mission was informed that draft proposals on regulating campaign finance have been presented to the government, but have not been successfully adopted to date. Stakeholders expressed concern regarding the public's limited awareness of campaign spending, the sources of funding, and the potential for undue influence in the electoral process.

To ensure greater transparency, integrity, and public trust in the democratic system, the Mission recommends:

- Establishing clear, prescriptive campaign finance legislation, which is supported by the necessary regulations.
- Implementing regulations that define campaign expenditure limits during election periods.
- Establishing contribution limits for individual donors to political parties or candidates within a reporting period.

¹⁴ Representation of the People Act

- Creating independent oversight bodies to monitor and report compliance with campaign financing regulations, and endowing them with the authority to investigate and audit financial disclosures.

The Mission was pleased to note, in its engagement with the Honourable Prime Minister, his openness to exploring options for campaign finance legislation that would be relevant and implementable in the Belize political and social context. The Mission is pleased to share that the OAS “Draft Model Law on the Registration and Regulation of Political Parties”,¹⁵ might provide a useful point of departure in this respect.

Registration of Political Parties

In addition to the lack of regulation for campaign financing, Belize has no legislation requiring the registration of political parties. Without legal recognition, political parties are not obligated to report campaign funding or disclose their financial activities. Furthermore, there are no provisions for public funding of candidates or political parties, and parties are not required to be registered in order to participate in elections. Consequently, political parties and candidates may not be legally accountable for complying with financial regulations.

As noted earlier in this report, internal conflicts within the opposition UDP presented significant challenges for that party in the pre-electoral period and had a public and discernible impact on that party’s participation in the 2025 general election. The OAS “Electoral Good Practices Guide for Strengthening Electoral Processes” recognizes that the political party/organization system is a core feature of representative democracy, in that it guarantees plurality and equal competition in the electoral contest, facilitates the exercise of citizens’ political rights, and allows for the expression of a range of views. The Guide also notes that a robust political party system strengthens democracy, while a society’s trust in its political system boosts the legitimacy of the leaders elected and the status of democratic governance.¹⁶ Accordingly, the existence of rules to govern political parties and specify the prerequisites needed for their legal recognition, can

¹⁵ OAS, “Model Law on the Registration and regulation of Political Parties”, <http://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/DRAFT-MODEL-LAW-ON-THE-REGISTRATION-AND-REGULATION-OF-POLITICAL-PARTIES.pdf>

¹⁶ OAS, “Electoral Good Practices Guide for Strengthening Electoral Processes”, https://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/FV_OEA_good_practices_eng_WEB.pdf

provide certainty to both their members and voters and guarantee political rights are upheld within the party itself.¹⁷

The Mission therefore recommends:

- Introducing clear rules for the registration and regulation of political parties, including the requirement that they register and submit to reporting requirements in order to participate in elections.
- Requiring registered political parties to submit annual declarations of continued existence, along with audited financial statements, to maintain their registration status.

The OAS Draft Model Law on the Registration and Regulation of Political Parties, would also be a useful point of departure in this regard.

VI. Political Participation of Women

Although women comprise approximately 49.5% of Belize's population¹⁸ and 51.29% of the Voters' List,¹⁹ they accounted for only 11 out of 90 candidates (12%) in the 2025 elections. This represents a decline compared to the 2020 electoral process, where 15% of candidates were women.

During its meetings with various stakeholders, the OAS Mission heard repeated concerns about the political culture in Belize, which continues to pose significant challenges for women's participation in politics. Interlocutors highlighted the difficulties women face in accessing leadership positions within political parties, which remain largely male-dominated. They also noted that internal party processes are often unfair and create barriers for women seeking to secure nominations. Furthermore, women who do enter the political arena frequently face threats and intimidation, further discouraging their participation.

OAS Missions in 2012 and 2015 had recommended that concerted efforts be made by stakeholders, including political parties and government authorities, to promote the participation

¹⁷ Electoral Good Practices Guide for Strengthening Electoral Processes.

¹⁸ World Bank Gender Data Portal, <https://liveprod.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sp-pop-totl-fe-zs?view=bar>

¹⁹ Elections and Boundaries Department, <https://elections.gov.bz/>

of women in the electoral contest. To foster genuine equal representation for women in decision-making positions over the long term, the OAS Mission recommends:

- Considering the implementation of positive measures within political parties, such as an effective gender quota, to encourage gender parity and increase the number of female candidates across all parties.
- Given the lack of campaign finance regulations in Belize, providing targeted financial support to promote the political participation of women. Resources should be allocated to training and mentorship programs, as well as to campaign support for female candidates, ensuring they have the necessary tools to compete on a more level playing field.
- Ensuring that the Elections and Boundaries Department expeditiously publishes sex-disaggregated data on candidates and poll workers, thus facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the exercise of political rights in the electoral process.

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A detailed report, which expands on the Mission's observations and recommendations, will be presented to the OAS Permanent Council in Washington, D.C. and shared with all stakeholders in Belize.

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