



Antigua and Barbuda General Elections

30 April 2026



The Commonwealth

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The Commonwealth

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Map of Antigua and Barbuda



Contents

Map of Antigua and Barbuda	iii
Letter of Transmittal	vii
Acronyms and abbreviations	xi
Executive Summary	xiii
1. Introduction	1
1.1 International election observation methodology	1
1.2 The <i>Revised Commonwealth Guidelines</i> : key provisions	1
1.3 The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups	1
1.4 Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the Antigua and Barbuda general elections	2
1.5 Terms of reference	3
1.6 Activities	3
2. Political Background	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Economic environment	5
2.3 Contemporary political context	5
2.4 Current environment	8
2.5 Key campaign issues for the 2026 election	8
2.6 Contesting parties and candidates	11
2.7 Results of elections (post-1981 independence to 2023)	12
3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration	13
4. Participation and Inclusion	25
4.1 Women	25
4.2 Civil society	27
4.3 Youth	28
4.4 Persons with disabilities	30
4.5 Barbudan people and Indigenous inclusion	32
4.6 Conclusion	32

5. The Campaign and the Media	33
5.1 The campaign	33
5.2 The media	38
6. Voting, Counting and Results Transmission	42
6.1 Opening of the poll	42
6.2 The voting process	43
Annex I. Composition and Biographies of the COG	48
Annex II. Arrival Statement	50
Annex III. Deployment Plan	52
Annex IV. Interim Statement	53
Annex V. Antigua and Barbuda Recommendations Tracker	57

Letter of Transmittal

Antigua and Barbuda General Elections Commonwealth Observer Group

30 April 2026

5 May 2026

Dear Secretary-General,

As Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group (the Group) for the 2026 Antigua and Barbuda General Elections, held on 30 April 2026, I am pleased to submit our Final Report.

This report is informed by extensive consultations with national stakeholders and by the Group's observation of all aspects of the electoral process during the period of our deployment.

On behalf of the Group, I wish to commend the people of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), polling staff, political parties, and security personnel for their respective roles in contributing to the peaceful and orderly conduct of the elections.

The Group applauds the professionalism and dedication of polling officials, who carried out the pre-poll, voting, and counting procedures in accordance with the prescribed guidelines. We also commend the deployment of information clerks outside polling stations, as well as the provision of detailed information, which included; polling station locations, the number of registered voters per polling station, and disaggregated data by age and gender. These measures contributed to a smooth and transparent electoral process.

Our overall assessment is that the electoral process was peaceful and transparent, and that the electoral framework largely provided an adequate basis for the conduct of a democratic election. We also found that the broader electoral environment allowed the freedoms of association, assembly, expression, and movement to be largely respected.

However, the Group noted concerns relating to transparency and accountability in campaign finance, as well as the need to strengthen the regulatory framework in this area. This issue has also been highlighted by previous Commonwealth

Observer Groups. We urge relevant stakeholders to consider measures to enhance the regulation and transparency of campaign financing, in line with international best practice, in order to strengthen public confidence in the electoral process.

The Group also noted instances of a polarised media environment, compounded by personal attacks exchanged between political parties and candidates on radio stations and across social media platforms. We encourage adherence to editorial standards and the development of clearer guidelines for respectful political communication, particularly during campaign periods.

On Election Day, the Group observed that women formed the majority of polling officials, serving as presiding officers, poll clerks, and information officers. Their professionalism contributed to the smooth conduct of the poll, yet this strong administrative role contrasts with their continued underrepresentation in elective office. The Group therefore recommends the development of a national gender policy and the adoption of internal party or legislated gender quotas to support women's meaningful participation at all levels of government and society.

The Group also noted the active participation of young people as polling staff and their growing engagement through social media, despite continued underrepresentation in formal political leadership. This points to a high level of civic awareness that has not yet translated into meaningful political participation. The Group recommends that government and political parties engage youth groups to further encourage and strengthen their interest in electoral participation.

Persons with disabilities, meanwhile, continue to face structural barriers, with some polling stations remaining inaccessible despite existing legal protections. The Group recommends that ABEC collect disability-related data during voter registration to support early accessibility planning and the deployment of all appropriate materials. These issues are discussed in detail in our report.

In accordance with our mandate, I hereby submit our detailed findings and recommendations in the

attached report. We appreciate the opportunity afforded us to observe this election and trust that our conclusions and recommendations will be received in the constructive spirit in which they are intended. We hope that this report and its recommendations will contribute to the continued consolidation of democracy in Antigua and Barbuda and to the broader family of the Commonwealth.

A square image containing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey background. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'P. Venson'.

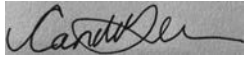
Hon. Pelonomi Venson

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Botswana

Chairperson of the Commonwealth

Observer Group

Observers' Signatures



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ABAPD	Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities
ABS	Antigua Broadcasting Service
ABEC	Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission
ABLP	Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party
AI	artificial intelligence
BPM	Barbuda People's Movement
CBC	Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CSME	Caribbean Single Market and Economy
CBI	citizenship by investment
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	civil society organisation
DNA	Democratic National Alliance
DGA	Department of Gender Affairs
FFEL	Free and Fair Election League
GDP	gross domestic product
FAQ	frequently asked questions
FPTP	first-past-the-post
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ID	Identification
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JCPC	Judicial Committee of the Privy Council
JLSC	Judicial and Legal Services Commission

MP	member of parliament
NYCAB	National Youth Council of Antigua and Barbuda
OMG	Observer Media Group
OAS	Organization of American States
PWDs	persons with disabilities
PSAs	public service announcements
ROPA	Representation of the People Act
SAR	state administrative resources
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	UN Convention Against Corruption
UPP	United Progressive Party
US	United States
VAT	value-added tax

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group ('the Group') for the 30 April 2026 Antigua and Barbuda general elections, following an invitation from the government. The Group, led by Hon. Pelonomi Venson, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Botswana, comprised four eminent persons with expertise in politics, elections, media and civil society. During its mission, the Group engaged a broad range of stakeholders, including the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, political parties, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), the police, the media, civil society, and the Commonwealth diplomatic representative.

The Group found that the elections were conducted in a peaceful, orderly and transparent manner. Polling procedures were generally followed, polling staff performed their duties professionally, and political parties, security personnel, the media and the electorate contributed to the overall conduct of the process.

The Group observed final campaign activities and deployed members across all 17 constituencies on election day.

The campaigns were energetic and highly visible, marked by rallies, motorcades, community outreach, media engagement and active political mobilisation. Fundamental freedoms, including those of expression, assembly and association, were broadly respected, although the Group noted instances of personal attacks and inflammatory commentary, particularly on social media.

The 2026 general elections took place under a compressed timetable following the dissolution of Parliament on 1 April 2026 and the subsequent announcement of elections on 7 April 2026. This expedited process tested electoral institutions and required accelerated adjustments to voter registration, transfers, verification, claims and objections. While ABEC is commended for its voter education efforts, particularly during the Expired Voter's ID [identification] Card Replacement Programme, the shortened timeframe raised concerns about whether all eligible voters had sufficient opportunity to confirm their registration status.

The Group noted that Antigua and Barbuda's legal and regulatory framework broadly provides an adequate basis for democratic elections. However, several areas require reform. These include strengthening the independence of the Electoral Commission, reviewing constituency boundaries to address disparities in registered voter numbers, introducing clearer timelines for election petitions, and improving the regulation, transparency and enforcement of campaign finance rules.

Participation and inclusion remain critical areas for attention. Women played a central role in election administration, forming the majority of polling staff, including as presiding officers, yet their representation as candidates declined from 19.6 per cent in 2023 to 13.5 per cent in 2026.

Antigua and Barbuda has a youthful demographic. Youth were visible in polling activities, particularly as poll clerks and information officers, but remained underrepresented in formal political leadership roles. Their role as administrators reflects a strong level of civic consciousness, which has yet to translate into meaningful inclusion in political processes.

Persons with disabilities continued to face significant structural barriers, with many polling stations remaining physically inaccessible.

In view of the gaps in the meaningful participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities, the Group recommended targeted reforms. These include a national gender policy, internal or legislated party quotas, stronger youth engagement, and the collection of data on disability during voter registration to enable the early mapping of polling stations and ensure that specialised assistive materials are deployed where they are most needed.

The media environment was active and pluralistic, with radio, television, online platforms and social media playing important roles in informing voters. However, concerns were raised about political polarisation, editorial independence, alleged bias in state-owned media and the absence of a codified election-specific

media code of conduct. The Group also noted the absence of printed newspapers, which may limit access to information for older voters and citizens who are less active online.

The Group noted the declining voter turnout, which fell from 76.51 per cent in 2018 to 70.34 per cent in 2023 and 62.41 per cent in 2026, suggesting a need for deeper analysis of voter engagement and public confidence.

Overall, the Group commended the people of Antigua and Barbuda, ABEC, the police and other institutions for the peaceful and transparent conduct of the 2026 general elections. At the same time, the Group emphasised that continued democratic consolidation will require reforms to strengthen electoral independence, campaign finance oversight, constituency delimitation, dispute resolution, inclusive participation, media fairness and public confidence in the electoral process.

This report sets out a set of recommendations for consideration by key stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda. They are offered in a constructive spirit, with the aim of deepening democracy and further strengthening the country's institutions and electoral processes.

Recommendations

No	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
Chapter 3: Legal Framework and Electoral Administration			
1	To uphold the credibility of the democratic process, protect electoral integrity, maintain trust in the judicial process and ensure access to justice, it is recommended that all stages of election petitions be concluded in a timely and equitable manner.	ABEC, judiciary	Legal/Regulatory
2	The Group recommends that, in line with best practice, the Constitution be amended to establish the Electoral Commission, including its composition and functions. Statutory powers should then be provided to enable the Commission to fulfil its mandate.	Parliament	Legal/Regulatory
3	The issue of constituency delimitation remains a matter of concern to stakeholders. The Group therefore reiterates the recommendation of the 2023 Commonwealth Observer Group that the review of constituency boundaries be completed as a matter of urgency.	Government	Political/Policy Administrative/ Technical Legal/Regulatory
4	The COG recommends that ABEC considers expanding the types of identification that may be used for voting to include government-issued IDs. In addition to the Voter ID, this would complement the use of picture lists on polling day.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical Legal/Regulatory
5	The Group reiterates the recommendation of the 2023 Commonwealth Observer Group that ABEC expeditiously complete its report to Parliament on legislation to govern political finance, including campaign finance. Such legislation should identify the sources and use of funds, limit contributions from donors, and regulate expenditure by candidates and political parties.	ABEC, Parliament	Legal/Regulatory
6	The COG strongly encourages ABEC to engage continuously with all stakeholders, including civil society, throughout the electoral cycle and to develop programmes that enhance civic and voter education.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical
Chapter 4: Participation and Inclusion			
7	The Group recommends that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda should prioritise the development and implementation of a national gender policy to ensure meaningful participation of women at all levels of government and society.	Government	Policy/Political
8	The Group recommends that political parties adopt internal party quotas or legislated gender quotas to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in elective office.	Political parties	Policy/Political

(Continued)

No	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
9	The Group recommends that ABEC strengthen its engagement with civil society groups to facilitate continuous voter education and awareness raising.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical
10	The Group recommends ABEC to consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of civil society organisations in electoral processes, including in the implementation of civic and voter education programmes.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical
11	The Group recommends that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and ABEC proactively engage with a broad cross-section of CSOs working across democracy, human rights, good governance and civic engagement to ensure their concerns are addressed in the administration of elections.	ABEC, Government, CSOs	Policy/Administrative/Technical
12	The Group recommends ABEC engages young people in the development of targeted voter information materials for future cycles, ensuring that messaging is 'evidence-based' and relevant to a digital-native generation.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical
13	The Group recommends that the government and political parties proactively engage with youth groups, including youth councils, in Antigua and Barbuda to build interest in politics and electoral participation among young people.	Government, political parties	Political/Policy
14	The Group recommends that political parties establish youth engagement mechanisms with genuine policy-making power to encourage young Antiguan and Barbudans to transition from organisers and field workers to candidates.	Political parties	Political/Policy
15	The Group recommends that ABEC should urgently introduce tactile ballot templates and stencils to empower visually impaired voters to exercise their franchise independently and with full confidentiality.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical
16	The Group recommends that ABEC collects data on disability during the registration process to enable the early mapping of polling stations and ensure that specialised assistive materials are deployed where they are most needed.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical
17	The Group recommends accessibility audits of all polling stations in advance of election day, prioritising ground-floor venues and the installation of temporary ramps where necessary.	ABEC	Policy/Administrative/Technical

(Continued)

No	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
Chapter 5: The Campaign and the Media			
18	Campaign finance reform: The Group recommends establishment of a robust political finance transparency system, including the introduction of legislation establishing spending ceilings, mandatory disclosure of donors and regulation of digital advertising, in discussion with CSOs and other stakeholders. A specialised regulatory unit within the ABEC could be empowered to enforce these rules.	ABEC, Parliament, political parties	Legal/Regulatory/Political
19	Codification of caretaker conventions: The Group recommends formal adoption of rules prohibiting large-scale public grants or promotions once a writ of elections is issued. Strict non-partisanship must be enforced regarding the use of state-owned vehicles, personnel and facilities for campaign activities.	Government, ABEC, Parliament	Legal/Regulatory/Political
20	Constituency boundary delineation: The Group recommends a data-driven redistribution of seats based on the 2022–2025 Census as a starting point, is essential to ensure equal suffrage. The government should appoint and empower the Boundaries Commission to conduct the constituency delimitation without political influence, as a matter of urgency.	Government, Boundaries Commission	Administrative/Technical
21	As recommended by the COG in 2023, the incorporation of ABS as a state-owned entity with an independent board of directors governing its policies, operations and programming could help mitigate some of the challenges regarding accessibility, fairness and bias.	Government, ABS	Policy/Political/Regulatory
22	The Group recommends that consideration be given to reviving the media association, as this could provide a useful platform for co-ordination, professional development and the reinforcement of ethical standards across the sector.	Media	Regulatory
23	There is a need to depoliticise the media landscape. It must be free, fair and inclusive. There is an urgent requirement to strengthen the regulatory framework in this regard.	Parliament, media	Legal/Regulatory
24	As recommended by the 2018 and 2023 COGs in their reports, an independent and adequately funded media council or monitoring body should be established to provide oversight and enforcement of Section 36(1) of the ROPA (Amendment) 2001 and Section 62(3) of the ROPA (Amendment) 2002.	Parliament, Government, media	Legal/Regulatory/Policy

(Continued)

No	Recommendation	Targeted stakeholder(s)	Type of recommendation
25	ABS and other media are encouraged to continue efforts to ensure balanced coverage and fair access for all political parties to strengthen editorial independence and public trust.	ABS, other media	Regulatory/Policy/ Administrative
26	ABEC should implement a structured system to monitor, flag and quickly respond to misinformation across platforms, supported by timely public clarification campaigns.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical
Chapter 6: Voting, Counting and Results Management			
27	The Group recommends that ABEC should consider engaging assistant returning officers to assist with the count. This will strengthen transparency and ensure that persons conducting the count are legally authorised to do so.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical
28	The Group recommends that further training be given to ensure that all polling day procedures are followed.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical
29	The Group recommends that ABEC should establish mechanisms to count at the polling stations to improve the integrity of the elections.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical/Policy
30	The Group recommends that ABEC should consider reviewing polling hours as most polling stations had fewer than 500 registered voters and queues were not observed for the most part during the day. This could allow for all registered voters to cast their ballots while reducing the strain on poll workers and allow for conclusion of results earlier.	ABEC	Administrative/ Technical

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a summary of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) methodology. It provides essential background on the context in which COGs operate and concludes with an overview of how this methodology was applied to the Antigua and Barbuda 2026 General Elections.

1.1 International election observation methodology

Since 1980, the Commonwealth has observed more than 200 elections in 41 countries. International election observation serves several purposes, including the following:

- Promoting the openness and transparency of the electoral process.
- Deterring improper practices and attempts at fraud.
- Enhancing public confidence in the process, thereby contributing to acceptance of election results.
- Diffusing political tensions through diplomacy and mediation.
- Strengthening international standards on electoral best practices.

1.2 The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines: key provisions

The Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries ('the Revised Guidelines') were agreed by Heads of Government at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London, United Kingdom. The key provisions include the following:

1. *COGs are independent, including of the Secretariat*
'Members of a COG are invited by the Secretary-General in their personal capacity as an eminent Commonwealth citizen, not as a representative of any member country, government or political group.'
2. *Observers, not monitors*
Unlike some citizen observer groups (monitors), which are permitted to intervene or offer assistance to electoral officials in a limited manner, Commonwealth observers – as with all international observers – cannot and do not interfere in any way with any aspect of the electoral process.
3. *Taking forward COG recommendations*
The Revised Guidelines encourage member countries to establish 'domestic mechanisms', such as multistakeholder meetings or committees, to review and take forward recommendations made by a COG.
4. *Whole-of-election-cycle approach*
Election observation is ideally not a stand-alone activity. Where possible, the Secretariat seeks to support stakeholders in the implementation of these recommendations through a range of methods, including the production of expert publications, the training of election management body staff and the facilitation of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and crucially, through bespoke technical assistance to national stakeholders upon the submission of a formal request.

1.3 The strength of Commonwealth Observer Groups

While all international election observer missions adhere to the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, each organisation's methodology has slight variances that reflect its unique strengths. The strength and value of Commonwealth observer missions lie in three key characteristics, as follows:

1. *Eminent observers*
While COGs are smaller in size than some other international observer missions, they comprise eminent persons from across the Commonwealth in their respective fields of expertise, such as senior

politicians; electoral commissioners; election experts; diplomats; and human rights, legal and media experts. The biographies of all observers can be found in Annex I.

2. *Diversity and peer-to-peer learning*
COGs reflect the geographical diversity of the Commonwealth itself, with observers selected from each of the world's continents. This inculcates a genuine spirit of peer-to-peer learning on election administration and democratic reform.
3. *Political mediation through the Chair's Good Offices*
COGs are normally chaired by a former Head of State or senior diplomat, invited based on careful consideration of several factors that ensure they are a 'good fit' for the election in hand. The respect afforded to such high-profile leaders allows COG chairs to enter into a 'Good Offices' role in instances of post-election political disputes and non-acceptance of election results. Such Good Offices roles have played a vital part in ensuring peaceful transitions between governments on many occasions.

More information on the role and mandate of observers can be found in the 2019 *Commonwealth Handbook on Election Observation*. For more information on the Commonwealth's efforts to promote democracy, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat website¹.

1.4 Deployment of a Commonwealth Observer Group to the Antigua and Barbuda general elections

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey, constituted a COG (or 'the Group') for the Antigua and Barbuda general elections, following an invitation from the government.

The Group comprised four eminent persons from across the Commonwealth, led by Hon. Pelonomi Venson, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Botswana. It included experts drawn from political, electoral, media and civil society backgrounds. The Group was supported by a three-person staff team from the Commonwealth Secretariat, led by Lindiwe Maleleka, Political Adviser in the Electoral Support Section. A full list of members can be found in Annex I.

Figure 1.1 Members of the Commonwealth Observer Group with Commonwealth Secretariat staff



Front row (from left to right): Hon. Pelonomi Venson (Botswana, COG Chairperson), Lindiwe Maleleka (Staff team leader)

Back row (from left to right): Ian-Michael Anthony (Dominica), Candia Dames (Bahamas), Aiman Rasheed (Maldives), Mukhtar Adesunkanmi (Commonwealth Secretariat staff)

¹ <https://thecommonwealth.org/>

1.5 Terms of reference

The mandate and agreed terms of reference for the Group were as follows:

- *The Group is established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the invitation of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.*
- *The Group is to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole.*
- *The Group will determine in its own judgement whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which the country has committed itself, with reference to national election-related legislation and relevant regional, Commonwealth and other international commitments.*
- *The Group is to act impartially and independently. It has no executive role; its function is not to supervise but to observe the process as a whole and to form a judgement accordingly. It is also free to propose to the authorities concerned such action on institutional, procedural and other matters as may assist the holding of such elections.*
- *The Group is to submit its report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who will forward it to the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, and leaders of political parties, and thereafter to all Commonwealth governments.*

1.6 Activities

The Group was in Antigua and Barbuda from 25 April to 6 May 2026. Its arrival statement was issued on 26 April 2026 (Annex II).²

The Group met with a range of stakeholders, including the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, leaders of political parties, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, the police, the media, civil society, and the Commonwealth diplomatic mission in St John's.

The Commonwealth Observer Group observed final campaign activities across Antigua and Barbuda, including rallies and political events in various constituencies.

Members of the Group were deployed to all 17 constituencies on 29 April 2026 (Annex III). On deployment, members received further briefings from election officials, political parties, civil society organisations and the police.

On 1 May 2026, the COG Chairperson delivered an Interim Statement (Annex IV),³ highlighting the Group's preliminary findings and observations. The Chairperson noted that the pre-election environment was characterised by sustained and highly visible campaigning across constituencies, with the political parties maintaining active outreach through rallies, community meetings and media engagement. She also noted that while stakeholders highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in political financing, there remained limited formal regulation in this area.

The Chairperson commended the people of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, polling staff, political parties, security personnel, and the media for their respective roles in contributing to the overall conduct of the elections.

² The Commonwealth (2026). 'Commonwealth Observer Group commences work in Antigua and Barbuda for 2026 General Elections', 27 April, <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-observer-group-commences-work-antigua-and-barbuda-2026-elections>

³ The Commonwealth (2026). 'Antigua and Barbuda polls transparent, media polarisation concerns emerge, says Commonwealth observers', <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/antigua-and-barbuda-polls-transparent-media-polarisation-concerns-emerge-says-commonwealth>

The Group's final report was completed in St John's before the Group's departure on 6 May 2026, for transmission to the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Figure 1.2 COG paid a courtesy call on the Governor General



2. Political Background

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the political context prior to the 2026 general elections in Antigua and Barbuda. This includes, inter alia, the political and economic history, results and analysis of prior elections, and the main campaign issues for the 2026 General Elections.

Historical background

Since independence, Antigua and Barbuda has transitioned from a sugar-based economy (which collapsed in the 1970s) to one dominated by tourism and offshore services. Recent history has been shaped by democratic consolidation, seeking to establish Antigua and Barbuda as the go-to conference and event destination, an increasing emphasis on citizenship-by-investment programmes, and climate resilience strategies.

Antigua and Barbuda will host CHOGM in November 2026, for the first time.

2.2 Economic environment

Antigua and Barbuda is a high-income, tourism-dependent small island developing state (SIDS) with a service-driven economy. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth has remained moderate but stable, estimated at around 2.5–3.0 per cent in 2025, following a strong post-pandemic rebound in 2024. Output is now above pre-pandemic levels, supported primarily by tourism, construction and citizenship-by-investment inflows. GDP per capita is relatively high for the Caribbean at over US\$22,000.

The fiscal position has improved significantly, with primary surpluses emerging due to stronger tax collection and one-off revenues, contributing to a reduction in public debt from around 100 per cent of GDP in 2020 to around 65–70 per cent in 2025.⁴ However, fiscal sustainability risks remain, particularly due to high gross financing needs and arrears accumulation.

Externally, the economy is highly exposed to global travel demand, with tourism also accounting for most foreign exchange earnings. The current account deficit widened again in 2025 due to increased import demand linked to construction and tourism investment.⁵

Inflation has recently moderated following earlier import-driven price pressures. Overall, the economic environment is characterised by persistent structural vulnerability due to narrow economic diversification and climate risks.

2.3 Contemporary political context

The political landscape in Antigua and Barbuda is currently dominated by two major parties, the incumbent Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP) and the United Progressive Party (UPP), with the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM) maintaining popularity in Barbuda. Key campaign issues are discussed at Section 2.6 below. The issues discussed below have shaped the political context in recent times.

October 2023 by-election

The first by-election held outside of Barbuda since independence was on 24 October 2023 at the St Mary's South constituency following the resignation of a UPP Member of Parliament (MP), Mr Kelvin Simon.

⁴ International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2025), 'Antigua and Barbuda: 2025 Article IV Consultation', www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/cr/2025/english/1atgea2025001-print-pdf.pdf

⁵ IMF (2026) 'Antigua and Barbuda: Staff Concluding Statement of the 2026 Article IV Mission', www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/cr/2025/english/1atgea2025001-print-pdf.pdf

At the time of his victory at the January 2023 general elections, Mr Simon was challenged via a petition on the grounds that he was a guidance counsellor at the Ministry of Education, allegedly contravening the Civil Service Regulations which require three months' notice of resignation prior to contesting elections. Mr Simon subsequently resigned his seat when challenged on this ground. Owing to his resignation, the election petition filed against him was rendered moot.

Mr Simon stood in the by-election, having since resigned his position at the Ministry of Education, and won the seat with 54.23 per cent to his ABLP competitor's 45.37 per cent of the vote.

At the time of parliamentary dissolution on 1 April 2026, the composition of the Antigua and Barbuda House of Representatives was as shown in [Table 2.1](#).

Table 2.1 Composition of Antigua and Barbuda House of Representatives at time of dissolution

Party	ABLP	UPP	BPM	INDEPENDENT.
Seats	10	5	1	1 ⁶

Election of Jamale Pringle for the UPP

Following the defeat of the party at the January 2023 general elections and losing his own constituency, Harold Lovell resigned as Leader of the UPP. Jamale Pringle was appointed Leader of the Opposition and formally chosen as Leader of the UPP following the UPP party conference in April 2024.

At the 2018 general elections, Mr Pringle was the sole UPP MP. Harold Lovell remained party leader at this time, despite losing his own constituency. This prior election victory may have contributed in large part to Mr Pringle's eventual rise to the leadership.

Figure 2.1 COG members met with Mr Jamale Pringle, the leader of UPP



6 Anthony Smith, MP, former UPP MP who resigned the party 15 July 2024.

Assassination of Asot Michael

Former independent MP for St Peter, Mr Asot Michael, was found dead at his home with multiple stab wounds on 5 November 2024. A 26-year-old man was later charged with murder.⁷ Mr Michael had served as an MP since March 2004, and had previously served as Minister of Tourism, Economic Development Investment and Energy from 2014 to 2017 (under the ABLP). In 2018, Mr Michael was Minister of Investment and Trade under the ABLP, a position he resigned following allegations that he demanded money from a British property investor.⁸

Throughout 2021, internal party tensions grew, leading to the ABLP proposing the removal of Mr Michael from executive committee meetings, something he successfully challenged. In March 2022, the ABLP proposed Rawdon Turner as its candidate to run in Mr Michael's constituency; however, he again successfully disputed this procedure, proceeding to the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court to ascertain whether the selection of another candidate (Mr Turner) was in accordance with the ABLP party constitution. At the 2023 general elections, Mr Michael stood as an independent candidate in the St Peter constituency, defeating Mr Turner by a margin of 2,137 votes.

Political crime, especially violent political crime, is extremely rare in Antigua and Barbuda, and the murder of Mr Michael shocked the nation, drawing regional sympathies. Mr Michael was granted an official funeral by PM Browne in December 2024.

At the 14 January 2025 by-election to elect his replacement in Parliament, ABLP candidate Mr Turner defeated a UPP competitor with 74.58 per cent of the vote.

2025 Barbuda Council elections

The Barbuda Council has 11 members, one ex officio member being a MP elected at the general elections, another being a senator (nominated by the Council and appointed by the Governor-General), and the other 9 being elected directly.

For the 26 March 2025 council election, five seats were contested. The BPM won all 5 seats, maintaining its 11/11 majority control of the council.

March 2026 by-election

On 16 March 2026, a by-election was held in the St Philip's North constituency following the resignation of ABLP MP, Sir Robin Yearwood. Sir Robin announced his resignation at an 18 February 2026 special sitting of Parliament to honour his 50 years of service as MP for St Philip's North.

The by-election was contested between Randy Baltimore for the ABLP and Alex Browne for the UPP. Prior to the election, Mr Browne had challenged the eligibility of Mr Baltimore to stand as a candidate. Mr Baltimore was a former civil servant, resigning his post as Principal Inspector of Customs on 20 February 2026. Mr Baltimore was nominated as the ABLP candidate on 25 February. Mr Browne argued that under Section 28(1) of the Civil Service Regulations,⁹ an officer appointed on a permanent contract must give three months' notice of their resignation.¹⁰

ABLP candidate Mr Baltimore won the by-election with 69.42 per cent of the vote.

⁷ AP News (2024), 'Police in Antigua charge a man with murder in the stabbing death of a politician', <https://apnews.com/article/antigua-michael-parliament-stabbing-caribbean-crime-55b8580560f21663f5ef14b13b2de9d3>

⁸ Antigua Observer (2018), 'Asot Resigns from Cabinet', <https://antiguaobserver.com/asot-resigns-from-cabinet/>

⁹ Footnote, Section 28(1).

¹⁰ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Alex Browne Challenges Randy Baltimore's Nomination in St Philip's North By-Election', <https://antiguaneewsroom.com/alex-browne-challenges-randy-baltimores-nomination-in-st-philips-north-by-election/>

2.4 Current environment

Campaign environment

Antigua and Barbuda is generally characterised by regular competitive elections, supporting an overall expectation of a peaceful electoral environment, though political competition remains sharp. Owing to the expedited holding of the 2026 elections (elections were called earlier than expected, as expressed by the stakeholders, following the dissolution of Parliament on 1 April 2026 and the subsequent announcement of elections on 7 April 2026), this election campaign was characterised by early and swift mobilisation from the two leading parties, and a drive to increase voter registration.

The principal contest remained between the governing ABLP and the opposition UPP, while the BPM continued to represent Barbuda-specific policies.

The governing ABLP formally launched its campaign ('Renaissance: A new era of progress and development') on 7 April 2026, ratifying 17 candidates at its National Convention on 12 April.¹¹ The UPP launched its campaign on 12 April 2026 with the campaign slogan: 'Government must work for you!'

In reality, owing to by-elections in October 2023, January 2025 and March 2026, as well as the 2025 Barbuda Council elections, Antigua and Barbuda had been subject to both formal and informal political positioning and local campaigning, contributing to a national discussion taking place from the January 2023 general elections.

The ABLP held what it termed as a 'megacade' – a large motorcade with drivers from across the island on 26 April 2026 in a final show of campaigning for the party ahead of the general elections.

The UPP, on the other hand, on 28 April 2026, held a final rally tagged the 'UPP-rising rally' at Mock Pond, All Saints East and St Luke constituency in Antigua.

More information on the political campaigns is provided in Chapter 5.

2.5 Key campaign issues for the 2026 election

Key campaign issues for the 2026 general elections are outlined below.

Issue 1: Cost of living and taxation

With regards to taxation, the central campaign debate is between fiscal discipline and social relief in an economy heavily reliant on external demand and imports.

Antigua and Barbuda does not levy personal income, capital gains, wealth or inheritance taxes, or taxes on global income. Rather, sales tax in the form of value-added tax (VAT; Antigua and Barbuda Sales Tax), land tax and property taxes form the bulk of personal taxes. In 2024, the standard Antigua and Barbuda sales tax rose from 15 per cent to 17 per cent.

To aid with cost-of-living increases, temporary 0 per cent rates have been applied to electricity and select foodstuffs. As an electoral campaign issue, citizens raised the issue of the tax structure causing inequality, that it benefits wealthy foreign investors while taxing everyday goods for Antiguan is a common argument against government economic policy in this area.

In an attempt to minimise the economic impacts on the population, the 2026 government budget introduced no new taxes, and instead focused on enforcement and collection of existing revenues.

The ABLP argues that maintaining a low-tax environment makes Antigua and Barbuda a more attractive country for investors and supports economic growth. The UPP, meanwhile, argues that low wages, limited diversification and uneven public service delivery are all attributable to an over-reliance on indirect taxation and that the current structure disproportionately favours the wealthy and foreign investors.

¹¹ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Watch: 17 ABLP candidates ratified at National Convention', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/watch-17-ablp-candidates-ratified-at-national-convention/>

At the launch of their campaign, the UPP proposed removing all duties and taxes on personal vehicle imports, 50 per cent off import taxes for commercial vehicles, and the removal of all taxes on vehicles and equipment for agricultural workers.¹²

Issue 2: Public services and citizenship by investment (CBI)

Both the ABLP and UPP have spoken publicly about their desire to increase spending and support for infrastructure, healthcare, education and road networks. Healthcare and education investment pledges are often coupled with a desire to improve digitisation efforts and a greater push to modernise service provision.

Critics have argued especially on the point of transport infrastructure that investment remains focused on urban areas and especially in the surrounds of St John's. The impact of second home ownership in Antigua and Barbuda by foreign investors has also been raised as a concern in the provision of public services, especially considering the tax structure discussed above.

To combat this, the government have introduced a citizenship-by-investment programme to aid public financing for large-scale infrastructure projects. Business investment, real-estate purchases and one-off financial contributions to the National Development Fund are all available routes for CBI. Globally, CBI has become a contentious issue, given the power of certain passports for visa-free travel once obtained. Consequently, critics highlight the CBI initiative could both impact international relations and is only seemingly a short-term economic policy given that the contributions are one-off.

On 7 April 2026, Prime Minister Gaston Browne reassured the public that the surge in road construction across Antigua and Barbuda was not merely election-season posturing, but a long-term infrastructure overhaul backed by a massive financial 'war chest'. He emphasised, 'No one should ever think that the roads will stop after the elections'.¹³

The UPP, during its campaigning, proposed raising the minimum wage for 'non-established' public service workers to EC\$2,700 per month and implementing a 4-day working week. These proposed policies are part of a wider proposal to reform public sector employment.¹⁴ The UPP has also promised removing taxes on water storage equipment for low-income households¹⁵ and promised not to reintroduce personal income taxes.¹⁶ ABLP Prime Minister Gaston Browne publicly described these proposals as 'senseless fiscal irresponsibility and reckless tax giveaways to win an election...the consequences would be catastrophic'.¹⁷

The primary debate among voters concerned the level of taxation compared with service provision and whether they felt they were getting adequate provision. Staffing, equipment provision and waiting times were concerns in healthcare; infrastructure in need of renewal, teacher retention and the adoption of digital services were issues in education; affordable housing stock and rising rents were issues in personal infrastructure; while electricity, water and waste management systems are also aging, with this issue frequently raised during political discussions.

¹² Antigua News Room (2026), 'Watch: Pringle says UPP will remove ALL duties and taxes on personal vehicle imports, if elected', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/watch-pringle-says-upp-will-remove-all-duties-and-taxes-on-personal-vehicle-imports-if-elected/>

¹³ Antigua Observer (2026), 'PM Browne defends "unprecedented" road works, says \$100M reserve will sustain projects post-election', <https://antiguaobserver.com/pm-browne-defends-unprecedented-road-works-says-100m-reserve-will-sustain-projects-post-election/>

¹⁴ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Pringle says UPP will Implement Four-Day Work Week by 2027', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pringle-says-upp-will-implement-four-day-work-week-by-2027/>

¹⁵ Antigua News Room (2026), 'UPP Leader Jamale Pringle Promises Tax-Free Water Tanks, Pumps and Pressure Systems Under Water Relief Programme', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/upp-leader-jamale-pringle-promises-tax-free-water-tanks-pumps-and-pressure-systems-under-water-relief-programme/>

¹⁶ Antigua News Room (2026), 'UPP says it won't re-introduce Personal Income Tax', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/upp-says-it-wont-re-introduce-personal-income-tax/>

¹⁷ Antigua News Room (2026), 'PM Browne Warns of "Catastrophic" Fiscal Crisis Over Pringle's Tax-Free Proposals', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pm-browne-warns-of-catastrophic-fiscal-crisis-over-pringles-tax-free-proposals/>

Campaign financing in Antigua and Barbuda is only lightly regulated, with few effective limits on political donations and weak transparency requirements. While the Representation of the People Act (Cap 379, last amended in 2022) sets nominal spending caps for candidates, these are outdated and poorly enforced, and there is no system of public funding for parties. Campaigns are therefore largely financed through private contributions, often with limited disclosure, and oversight by the Supervisor of Elections is constrained.

Issue 3: Economic diversification

To encourage tourism investment, there is no tax on rental income from villa, beachfront home or resort-based real estate investments. The usual rate of VAT is also decreased for tourism-related services. Tourism and real estate investors also benefit from tax holidays of up to ten years, import duty exemptions, and zero withholding tax on dividends under the Fiscal Incentives Act and Hotel Aid Act.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resultant restrictions on global travel illustrated the fragility of the tourism industry. This is of particular concern to economies as dependent on this industry as Antigua and Barbuda. Financial services, renewable energy and the digital economy are three areas of focus in renewed economic diversification efforts.

With increased attention on agricultural and nutritional security across Caribbean Community (CARICOM) members, agriculture has also received renewed attention as a growth industry. Though limited by the impact of worsening natural disasters and climate change, investment continues to grow. As with public service provision highlighted in Issue 2 above, investment has been increasing in both port modernisation and airport upgrades. Critics remain concerned that even well-meaning diversification and investment efforts remain somewhat dependent on tourism.

Issue 4: Government transparency

Governance, transparency and corruption narratives emerged as a central issue in the 2026 election, reflecting deeper tensions between performance legitimacy and institutional accountability. The incumbent ABLP framed its governance record around economic recovery, infrastructure expansion and post-pandemic stability. However, critics, including the United Progressive Party (UPP), argued these achievements had been accompanied by opaque decision-making processes, particularly in relation to large-scale development agreements, public procurement and the management of state assets.

Allegations of limited transparency in contract allocation, insufficient parliamentary scrutiny and informal governance practices through patronage networks, reinforced perceptions that executive dominance was constraining effective oversight.¹⁸ Yet, this framing must be critically assessed as being not unique to the incumbent ABLP and reflects broader structural features in Caribbean politics. The key electoral issue, therefore, was not simply whether political patronage exists, but whether voters perceived governance as being fair, transparent and inclusive.

In April 2026, former Minister and UPP candidate Ms Malaka Parker accused the governing ABLP of 'weaponising hardship' and 'institutional bribery'.¹⁹ Ms Parker alleged the government was using roads and housing construction projects and multi-million-dollar building material shipments as an election gimmick. She further claimed government giveaways in the pre-election period could result in a severe fiscal crisis post-election.

Issue 5: Barbuda autonomy

The matter of Barbudan autonomy has existed in some form since the island was leased to the Codrington family during British colonial rule. Though movements dissipated, recent developments post-Hurricane Irma (2017) have brought the issue back to the fore.

¹⁸ Transparency International (2023), 'Corruption perceptions index 2023', www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023

¹⁹ Michael, V (2026), 'UPP candidate accuses PM Browne of "weaponizing hardship" and "institutional bribery"', Antigua and Barbuda Observer, 6 April, <https://antiguaobserver.com/upp-candidate-accuses-pm-browne-of-weaponising-hardship-and-institutional-bribery/>

Barbuda's inhabitants (about 2,000 people) have been able to protect the island by maintaining communal land ownership. Under the Barbuda Land Act, 2007, the citizens of Barbuda communally own the land, and must provide consent for major development projects on the island. However, since 2016, the ABLP-led government has changed the law to introduce private property, despite community pushbacks. The Act was altered to increase the standard price for a major development required for a country-wide vote from EC\$5.4 million to EC\$40 million.

The eyewall of Hurricane Irma directly hit Barbuda in 2017, causing three deaths and an estimated US\$300 million worth of damage. Up to 95 per cent of all the structures on Barbuda were destroyed, including water treatment plants, hospitals, schools and the sole airport. The government has asserted that ownership of private titles are necessary if people are to obtain adequate insurance. Critics have framed this as 'disaster capitalism'.

Since the previous election in 2023, the Barbuda land and governance dispute has intensified significantly, evolving from a long-standing structural issue into a series of legal, administrative and political confrontations between the central government and Barbudan local authorities. A key turning point occurred in 2023–2024, when the government advanced policies extending national land governance frameworks to Barbuda, including the application of adjudication mechanisms that facilitate individual land registration. In April 2024, Barbuda was formally declared a land adjudication area, raising concerns that land deemed unused or unclaimed could revert to the state. This move was strongly resisted by local authorities, including the Barbuda Council, who argued that such policies undermined the island's long-standing system of communal land ownership enshrined in domestic law.²⁰ The Barbuda People's Movement (BPM), led by Trevor Walker, has been at the forefront of the resistance, framing the issue as one of self-determination and local autonomy.

In 2024, Barbudans secured a significant procedural victory at the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which affirmed their legal standing to challenge large-scale development projects, including airport expansion and tourism investments. This has coincided with reports of protests and an increased security presence in 2025, linked to contested developments, including the new Burton-Nibbs International Airport.²¹

Politically, the dispute has had clear electoral implications, with the Barbuda People's Movement achieving a decisive victory in the 2025 Barbuda Council elections, reinforcing the centrality of land rights in local political mobilisation.

2.6 Contesting parties and candidates

The parties and leaders contesting the 2026 general elections are shown in [Table 2.2](#).

Table 2.2 Parties and leaders contesting 2026 general elections

Party name	Acronym	Party leader
Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party	ABLP	Gaston Browne
United Progressive Party	UPP	Jamale Pringle
Barbuda People's Movement	BPM	Trevor Walker

Independent candidature is permitted in Antigua and Barbuda, though somewhat rare.

²⁰ Knight, K (2024) 'Displacement capitalism in Barbuda: A story of greed, resistance and hope', Internal Displacement Research Programme, https://researchinginternaldisplacement.org/short_pieces/displacement-capitalism-in-barbuda-a-story-of-greed-resistance-and-hope/

²¹ Antigua News Room (2025), 'Barbuda Council rejects land registration process', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/barbuda-council-rejects-land-registration-process/>

2.7 Results of elections (post-1981 independence to 2023)

Table 2.3 Election results (1984–2023)

Year	Voter turnout	ABLP result	UPP result	Third party seats
2023	70.34%	9 Seats 47.06% Gaston Browne	6 Seats 45.22% Harold Lovell	1 Seat 1.46% Trevor Walker (BPM) (Also 1 independent, Asot Michael, 5.17%)
2018	76.51%	15 Seats 59.24% Gaston Browne	1 Seat 37.09% Harold Lovell	1 Seat 1.43% Trevor Walker (BPM)
2014	90.27%	14 Seats 56.45% Gaston Browne	3 Seats 41.95% Baldwin Spencer	
2009	80.27%	7 Seats 47.16% Lester Bird	9 Seats 50.95% Baldwin Spencer	1 1.14% Trevor Walker (BPM)
2004	91.19%	4 Seats 41.94% Lester Bird	12 Seats 55.50% Baldwin Spencer	1 Seat 1.26% Trevor Walker (BPM)
1999	63.61%	12 Seats 52.94% Lester Bird	4 Seats 44.45% Baldwin Spencer	1 Seat 1.26% Hilbourne Frank (BPM)
1994	62.32%	11 Seats 54.44% Lester Bird	5 Seats 43.71% Baldwin Spencer	1 Seat 1.35% Hilbourne Frank (BPM)
1989	60.72%	15 Seats 63.85% Vere Bird	1 Seat 30.96% Baldwin Spencer	1 Seat 1.37% Hilbourne Frank (BPM)
1984	61.12%	16 Seats 67.90% Vere Bird		1 Seat 7.20% Independent

Note: Colour denotes victorious party. Seats won, popular vote (%), PM candidate.

3. Legal Framework and Electoral Administration

System of government

Antigua and Barbuda has a parliamentary democratic system of government, with His Majesty King Charles III as the Head of State (represented by the Governor-General) and the Prime Minister as the Head of Government. The 1981 Constitution (as amended) is the supreme law of the land and establishes Antigua and Barbuda as a unitary sovereign democratic state. Sovereignty is vested in the people, who exercise their power of choice of government during general and local government elections (in Barbuda). These elections are an expression of the will of the people.

Legislative framework

The core legislative and regulatory framework applicable to the 2026 general elections comprised both domestic law and international conventions, charters and agreements that Antigua and Barbuda has ratified or consented to.

Domestic laws are as follows:

- The Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda (1981)
- The Representation of The People Act (Cap 379, last amended in 2021)
- The Barbuda Local Government Act (Cap. 44, 1976)

Antigua and Barbuda has committed itself to several international principles, and ratified international treaties and conventions that set out standards for democratic elections. These include:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976
- The Inter-American Democratic Charter, 2001
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1981
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1969
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008
- The Commonwealth Charter, 2013

The Representation of the People Act (ROPA) (as amended 2021) is the relevant legislation for general elections and includes the following subsidiary legislation:

- Registration regulations
- Election rules
- Prescribed forms regulation

Parliament sought to modernise the country's electoral framework through regulations on campaign financing to improve transparency and accountability. This was done by enacting the ROPA. Section 83 of the Act contains measures such as mandatory disclosure of contributions made by individuals and entities, limits on contributions from individuals and entities, and compulsory submission of audited financial statements by political parties. The ABEC is authorised to impose a daily penalty for failure to comply with the requirement of this section.

Executive (the Prime Minister)

The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor-General by instrument under the Public Seal of Antigua and Barbuda. According to Section 158 of the Constitution –

Whenever there is occasion for the appointment of a Prime Minister, the Governor-General shall appoint as Prime Minister –

- i. *a member of the House who is the leader in the House of the political party that commands the support of the majority of members of the House; or*
- ii. *where it appears to him that such party does not have an undisputed leader in the House or that no party commands the support of such a majority, the member of the House who in his judgement is most likely to command the support of the majority of members of the House, and is willing to accept the office of Prime Minister.*

Following the 2026 general elections, Mr Gaston Browne was sworn in as Prime Minister.

Parliament

The Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda consists of His Majesty, the 17-member House of Representatives (the lower house) and the 17-member Senate (the upper house).

House of Representatives

The 17-member directly elected House of Representatives ('the House') is the lower house of Parliament, with Members of Parliament (MPs) representing single-seat constituencies from across the country. Based on a five-year parliamentary term, MPs are elected using the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system. The leader of the party commanding the support of the highest number of MPs within the House is appointed Prime Minister by the Governor-General and forms a government.

To be eligible to stand as a candidate for election, one must be a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda above the age of 21 and must have resided in Antigua and Barbuda for at least 1 year prior to nomination.

Senate

The 17-member Senate is appointed by the Governor-General. Ten are appointed based on the advice of the Prime Minister, four based on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. The remaining three are appointed as follows: one by the Governor-General at his own discretion; one acting with the advice of the Barbuda Council; and one being an inhabitant of Barbuda, on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The President of the Senate is elected by senators who are not otherwise ministers or parliamentary secretaries. The Senate has equal power in proposing laws/bills, with the noted exception of 'money bills' (any bill involving monetary provisions, such as appropriation or taxation). The Senate can, however, amend money bills.

Judiciary

The judiciary is led by the Chief Justice, who is appointed by His Majesty in accordance with the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Order.

The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court includes the Court of Appeal and the High Court. Judges serving on the Court of Appeal and the High Court are appointed by the Judicial and Legal Services Commission (JLSC). The JLSC is composed of five members: the Chief Justice (as Chairman), a justice of appeal or puisne judge, a person appointed by the Chief Justice with the concurrence of not less than four prime ministers of the states making up the Court (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Christopher and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) and the Chairman of the Public Service Commission of two states in the order designated by the Chief Justice.

The Magistracy, headed by the Chief Magistrate, oversees the prosecution of summary offences. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council serves as the final appellate court for both civil and criminal matters. Additionally, the Caribbean Court of Justice, located in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, has original jurisdiction in interpreting the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the legal framework for economic integration and co-operation among CARICOM member countries through the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Complaints and election disputes

Antigua and Barbuda has an established mechanism for dealing with election disputes during the electoral period. Candidates, if present at the counting, may request a recount of the announced results.

A voter or a candidate may also question the validity of the election of a member of the House of Representatives in the High Court, as outlined in Section 43 of the ROPA. The petition may also be brought in respect of the conduct of a returning officer (ROPA, Section 44(2)). The requirements include the following:

- The petitioner must be a person who had a right to vote at the election, or a person who voted, a person claiming the right to be elected or returned, or a person alleging to have been a candidate at the election (Section 44(1)).
- The petition shall be in the prescribed form, state the prescribed matters and be signed by the petitioner, or all the petitioners if more than one (Section 44(3)).
- The petition must be filed with the Registrar within seven days after the return of the member to whose election the petition relates.

Election petitions are determined by the High Court, with appeals to the Court of Appeal. The decision of the Court of Appeal is final. However, in certain limited circumstances, a final appeal might be made to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) in London. There appears to be public confidence in the judiciary to determine election petitions. The High Court and Court of Appeal have passed important judgements on election petitions.

However, going into the 2026 general elections, the substantive matter in the by-election petition case of *George Wehner v Randy Baltimore* had not been heard. The case, brought by a voter against the ABLP candidate Randy Baltimore, challenges the validity of his election on constitutional grounds, arguing that he was still a public officer at the time of nomination and therefore ineligible to contest.

The Group notes that although procedural safeguards are in place to ensure fair adjudication of election petitions in Antigua and Barbuda, a lack of stipulated legislative timeframes at any stage of the process has the potential to erode public confidence in the integrity of the electoral system. Such instances were noted in the by-elections of 2023 and 2026.

Recommendation

To uphold the credibility of the democratic process, protect electoral integrity, maintain trust in the judicial process and ensure access to justice, it is recommended that all stages of election petitions be concluded in a timely and equitable manner.

Electoral offences

Electoral offences are outlined in various sections of the ROPA. These include:

- offences by registration and election officers
- illegal registration
- failure to file a report of contributions made by individuals and entities
- influencing electors to vote for any candidate, illegal voting, bribery, undue influence and personation.

The Group notes allegations of bribery by the opposition, which were denied by the ABLP.

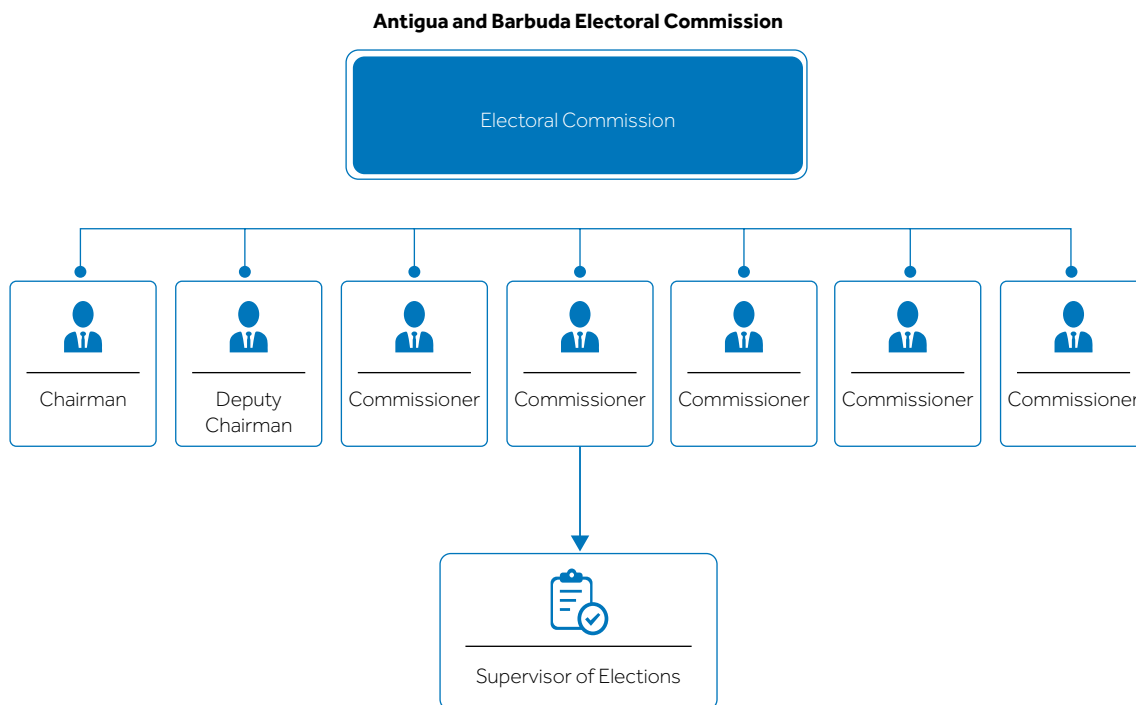
The Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission

The Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC) is the body responsible for administering elections in Antigua and Barbuda. It plays a central role in safeguarding democratic governance by ensuring that elections are free, fair, and transparent. Although ABEC is not constitutionally entrenched, it operates within a legal framework shaped by electoral legislation, particularly the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act.

The creation of ABEC arose from a report prepared by the Commonwealth Observer Group following the 1999 general elections. The Group recommended "the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission in Antigua and Barbuda with, among other powers, the mandate to create a completely new register, introduce a system of voter identification cards, and arrange the redrawing of constituency boundaries, and as necessary, review electoral law."

ABEC was established on December 3, 2001, by the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, No. 17 of 2001. A staff complement was subsequently hired, and five commissioners were appointed in April 2002.

According to Section 6(1) of the Amendment Act, ABEC is responsible for the control and supervision of the preparation of the voters' register and the conduct of elections in every constituency. It is also responsible for ensuring that all election officers act with fairness, impartiality, and in compliance with electoral law. ABEC is expected to act impartially and independently, free from political or governmental influence or interference.



When ABEC was established in 2001, it consisted of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, and three other members. In 2011, the Act was amended, increasing ABEC's membership from five to seven. The term of a commissioner is seven years from the date of appointment, and commissioners are eligible for reappointment. All commissioners are appointed by the Governor-General, and nominations are made as follows:

- The Chairman shall be nominated by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.
- The Deputy Chairman shall be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition after consultation with the Prime Minister.

- Two members shall be nominated by the Prime Minister.
- One member shall be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition.
- One member shall be nominated jointly by the Antigua Christian Council and the United Evangelical Association of Antigua and Barbuda.
- One member shall be nominated jointly by the Antigua and Barbuda Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Antigua and Barbuda Employers' Federation.

Table 3.1 Members of the ABEC

Name	Position	Date Appointed
Arthur Thomas Snr	Chairman	16 February 2024
Eugene Francis, Esquire	Deputy Chairman	21 December 2022
Clovis St Romain	Commissioner	4 March 2024
Vernest I. James-Mark	Commissioner	26 September 2022
Vacant	Commissioner	—
Juliet Benjamin	Commissioner	1 October 2018
Alrick Daniel	Commissioner	12 May 2022

Source: ABEC²²

However, the Group notes that, despite the establishment of ABEC, there appears to be a reporting line to the Minister. For example, under Section 2 of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, "Minister" means the Minister responsible for the administration of the Act. This arrangement could compromise the independence of ABEC and erode public trust and confidence in its operations. The Group further notes that this does not align with best practice, under which the Commission would be established by the Constitution and granted full independence.

Recommendation

The Group recommends that, in line with best practice, the Constitution be amended to establish the Electoral Commission, including its composition and functions. Statutory powers should then be provided to enable the Commission to fulfil its mandate.

Boundary delimitation

Part 4, Section 63 of the Constitution establishes a Constituencies Boundaries Commission, which is appointed to review the number and boundaries of constituencies. The Commission is constituted by the Governor-General and consists of a Chairman, appointed in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition; two members appointed in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister; and one member appointed in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition.

The Commission is required to review the number and boundaries of constituencies in Antigua and Barbuda and submit a report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives recommending any proposed alterations, in accordance with Section 64(1). The report must be submitted to the Speaker not less than two years, and not more than five years, after the submission of the previous report, as provided under Section 64(2). Following submission of the report, the Prime Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives, for its consideration, a draft Order by the Governor-General giving effect to the recommendations in the report, with or without modifications, in accordance with Section 65.

²² Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission - <https://abec.gov.ag/about-us/history.php>

Table 3.2 Antigua and Barbuda is divided into 17 constituencies, as indicated in the table below:

No.	Constituency Name	Approx No. Voters
1	St John's City West	3,142
2	St John's City East	2,167
3	St John's City South	2,107
4	St John's Rural West	5,709
5	St John's Rural South	4,041
6	St John's Rural East	5,187
7	St John's Rural North	4,373
8	St Mary's North	5,347
9	St Mary's South	2,816
10	All Saints East and St Luke	4,220
11	All Saints West	5,351
12	St George	5,997
13	St Peter	4,886
14	St Phillip North	2,060
15	St Phillip South	1,263
16	St Paul	3,321
17	Barbuda	1,326

The Group notes the significant disparity in the number of registered voters across constituencies and the resulting impact on the equitable distribution of voters, particularly when comparing St. George with St. Phillip South. The Group further notes that, after his re-election, the Prime Minister stated that the issue of boundary delimitation could not be resolved because of the early elections, but that it would be addressed once the census is completed and the Boundaries Commission is reconstituted.²³

Recommendation

The issue of constituency delimitation remains a matter of concern to stakeholders. The Group therefore reiterates the recommendation of the 2023 Commonwealth Observer Group that the review of constituency boundaries be completed as a matter of urgency.

Voter registration

The right to be registered to vote in Antigua and Barbuda is established in both the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act (ROPA), with specific provisions outlining eligibility. This constitutional right is implemented through the Amendment Act.

According to Sections 16(1) and 16(2) of ROPA:

16(1) Subject to this Act and any enactment imposing any qualification or disqualification for registration as an elector, a person is qualified to be registered as an elector for a constituency if, on the qualifying date, he or she:

- a. is a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda; or
- b. is a Commonwealth citizen, other than a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda, who has resided in Antigua and Barbuda for a period of at least three years immediately before the qualifying date; and

²³ <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pm-browne-says-census-needed-before-constituency-boundaries-can-change/>

- c. is 18 years of age or over; and
- d. has resided in that constituency for a period of at least one month immediately preceding the qualifying date.

16(2) A person is not qualified to be registered as an elector for more than one constituency.

The law also provides for disqualification. Under Section 17 of the Amendment Act, a person is disqualified from registration or voting if he or she is of unsound mind, is serving a sentence of imprisonment in Antigua and Barbuda, is disqualified for electoral offences, is under a sentence of death imposed by a court in any part of the Commonwealth, or is otherwise legally barred. A combined reading of these provisions makes clear that the right to be registered depends on citizenship, age, lawful registration, and legal capacity, with administration and oversight carried out by ABEC.

Voter registration is conducted by Registration Officers and Registration Clerks across the various constituencies. The process is carried out as follows²⁴:

- a. The applicant is briefly interviewed by the Registration Officer or Registration Clerk, in the presence of scrutineers, to ensure that the criteria for registration are met. If the criteria are met, the applicant is required to produce the necessary documents.²⁵
- b. The relevant information is entered into ABEC's computer system. In addition, the applicant's photograph, fingerprints, and electronic signature are captured. The documents presented are also scanned into the system.
- c. A receipt, required for the collection of a Voter Identification Card, is generated and signed by the Registration Officer or Registration Clerk and the scrutineer. The receipt must be presented when collecting the Voter Identification Card.
- d. The applicant's name is entered into a Supplementary List, which is produced by the 15th day of the month following the month in which the application was made.
- e. Publication of the Supplementary List is followed by a period for claims and objections. At the end of this period, where there is no objection, the applicant's name is entered on the Preliminary List of Electors, published by April 30 and October 31, and the Register of Electors, published by June 30 and December 31. At this point, the applicant is duly registered and eligible to receive a Voter Identification Card.

For the purposes of general elections in Antigua and Barbuda, the Commission is required to publish a register for elections not later than seven days after the writ is issued, in accordance with Section 24(1) of the Amendment Act. The register for elections must contain the names of all persons included in the Register of Electors, including any revisions to the register.

The register for elections used in the 2026 general elections contained 63,313 persons: 28,929 males and 34,384 females.

On April 7, 2026, the Supervisor of Elections, Mr Ian Hughes, reported that approximately 4,500 electors had replaced their expired or lost identification cards. Most of these cards had expired in 2024, based on the 10-year validity period for which they were issued. This contributed to a total of 24,428 applications processed since the revalidation exercise began in August 2024. He further noted that a significant portion of the electorate had yet to renew their documentation, with approximately 18,000 cards still outstanding. By April 15, 2026, ABEC confirmed that the process was up to 55 per cent complete, while noting disparities across constituencies. The ABEC is to be commended for the extensive public education undertaken during the Expired Voter ID Card Replacement Programme, which included frequent updates on the status of card renewals.


²⁴ Source: Accessed from ABEC's website: <https://abec.gov.ag/registration/process.php>

²⁵ abec.gov.ag/registration/requirements.php#requirements

Figure 3.1 Supervisor of Elections, Mr Ian Hughes briefing the COG




Table 3.3 Replacement Voter ID Card Official Report by ABEC



Antigua & Barbuda Electoral Commission

REPLACEMENT VOTER ID CARD OFFICIAL REPORT



#	COUNSTITUENCY	Balance from 2025	JAN			FEB			MAR			APRIL 2026					GRAND TOTAL	% Complete
		SUB-TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	1st-4th	5th-11th	12th-18th	19th-25th	26th-30th	TOTAL				
1	ST. JOHN'S CITY WEST	758	12	14	234	71	159	119	66	31	446	1464	63%					
2	ST. JOHN'S CITY EAST	486	9	13	162	47	122	125	59	32	385	1055	67%					
3	ST. JOHN'S CITY SOUTH	475	7	10	149	42	100	82	70	17	311	952	65%					
4	ST. JOHN'S RURAL WEST	1451	46	25	363	93	280	327	168	59	927	2812	63%					
5	ST. JOHN'S RURAL SOUTH	961	24	27	248	62	165	172	105	41	545	1805	62%					
6	ST. JOHN'S RURAL EAST	1333	41	35	407	92	274	257	124	66	813	2629	63%					
7	ST. JOHN'S RURAL NORTH	1158	24	12	378	96	225	217	130	56	724	2296	67%					
8	ST. MARY'S NORTH	1271	38	26	320	91	250	326	153	58	878	2533	61%					
9	ST. MARY'S SOUTH	845	14	12	185	59	141	150	73	26	449	1505	71%					
10	ALL SAINTS EAST AND ST. LUKE	1195	31	16	297	63	256	232	122	37	710	2249	67%					
11	ALL SAINTS WEST	1493	35	34	408	113	293	270	150	45	871	2841	72%					
12	ST. GEORGE	1755	22	30	362	103	245	345	165	47	905	3074	68%					
13	ST. PETER	2219	7	6	78	33	86	103	82	37	341	2651	93%					
14	ST. PHILIP NORTH	695	22	218	197	6	26	26	14	3	75	1207	76%					
15	ST. PHILIP SOUTH	417	9	13	134	40	93	51	18	13	215	788	75%					
16	ST. PAUL	1088	13	15	231	59	162	159	88	31	499	1846	68%					
17	BARBUDA	720	1	2	15	7	17	20	19	16	79	817	80%					
Total Weekly Application Count						1077	2894	2981	1606	615								
MONTHLY TOTAL		18320	355	508	4168						9173	32524						

Source: The Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission

Table 3.4 Daily Replacement Voter ID Card Official Report by ABEC



Antigua & Barbuda Electoral Commission
DAILY REPLACEMENT VOTER ID CARD OFFICIAL REPORT

APRIL/MAY 2026 - WEEK #90: 26TH APRIL - 1ST MAY 2026

#	CONSTITUENCY	26th April					27th April					28th April					29th April					30th April					1st May					Week's Total			
		A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E				
1	ST. JOHN'S CITY WEST	0	4				4	7	7			14	3	10			13																	0	31
2	ST. JOHN'S CITY EAST	0	2				2	1	17			18	0	12			12																	0	32
3	ST. JOHN'S CITY SOUTH	0	0	0	0		0	1	2	1	7	11	2	2	2		6																	0	17
4	ST. JOHN'S RURAL WEST	3	7	1			11	8	15	1		24	6	16	2		24																	0	59
5	ST. JOHN'S RURAL SOUTH	1	0	2			3	2	7	8		17	7	6	8		21																	0	41
6	ST. JOHN'S RURAL EAST	3	0				3	12	21			33	20	10			30																	0	66
7	ST. JOHN'S RURAL NORTH	3	6				9	13	13			26	14	7			21																	0	56
8	ST. MARY'S NORTH	2	2	1	1		6	8	6	4	7	25	5	4	7	11	27																	0	58
9	ST. MARY'S SOUTH	1	0	1			2	10	3	1		14	7	1	2		10																	0	26
10	ALL SAINTS EAST AND ST. LUKE	1	4	0	1		6	9	0	0	3	12	10	6	1	2	19																	0	37
11	ALL SAINTS WEST	0	1	0	0	0	1	5	2	5	3	8	10	1	4	3	21																	0	45
12	ST. GEORGE	3	4	2			9	11	2	8		21	7	4	6		17																	0	47
13	ST. PETER	6	1	1			8	13	2	3		18	10	1			11																	0	37
14	ST. PHILIP NORTH	1	0	0			1	1	0	0		1	1				1																	0	3
15	ST. PHILIP SOUTH	1	0	2			3	2	1	4		7	3				3																	0	13
16	ST. PAUL	1	3				4	11	4			15	7	5			12																	0	31
17	BARBUDA	1					1	10				10	5				5																	0	16
Daily Replacement Application Count		73					289					253					0					0					0					615			
Daily New Application Count		11					31					25																							

Source: Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission

The Supervisor of Elections also explained the legal "claims and objections" period, noting that, if an election is held in April, the registration cutoff would have been the end of February in order to satisfy the mandatory statutory notice period.

The decision to call an early election, dissolve Parliament, and schedule elections in April therefore compressed this process, requiring adjustments to registration, transfers, and verification timelines. This raised concerns as to whether the statutory safeguards for voter verification and objections had been fully observed, and whether all eligible voters had adequate opportunity to establish their registration status within the shortened timeframe.

ABEC advised that each constituency has a registration unit. Voters needing to replace their cards were required to present their expired Voter ID, valid government-issued identification, any relevant marital-status documents, and proof of address. ABEC further advised that persons who did not possess a valid Voter ID could, upon application and approval, vote using a special identification card issued by the Supervisor of Elections.

Recommendation

The COG recommends that ABEC considers expanding the types of identification that may be used for voting to include government-issued IDs. In addition to the Voter ID, this would complement the use of picture lists on polling day.

Candidate eligibility and nomination

The closing date for nominations was April 13, 2026. Under the Election Rules of the Representation of the People Act (ROPA), candidates must be nominated by a proposer, a seconder, and eight other electors registered in the respective constituency.

The nomination paper must contain the full name and address of the candidate and of his or her proposers, the candidate's occupation, and the electoral numbers of the proposers.

Candidates or their authorised agents are required to deliver the nomination paper to the Returning Officer, together with a deposit of \$500. The deposit is forfeited if the candidate receives less than one-eighth of the total votes cast for all candidates.

Once a candidate has submitted the relevant nomination papers and statutory declarations, met the required criteria, paid the deposit, and given written consent attested by a witness, he or she stands duly nominated. ABEC then assigns a symbol to be affixed to every ballot paper opposite the name of each candidate.

A decision by the Returning Officer that a nomination paper is invalid is final and may be challenged only by way of an election petition. The Returning Officer is required to have the nomination papers and statutory declarations posted at the place where they were delivered.

At the close of nominations, 37 candidates had been nominated across the 17 constituencies: 17 for the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party (ABLP), 16 for the United Progressive Party (UPP), one for the Barbuda People's Movement (BPM), and three independent candidates.

Table 3.5 The table below provides the full slate of nominated candidates

Constituencies	Candidates	Political Party
St John's City West	Gaston Alphonso Browne	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	T. Alister Lincoln Thomas	United Progressive Party
St John's City East	Melford Nicholas	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Pearl Quinn Williams	United Progressive Party
St John's City South	Steadroy Cutie Benjamim	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Adrian Williams	United Progressive Party
St John's Rural West	Michael Joseph	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Rihard Lewis	United Progressive Party
	Nigel Bascus	Independent
St John's Rural South	Daryll Matthew	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Emmanuel Peters	United Progressive Party
St John's Rural East	Maria Browne	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Ashworth Azille	United Progressive Party
St John's Rural North	H. Charles Fernandez	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Malaka Parker	United Progressive Party
St Mary North	Philmore Benjamin	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Jonathan Joseph	United Progressive Party
St Mary South	Dwayne George	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Kelvin Simon	United Progressive Party
All Saints East & St Luke	Lamin Newton	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Lars Jamale Pringle	United Progressive Party
All Saints West	Anthony Smith Jr.	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Harold Lovell	United Progressive Party
St George	Michael Freeland	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Kelton Dalso	United Progressive Party
	Gail Pero Georges	Independent
St Peter	Rawdon Turner	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	George Wehner	United Progressive Party
St Phillip North	Randy Baltimore	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Alex Browne	United Progressive Party
St Phillip South	Kiz Nathaniel Johnson	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Sherfield Bowen	United Progressive Party
St Paul	E. P. Chet Greene	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Franz De Freitas	United Progressive Party
	Alan Weston	Independent
Barbuda	Kendra Beazer	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Party
	Trevor Walker	Barbuda's People Movement

Recommendation	The Group reiterates the recommendation of the 2023 Commonwealth Observer Group that ABEC expeditiously complete its report to Parliament on legislation to govern political finance, including campaign finance. Such legislation should identify the sources and use of funds, limit contributions from donors, and regulate expenditure by candidates and political parties.
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Voter education

Voter education in Antigua and Barbuda is an essential function carried out primarily by ABEC to promote informed and active citizen participation in the democratic process. Through public awareness campaigns, community outreach, and media engagement, ABEC educates citizens on voter registration procedures, eligibility requirements, polling day rules, and the importance of voting. These efforts often include workshops, school programmes, radio and television broadcasts, and the distribution of informational materials designed to reach a wide cross-section of the population. Special emphasis is placed on first-time voters and on ensuring that all citizens understand their rights and responsibilities within the electoral system.

In the lead-up to the 2026 general elections, ABEC intensified its efforts by urging eligible citizens to register and update their voter information, emphasising the importance of inclusion on the voters’ list. In addition, ABEC published a full list of voter registration sites and opening hours across all constituencies to improve accessibility and encourage participation.²⁶

The Group was informed that all forms of media, including social media, were used in the voter education process. Information was made available to voters on ABEC’s website, Facebook page, and YouTube channel.

During its engagement with stakeholders, the Group was informed that, while ABEC had implemented several voter education programmes, there remained a need to engage citizens throughout the electoral cycle through sustained civic education.

Recommendation	The COG strongly encourages ABEC to engage continuously with all stakeholders, including civil society, throughout the electoral cycle and to develop programmes that enhance civic and voter education.
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Figure 3.2 COG received a briefing from ABEC



²⁶ Antigua Newsroom (2026) <https://antiguanewsroom.com/electoral-commission-publishes-full-list-of-registration-sites-and-opening-hours/>

Recruitment and training of election staff

ABEC informed the Group that the Commission trained and employed approximately 600 election officials, and polling-day staff, for the 2026 general elections. These included Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, and Poll Clerks.

The Group notes the engagement of Information Officers, who played a useful role in assisting voters to find their names on the lists and directing them to the correct polling stations. These officers also assisted elderly voters at the polling stations observed by the Group. The Group was informed that training was conducted for each category of election official.

4. Participation and Inclusion

The election announced on 7 April and held on 30 April 2026 under a truncated timeframe tested Antigua and Barbuda's institutions and systems in delivering an inclusive and participatory process. Participation and inclusion are not merely administrative requirements but are fundamental tenets of the Commonwealth Charter and the international human rights framework, requiring that all segments of society – particularly those traditionally marginalised – have an equitable voice in the governance of their country. This chapter evaluates the 2026 electoral process through the lens of participation, examining the barriers to and facilitators of inclusion for women, civil society, youth and persons with disabilities, while drawing comparative insights from the 2023 general elections.

The socio-political landscape of the 2026 election was characterised by a consolidation of power by the ABLP, which secured 15 of the 17 seats in the House of Representatives. While the election was conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner, the decrease in voter turnout – from 70.3 per cent in 2023 to 62.41 per cent in 2026 – suggests an emerging voter fatigue or apathy that warrants analysis. The chapter reviews how the condensed timeframe of the 2026 election, announced only 23 days prior, impacted the ability of diverse groups to engage meaningfully with the democratic process.

Antigua and Barbuda has several institutional frameworks with mandates that promote participation and inclusion, including the Office of the Ombudsman, the Directorate of Gender Affairs and the Social Protection Board. The nation has committed to the principles of participation and inclusion as a signatory to numerous regional and international conventions. Efforts to address structural barriers have been supported through the ratification of instruments, which include:

- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1969
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1976
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1981
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1976
- The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women 1995
- The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008

While certain gaps remain, these international understandings are generally incorporated into the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda and in the following national legislation:

- The Representation of the People Act 1975 (as amended)
- The Barbuda Local Government Act 1976
- The Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda 1981
- The Female Employees (Fair Remuneration) Act 1970
- The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code 1975
- The Social Protection Act 2020

4.1 Women

The participation of women in the 2026 electoral cycle shows the contrast between significant grassroots involvement versus persistent underrepresentation at the highest echelons of elective office. Despite Antigua and Barbuda's accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW) in 1989, the transition from international commitment to domestic parity remains a protracted process. The 2026 election served to highlight the structural and cultural impediments that continue to define the 'glass ceiling' in Antiguan and Barbudan politics.

Figure 4.1 COG met with Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL)



Legislative framework and political leadership

Antigua and Barbuda operates under a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, which, in the absence of legislated gender quotas, often militates against the election of female candidates in highly competitive single-member constituencies. Unlike jurisdictions in the Commonwealth such as Rwanda that have experimented with reserved seats or mandatory candidate lists, the twin-island nation relies on the voluntary mechanisms of political parties to achieve gender balance.

The elective disparity is most evident when comparing the House of Representatives to the Senate. In the period leading up to the 2026 poll, women held only 5.9 per cent of the seats in the lower house – that is, a single member – whereas they comprised 41.2 per cent of the appointed Senate. The Group also notes with concern that the proportion of female candidates decreased from 19.6 per cent in 2023 (10 out of 51 candidates) to 13.5 per cent in 2026 (5 out of 37 candidates). These data suggest that the barrier to female participation is not a lack of qualified or willing women, but due to systemic barriers to female participation, including the internal selection processes of political parties and the adversarial nature of the campaign trail.

Table 4.1 Gender distribution in legislative bodies prior to the 2026 general elections

Legislative body	Total members	Women (pre-election 2026)	Percentage
House of Representatives	17	1	5.9%
Senate	17	7	41.2%
Combined	34	8	23.5%

Candidate representation and party dynamics

The Group notes that the vitriolic remarks and personal attacks identified in 2023 persisted in the 2026 election. Observers heard that female candidates were disproportionately subjected to scrutiny regarding their physical appearance and domestic lives, rather than their policy positions. The Department of Gender Affairs (DGA) reported that while it provides mentorship and capacity-building workshops, the absence of a formal national gender policy limits its ability to co-ordinate and promote a more inclusive political environment.

In the 2026 cycle, the lack of a structured, well-resourced institutional mechanism to mentor and promote female candidacy meant that many potential female candidates remained on the periphery of the political process.

Voter engagement and election administration

Women continue to be the most active participants in the democratic process in terms of voter registration and turnout. The 2023 data indicated that women constituted 52.8 per cent of the registered electorate, a trend that appeared to hold steady in 2026. The Group noted that women were not only the first to arrive at many polling stations but also formed the backbone of the electoral administration on election day.

Most polling day staff – including presiding officers, poll clerks and information officers – were women. Their professionalism and dedication were cited as key factors in the smooth conduct of the poll. This high level of administrative participation contrasts sharply with elective representation, suggesting that while women are entrusted with the management of democracy, they are not yet fully empowered to lead it.

Recommendations	The Group recommends that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda should prioritise the development and implementation of a national gender policy to ensure meaningful participation of women at all levels of government and society.
	The Group recommends that political parties adopt internal party quotas or legislated gender quotas to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in elective office.

4.2 Civil society

The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Antigua and Barbuda's 2026 elections was multifaceted, encompassing voter education, advocacy for marginalised groups and the provision of independent oversight, including fielding domestic election observation. However, the effectiveness of civil society was hampered by an environment CSOs described as a 'shrinking of the civic space' and the logistical challenges of snap elections.

Institutional engagement and oversight

ABEC demonstrated an improvement in transparency by providing a comprehensive information pack to international observers, which included disaggregated data by age and gender. Despite these improvements for international observers, domestic CSOs reported that their access to detailed electoral statistics remained limited in 2026. The 2026 election highlighted the need for a formal domestic mechanism that includes the various election stakeholders reviewing and implementing observer recommendations throughout the election cycle. The Group reiterates that meaningful civil society engagement is an essential mechanism for accountability and democratic consolidation.

Voter education

The 2026 snap election required a rapid mobilisation of voter education resources. A primary focus was the identification (ID) card replacement programme, as ABEC estimated that more than 20,000 registered voters needed new cards prior to the April poll. CSOs, including religious organisations and

community groups, played a vital role in disseminating this information through social media and traditional community networks.

However, the Group noted with concern that the media landscape remained highly polarised. Because major media entities like the Antigua Broadcasting Service (ABS) and the Observer Media Group (OMG) are state-owned or viewed as partisan, respectively, the space for independent, civil society-led discourse was limited. The Group heard that this polarisation often led to the marginalisation of non-partisan voices, as the electoral narrative was dominated by the two major parties.

Advocacy for marginalised groups

The Free and Fair Election League (FFEL), Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities (ABAPD), and the National Youth Council of Antigua and Barbuda (NYCAB) were among the most active CSOs in advocating for inclusive policies. In the 2026 cycle, FFEL and NYCAB focused on fielding domestic observation effort, while ABAPD focused on advocating for persons with a disability (PWDs) to independently exercise their franchise.

The COG heard that while these organisations are passionate and vocal, they often operate with limited resources and face challenges if their advocacy is perceived as being anti-government. For civil society to truly flourish, the government must ensure that CSOs are treated as partners in development.

Recommendations	The Group recommends that ABEC strengthen its engagement with civil society groups to facilitate continuous voter education and awareness raising.
	The Group recommends ABEC to consider convening a committee for consultation to ensure inclusion of civil society organisations in electoral processes, including in the implementation of civic and voter education programmes.
	The Group recommends that the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and ABEC proactively engage with a broad cross-section of CSOs working across democracy, human rights, good governance and civic engagement to ensure their concerns are addressed in the administration of elections.

4.3 Youth

Antigua and Barbuda possesses a youthful demographic, with the National Youth Policy 2004 defining 'youth' as those aged 16 to 35. In 2026, the engagement of this group was a primary focus for political parties, as younger voters represent a major demographic that is increasingly less tethered to traditional familial voting patterns.

Demographics and voter turnout

While the 2022 Census data remained partially unpublished at the time of the 2026 election, registration data suggest that nearly two-thirds of the population are under the age of 40. However, the decrease in overall voter turnout from 70.3 per cent in 2023 to 62.41 per cent in 2026 is possibly a result of youth apathy as they are the largest demographic.

Observers noted that first-time voters (those reaching 18 between 2023 and 2026), youth groups and CSO representatives were active on social media, but some expressed disillusionment regarding their ability to influence policy. The 2026 campaign featured significant digital engagement, with ABLP and UPP candidates using TikTok and Facebook to reach young Antiguan and Barbudans. However, the COG heard concerns that this engagement was often transactional, involving the distribution of food or promotional items rather than meaningful policy dialogue.

Youth representation in leadership

Despite their demographic weight, youth remain underrepresented in formal leadership roles. The 2020 Parliament featured one MP under the age of 30, with the 2023 and 2026 election seeing three MPs who

could be considered as youth at the time of the election. The Democratic National Alliance (DNA) had historically fielded the most youth candidates, but its decision not to contest the 2026 election further reduced the avenues for young leaders to enter the political sphere. The elections saw a reduction of youth candidates from 29.4 per cent (15 out of 51) in 2023 to 21 per cent (8 out of 38) in 2026.

Crucially, as the Group heard, and as reflected in the 2023 COG report, the traditional way of voting – following the party of previous generations – is in decline. This presents an opportunity for parties to increase youth involvement by revamping their organisational structures to include youth in decision-making arms. The NYCAB hosted a voter symposium in the lead-up to 2026, where representatives from the contesting parties were interrogated on their plans for youth opportunities and mental health facilities.

Figure 4.2 COG meeting with youth groups



Participation in election administration

One of the most positive findings of the 2026 mission was the significant representation of young people among polling staff. Young Antiguan and Barbudans were visible as poll clerks and information officers in nearly every polling station visited by the COG. Their presence as administrators suggests a high level of civic consciousness that has yet to translate into meaningful inclusion in political processes.

Recommendations	The Group recommends ABEC engages young people in the development of targeted voter information materials for future cycles, ensuring that messaging is 'evidence-based' and relevant to a digital-native generation.
	The Group recommends that the government and political parties proactively engage with youth groups, including youth councils, in Antigua and Barbuda to build interest in politics and electoral participation among young people.
	The Group recommends that political parties establish youth engagement mechanisms with genuine policy-making power to encourage young Antiguan and Barbudans to transition from organisers and field workers to candidates.

4.4 Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) continue to face the most significant structural barriers, including accessibility and infringement of secrecy of the ballot, to participation in Antigua and Barbuda. While the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2016 and the subsequent Disability and Equal Opportunity Act 2017 provide a legal mandate for inclusion, the 2026 election cycle revealed a persistent implementation gap.

Figure 4.3 Voters who needed assistance were assisted accordingly



Physical accessibility and the 2026 polling experience

The 2023 report noted that many polling stations lacked step-free access, with voters often required to ascend or descend stairs to reach the voting booth. In the 2026 elections, despite ABEC's pledge to

Figure 4.4 Some polling stations with stairs



prioritise accessibility, observers found that most of the 190 polling stations set up in older schools and community centres remained structurally inaccessible, as disabled and elderly voters were required to climb steps or required assistance to reach the ballot box.

In several instances, PWDs and the elderly were physically assisted by family members or poll workers, which – while helping with participation – underscores a lack of systemic accommodation of the needs of PWDs and the elderly.

Assisted voting and the secrecy of the ballot

The secrecy of the ballot is a fundamental democratic right that is frequently compromised for PWDs in Antigua and Barbuda. Under Section 50 of the Representation of the People Act, blind or visually impaired voters are permitted to bring a companion to assist them. For other PWDs, the presiding officer marks the ballot in the presence of polling agents. This mechanism forces the voter to disclose their choice, depriving them of the constitutional right to secret suffrage.

In the 2026 elections, the COG noted the continued absence of tactile ballot templates or stencils for the blind and visually impaired. While some other Commonwealth nations have successfully integrated these tools, their absence in Antigua and Barbuda remains a critical point of concern for inclusion advocates. However, the Group notes that the practice of allowing the elderly and PWDs to move to the front of the queue was consistently observed on 30 April.

Table 4.2 Comparative status of disability inclusion (2023 versus 2026)

Inclusion indicator	Status in 2023	2026 observation
Tactile ballots	Not available	Still not implemented
Ramp access	Insufficient in schools	Persistent gaps identified
Data on disability	Not collected during registration	Remains an administrative gap
PWD candidates	None identified	No identified PWD candidates in House of Representatives

Recommendations	The Group recommends that ABEC should urgently introduce tactile ballot templates and stencils to empower visually impaired voters to exercise their franchise independently and with full confidentiality.
	The Group recommends that ABEC collects data on disability during the registration process to enable the early mapping of polling stations and ensure that specialised assistive materials are deployed where they are most needed.
	The Group recommends accessibility audits of all polling stations in advance of election day, prioritising ground-floor venues and the installation of temporary ramps where necessary.

Figure 4.5 COG was briefed by the Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities (ABAPD)



4.5 Barbudan people and Indigenous inclusion

The relationship between Antigua and Barbuda remains a central theme in the nation's political discourse, particularly concerning land rights and administrative autonomy. In the 2026 election, the BPM, led by Trevor Walker, reaffirmed its commitment to protecting Barbuda's heritage and autonomy. The ABLP mounted a vigorous challenge on the island, fielding Kendra Beazer.

While the BPM successfully retained the seat, the 2026 mission noted that Barbudans expressed a desire for greater consultation in the decision-making processes that affect them.

4.6 Conclusion

While the people of Antigua and Barbuda demonstrated their commitment to democratic participation in the general elections of 30 April 2026, the findings on participation and inclusion indicate that much work remains to be done. The 2026 observations and results show structural imbalances with respect to participation and inclusion of women, youth and PWDs.

The recommendations in this section are offered with a view to ensuring that future electoral cycles promote meaningful participation and inclusion. By implementing these measures, Antigua and Barbuda can move closer to an inclusive democratic ideal where the diversity of its population is reflected not just in the administration of the polls, but in the leadership of the nation.

5. The Campaign and the Media

5.1 The campaign

Parliament was dissolved on 1 April 2026, and the election date was announced on 7 April. On 13 April, 37 candidates were nominated for the general elections. There were three independent candidates and one candidate from the Barbuda People's Movement.

The campaigns were energetic and peaceful, though there were instances of personal attacks and vitriolic remarks that spread on social media platforms. Fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution²⁷, including those to freedom of expression (Section 12), peaceful assembly and association (Section 13), were respected.

The ABLP launched its campaign in early April under the theme 'Renaissance: A New Era of Progress and Prosperity', promising to continue delivering strong, visionary plans. It later released its Manifesto 2026,²⁸ outlining its vision for the country and campaigning on 'steady, strong, leadership'.

Figure 5.1 ABLP supporters at a rally



The UPP, which faced questions from opponents throughout the campaign regarding its level of readiness for the election and preparedness to govern, pledged a 'People First' agenda and campaigned²⁹ on 15 pillars, among them the cost of living, jobs and economic growth, roads and infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

²⁷ Antigua and Barbuda Constitution order 1981, <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Antigua/antigua-barbuda.html>

²⁸ Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party Manifesto, <https://ablpantigua.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/ABLP-Manifesto-2026-online.pdf>

²⁹ United Progressive Party Manifesto, www.myupp.org/about/manifesto-2026

Figure 5.2 UPP rally



The UPP proposed raising the minimum wage for 'non-established' public service workers to EC\$2,700 monthly and implementing a 4-day working week. These proposed policies were a part of a wider proposal to reform public sector employment.³⁰ The UPP also promised removing taxes on water storage equipment for low-income households,³¹ and promised not to reintroduce personal income taxes.³² Prime Minister Gaston Browne publicly described these proposals as 'senseless fiscal irresponsibility and reckless tax giveaways to win an election...the consequences would be catastrophic'.³³

The opposition party also raised 'serious concerns' over a United States (US) visa restriction on Antiguan and Barbudan citizens. It claimed a vote for the ABLP was a vote for visa restrictions. The US suspended visa processing for citizens of Antigua and Barbuda in January 2026 due to concerns over its CBI programme. The government said it was working with Washington to secure a reversal of the decision, with Prime Minister Gaston Browne defending regional CBI programmes as 'lawful, transparent, development tools'. The Prime Minister said his government had worked closely and constructively with the US Government to strengthen safeguards within the programme.

To aid with cost-of-living increases, temporary 0 per cent rates were applied to electricity and select foodstuffs. In an attempt to minimise economic impacts on the population, the 2026 government budget introduced no new taxes, and instead focused on enforcement and collection of existing revenues. The ABLP argued that maintaining a low-tax environment made Antigua and Barbuda a more attractive country for investors and supports economic growth.

³⁰ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Pringle Says UPP will Implement Four-Day Work Week by 2027', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pringle-says-upp-will-implement-four-day-work-week-by-2027/>

³¹ Antigua News Room (2026), 'UPP Leader Jamale Pringle Promises Tax-Free Water Tanks, Pumps and Pressure Systems Under Water Relief Programme', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/upp-leader-jamale-pringle-promises-tax-free-water-tanks-pumps-and-pressure-systems-under-water-relief-programme/>

³² Antigua News Room (2026), 'UPP says it won't re-introduce Personal Income Tax', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/upp-says-it-wont-re-introduce-personal-income-tax/>

³³ Antigua News Room (2026), 'PM Browne Warns of "Catastrophic" Fiscal Crisis Over Pringle's Tax-Free Proposals', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pm-browne-warns-of-catastrophic-fiscal-crisis-over-pringles-tax-free-proposals/>

Figure 5.3 Motorcade of the Barbuda People's Movement



The UPP, meanwhile, argued that low wages, limited diversification and uneven public service delivery were all attributable to an over-reliance on indirect taxation and that the then current tax structure disproportionately favoured the wealthy and foreign investors.

At the launch of its campaign, the UPP proposed removing all duties and taxes on personal vehicle imports, 50 per cent off import taxes for commercial vehicles, and the removal of all taxes on vehicles and equipment for agricultural workers.³⁴

The opposition told the COG it was disadvantaged by the calling of an early election and claimed the ruling party was able to access some data from ABEC the opposition, could not access. The UPP also alleged the use of state resources to bribe citizens. It claimed that food vouchers paid for by government to assist persons in need were given to ABLP candidates for distribution.

The opposition party also alleged to the COG that the ruling party had distributed building supplies to electors in an effort to win votes. The opposition's claims were shared in the social media sphere during the course of the campaigns. However, the prime minister dismissed³⁵ those allegations as untrue and unfounded, saying on his radio programme after his party's decisive victory that the win had been achieved due to public confidence and strong performance, not inducements. Prior to the elections, he had reassured the public that a surge in road construction across Antigua and Barbuda was not election-season posturing, but a long-term infrastructure overhaul backed by a massive financial 'war chest'. He emphasised, 'No one should ever think that the roads will stop after the elections'.³⁶

The UPP also claimed its campaign material was vandalised in certain areas. Days ahead of the poll, the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda said it was aware that some individuals were engaged in the removal, defacing and destruction of political flyers, posters and billboards. The force noted the actions were unlawful

³⁴ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Watch: Pringle says UPP will remove ALL duties and taxes on personal vehicle imports, if elected', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/watch-pringle-says-upp-will-remove-all-duties-and-taxes-on-personal-vehicle-imports-if-elected/>

³⁵ Antigua News Room (2026), 'PM Gaston Browne rejects vote-buying claims after ABLP landslide victory', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/pm-gaston-browne-rejects-vote-buying-claims-after-ablp-landslide-victory/>

³⁶ Antigua Observer (2026), 'PM Browne defends "unprecedented" road works, says \$100M reserve will sustain projects post-election', <https://antiguaobserver.com/pm-browne-defends-unprecedented-road-works-says-100m-reserve-will-sustain-projects-post-election/>

and undermined the democratic process, particularly during a period of heightened political activity. It warned that anyone found engaging in the practice would be arrested and prosecuted.³⁷

The COG observed that there were no major incidents of concern in the lead up to the elections. The short campaign season was marked by well-attended political rallies in the various constituencies, large motorcades, and lively concerts and parties in an effort to energise the bases, win over undecided voters and bring out the vote. The COG observed some of these activities, which were vibrant, colourful and peaceful. Billboards and other ABLP campaign material were most prevalent throughout the communities. In comparison to the ABLP, there was a minimum display of UPP materials in many areas observed. The opposition party said that in addition to being outspent by the ABLP, the short election timeframe meant it could not co-ordinate timely shipments of campaign paraphernalia or publish hard copies of its campaign manifesto, which the opposition said affected the public's opinion.

Campaign finance and electoral integrity

1. *Introduction and electoral context*

Despite the orderly conduct on polling day, the COG noted structural issues around electoral administration that require attention to further strengthen the integrity of elections in Antigua and Barbuda. The primary structural issues include the absence of a modern political financing system, outdated constituencies that challenge the principle of equal suffrage, and challenges to accessibility and secret suffrage faced by PWDs and the elderly.

2. *International and local commitments*

Antigua and Barbuda is bound by several frameworks designed to safeguard election integrity, though a gap remains between formal commitments and practical implementation. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) mandates genuine periodic elections and equal suffrage. While universal suffrage was upheld, equal suffrage is under strain because of vast disparities in constituency sizes. Article 7(3) of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) encourages transparency in political funding, yet the 2026 cycle highlighted a lack of mandatory disclosure for donor identities or party expenditures. The Inter-American Democratic Charter and the Commonwealth Charter emphasise independent electoral management. While the Constitution and the Integrity in Public Life Act 2004 provide Antigua and Barbuda's legal bedrock, institutions like the Integrity Commission are reportedly under-resourced, limiting their ability to investigate malfeasance. While the ABEC and state institutions deserve credit for the smooth conduct of election administration, incumbency advantages overshadow the election environment, raising questions whether the incumbent is afforded undue advantages and influence over the election.

Table 5.1 Formal international commitments versus practical implementation

Framework/instrument	Core principle	2026 observation notes
ICCPR Article 25	Equal suffrage	This principle is challenged by constituency size disparities.
UNCAC Article 7(3)	Finance transparency	There is a lack of a robust disclosure for donors/parties, especially third party donations.
Commonwealth Charter	Level playing field	Incumbency advantages include state media dominance.

³⁷ Antigua News Room (2026), 'Police Issue Warning as Campaign Materials Are Removed and Defaced Across Communities', <https://antiguaneewsroom.com/police-issue-warning-as-campaign-materials-are-removed-and-defaced-across-communiti/>

3. *Legal framework and political finance*

The Representation of the People Act (ROPA) governs the administrative conduct of polls and the election was administered well. However, the overall election system fails to address political party regulation and campaign finance transparency adequately.

There are no ceilings on party funding, and the Group heard that existing candidate spending limits are considered to be unenforced. The lack of mandatory disclosure of monies in elections creates a vacuum for 'dark money', potentially influencing public policy through wealthy lobbies. The current environment of ruling party control and influence over the state media allows it to extensively use this state resource, while the opposition noted to the Group that it faced unequal treatment. Furthermore, electoral constituency boundaries have remained largely static since 1984, leading to significant imbalances where the weight of a vote varies drastically between districts, potentially violating the 'one person, one vote' principle. This could amplify the ability of money and influence to change the outcome of an election.

The Group emphasises that regulating money in politics is essential for institutional legitimacy and democratic consolidation. Political finance transparency prevents spending 'arms races', levels the playing field for under-represented groups such as women and youth, deters illicit influence, and provides voters with essential information about a candidate's backers. Best practices include mandatory banking for all political transactions, disclosure of beneficial ownership and tracking of digital spending. Additionally, the Group heard that women candidates often face greater financial barriers, a systemic challenge to them attaining public office. Targeted public funding and disclosure rules, along with equitable political financing, therefore, could help promote gender parity in the House of Representatives.

4. *Abuse of state administrative resources (SAR)*

The 2026 COG identified several instances where state resources could be characterised as being used for political gain.

A nationwide 'Clean-up Campaign' launched weeks before the election allowed the deployment of state-funded labour in competitive constituencies. Furthermore, the state-owned Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Service (ABS) television and radio provided coverage to government ceremonies, while – according to the opposition – denying equal treatment to the opposition parties,

5. *Candidate versus public official*

The Group observations in 2026 highlight the need for a clear distinction between an individual's role as a candidate and as a public official. In many Commonwealth nations, 'caretaker conventions' restrict government activity once Parliament is dissolved. These conventions ensure only routine duties are performed, major policy decisions are delayed or require consultation with the opposition, and the public service remains non-partisan. In Antigua and Barbuda, these conventions were largely absent, with state machinery – such as official press releases for legal actions against opponents – being synchronised with campaign rhetoric.

6. *Recommendations for reform*

The COG identifies three critical areas for legislative and institutional reform in Antigua and Barbuda, as follows:

Recommendations	Campaign finance reform: The Group recommends establishment of a robust political finance transparency system, including the introduction of legislation establishing spending ceilings, mandatory disclosure of donors and regulation of digital advertising, in discussion with CSOs and other stakeholders. A specialised regulatory unit within the ABEC could be empowered to enforce these rules.
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	Codification of caretaker conventions: The Group recommends formal adoption of rules prohibiting large-scale public grants or promotions once a writ of elections is issued. Strict non-partisanship must be enforced regarding the use of state-owned vehicles, personnel and facilities for campaign activities.
	Constituency boundary delineation: The Group recommends a data-driven redistribution of seats based on the 2022–2025 Census as a starting point, is essential to ensure equal suffrage. The government should appoint and empower the Boundaries Commission to conduct the constituency delimitation without political influence, as a matter of urgency.

7. Conclusion

The 2026 elections confirmed the people's commitment to democracy, yet systemic vulnerabilities remain. An 'arms race' in spending and the blurring of lines between state and party interests risk eroding the legitimacy of the democratic mandate. By implementing these structural reforms, Antigua and Barbuda can ensure its electoral system truly represents the collective will of all its citizens.

5.2 The media

The media generally met its obligation to provide credible information in the weeks leading up to the 30 April 2026 elections, helping voters make informed decisions. However, the highly polarised environment raised concerns about fairness and editorial independence, with the opposition complaining of bias and unfair treatment by the state-owned ABS.

The country has a dynamic media environment, with nearly 20 radio stations. It also has television, e-papers and online sites. Mainstream news outlets like ABS television and radio are key sources of news and information. ABS also has a strong presence on social media platforms, including Facebook, on which livestreaming is provided. It was an important communications channel during the election period, but its coverage was dominated by government-related news.

The e-newspaper, The Daily Observer, another major player on the media landscape, is privately-owned by NewsCo, which is perceived to be politically aligned with the UPP. It also owns Observer Radio, HITZ FM and Observer Publications.

Another prominent media group is PointeVile Communications, Inc., which operates Pointe Xpress Newspaper, television and Pointe FM, founded by the Prime Minister. He has a weekly radio programme, which streams online.

Other private online media entities are Antigua Newsroom, Antigua Breaking News and Real News Antigua.

Some stakeholders the Group met with complained that the candidates and their campaigns did not always get fair access to the media, and diverse and balanced viewpoints were not always reflected given the political affiliation and ideological alignment of the various media entities.

ABS told the COG that once the writs of election were issued, it provided rate cards to the political parties and scheduled candidate interviews for ABS TV's 'Know Your Candidate' programme.

All ABLP candidates took advantage of the opportunity to be interviewed. However, after two UPP candidates were interviewed, the opposition party refused to participate further in the interviews, citing complaints from its candidates and supporters about the bias and combativeness displayed by the programme's host and the negative slant of the news reports following their appearance.³⁸

³⁸ Antigua News Room (2026), 'ABS accused of bias as UPP candidates cancel appearances on "Know Your Candidates"', <https://antiguanewsroom.com/abs-accused-of-bias-as-upp-candidates-cancel-appearances-on-know-your-candidates/>

Figure 5.4 COG met with ABS



ABS strongly rejected the allegations, stating that the host operated with a high degree of professionalism.³⁹

One week after nomination day, and ten days ahead of the elections, the ABEC published general elections media guidelines pursuant to Section 36(1) of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act.⁴⁰

These rules prohibit radio and television stations from preventing any political party or candidate nominated to run in the general elections from broadcasting information necessary to promote their campaigns. The rules also prevent print media from blocking the publication of any print material to promote a campaign and require owners of electronic and print media to provide equitable allocation of time and space in a non-discriminatory manner.

The guidelines also stipulate that media entities cannot charge more than the ordinary advertising rates for promoting political content. Violation of these rules would come with a penalty of EC\$10,000 upon conviction or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year.

The opposition told the COG it did not advertise on ABS entities because it had no confirmation that the ABLP was being made to pay for the advertising it was doing, and there was no guarantee of fairness. The opposition party used other media channels for advertising, including The Observer, and pushed its messages out via social media.

The UPP complained of a lack of balance in news coverage, and some private media personnel told the Group that denial of access to government officials was heightened during the election season, making it more difficult to balance their stories. Private media also shared with the COG that there were some private media practitioners who were afraid of being victimised.

The ABS said it remained committed to providing balanced reporting and aimed to get opposition responses to stories where warranted, but noted a general distrust by those aligned with the opposition.

State-owned and private media entities played important roles in voter education, amplifying information provided by ABEC. Some private media practitioners expressed concerns about having to pay to access historical data from the Electoral Commission.

The COG took note of the absence of any printed newspapers in Antigua and Barbuda, which traditionally had been a vital source of communication for elderly electors and those who do not use social media channels.

There is no precedent for an election-specific code of conduct for the media, either private or government owned. Neither is there a single codified media code of ethics. As noted, freedom of expression – including that of the press – is guaranteed in the Constitution and journalists are protected from arbitrary interference. These rights are qualified, meaning the state can impose restrictions in the interest of public order,

³⁹ ABS Television/Radio (2026), 'UPP withdraws remaining candidates from "know your candidates programme"', www.facebook.com/abstvradio/posts/pfbid0sCktSnnchGwEUoTKzKry6XVeFSEie5AUdkPLSPhd1Pkud7dtHKYUGYAM6bmFBDdl?rid=9JAhzZxYB1I0I6iz

⁴⁰ Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (2026), 'ABEC publishes general elections media guidelines 2026', www.facebook.com/100064888770009/posts/please-be-guided-accordingly-and-share/1453366536836292/

Figure 5.5 COG met with some private media houses



national security, reputation protection and the less-defined, morality. Journalists and media outlets are expected through individual articles of legislation to balance freedom of journalistic expression with public accountability and to refrain from harm or defamation through their publications.

The Antigua and Barbuda Media Congress has been inoperative for more than a decade. Some private media practitioners highlighted difficulties in meeting their mandate given stretched resources and the exit of skilled journalists from the profession. It is good practice for media workers and journalists to come together in an association to further advance their professional interests, including the drafting and promotion of codes of conduct in collaboration with civil society. These codes should guide responsible reporting generally, and during elections in particular, helping to strengthen ethical journalism and public trust in the media.

Recommendations	As recommended by the COG in 2023, the incorporation of ABS as a state-owned entity with an independent board of directors governing its policies, operations and programming could help mitigate some of the challenges regarding accessibility, fairness and bias.
	The Group recommends that consideration be given to reviving the media association, as this could provide a useful platform for co-ordination, professional development and the reinforcement of ethical standards across the sector.
	There is a need to depoliticise the media landscape. It must be free, fair and inclusive. There is an urgent requirement to strengthen the regulatory framework in this regard.
	As recommended by the 2018 and 2023 COGs in their reports, an independent and adequately funded media council or monitoring body should be established to provide oversight and enforcement of Section 36(1) of the ROPA (Amendment) 2001 and Section 62(3) of the ROPA (Amendment) 2002.
	ABS and other media are encouraged to continue efforts to ensure balanced coverage and fair access for all political parties to strengthen editorial independence and public trust.

Social media

In 2024, 72.7 per cent of the population in Antigua and Barbuda was using the internet. Approximately 64.3 per cent of the population was using social media, with Facebook the most popular platform used.⁴¹

Given this deep internet penetration, the candidates and political parties made widespread use of social media during the campaign season, often streaming live for viewers. At the time of writing, the ABLP had approximately 21,000 followers on Facebook, and the UPP had about 13,000. ABS television/radio had 186,000 Facebook followers, significantly more than private media outlets.

ABEC also made liberal use of social media in publishing information. The Electoral Commission is to be lauded for providing frequent reports on voter replacement ID cards, voting requirements, polling locations, and public service announcements (PSAs) to educate and inform voters.

ABEC used social media for voter education on legislation that governs its operations and engaged media to increase understanding of its role.

Widespread use of social media and a growing artificial intelligence (AI) culture also make it easier for misinformation and disinformation to spread across platforms, including WhatsApp. This could impact the fairness of elections and distort voter education efforts.

While there were reported instances of misinformation and disinformation on social media, the COG notes that this did not appear to have a significant impact on the electoral process.

Recommendation

ABEC should implement a structured system to monitor, flag and quickly respond to misinformation across platforms, supported by timely public clarification campaigns.

Access to information

Access to information is legally mandated by the Freedom of Information Act (2004). This Act permits citizens to request records and documents from public authorities, though critics claim public awareness of this is low. Others have claimed that requests from newsrooms and journalists have had limited success in obtaining information.

The Data Protection Act (2013) mandated the appointment of an Information Commissioner to manage compliance with any such requests.

⁴¹ DataReportal: Digital 2026: Antigua And Barbuda, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-antigua-and-barbuda#:~:text=Social%20media%20statistics%20for%20Antigua,at%20the%20end%20of%202025>

6. Voting, Counting and Results Transmission

The 30 April 2026 general elections were conducted using the voters list published on 2 April; the list contained 63,313 eligible voters. The COG was advised by the ABEC that under the process of continuous registration, eligible voters had been added annually. On 15 April 2026, ABEC published a list indicating that 511 persons had been transferred in or out of constituencies for the period October 2025 to February 2026.⁴² The Group was also provided with age-disaggregated data for the eligible voters.

There were 17 constituencies with a total of 190 polling stations. However, given the sizes of some polling districts, voters were divided alphabetically and extra polling stations established.

Polling stations were primarily located in schools, community halls and other public buildings.

Members of the COG observed the distribution of signage and other non-sensitive materials to presiding officers the evening before the elections. Ballot boxes and papers were collected from ABEC early on election day and the returning officers distributed them to presiding officers at the various sites prior to the opening of the polls.

Observers visited polling stations in their assigned areas of deployment on election day. They observed the opening and closing of the polls in selected stations, as well as the voting process in several polling stations across Antigua and Barbuda. Members also observed the transfer of ballot boxes from polling stations to the counting centres. The count was generally conducted by the returning officers. However, in Barbuda, some ballots were counted by ABEC's Registration Officer.

Recommendation

The Group recommends that ABEC should consider engaging assistant returning officers to assist with the count. This will strengthen transparency and ensure that persons conducting the count are legally authorised to do so.

6.1 Opening of the poll

The polls opened at 6:00am and closed at 6:00pm. Members of the COG observed the process in various locations where they were deployed. The opening process requires that each polling station is staffed with a presiding officer and two poll clerks. In polling locations housing multiple polling stations, information desks were set up on the outside to assist voters in finding their polling stations. The presence of party representatives was observed outside polling stations.

The following were also observed:

- All polling stations observed had the required number of poll workers present.
- The polling stations observed had at least two political party/candidate agents present.
- Security in the form of the police was present and unobtrusive at all locations.
- The party/candidate agents were allowed to verify the quantity of ballots issued to the presiding officer to be used in the polling station, as well as the serial numbers of the ballots. These were stapled in booklets.
- Prior to poll opening, Presiding officers, as required, displayed to the authorised persons present in the station the empty ballot box before sealing the lid and placing it in full view.
- All election supplies, including ballot papers, were available in sufficient quantities.

⁴² See: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q75DJ719_jY5CsG_89jQUtp1u4ZXrTdu/view

6.2 The voting process

Election day

Voting was conducted in a peaceful and orderly environment across the 17 constituencies.

Observers noted that procedures were generally adhered to and poll workers were professional in the execution of their duties. Prior to election day, ABEC held training sessions for returning officers and other poll workers. It also hosted an information session for local and international observers and other stakeholders.

Figure 6.1 Voters queuing at a polling station



The voting procedures require the elector to attend the polling station for the polling division in which he or she is registered. Observers noted that at many locations, easily identifiable information officers were stationed at the entrance of voting sites checking the voters register to ensure electors were at the right location. This was designed to save time and added to the smooth flow of the voting process. There was signage at all the polling stations the observers visited, informing electors on voting procedures.

Identification of electors

Once inside the room, the elector then approached the presiding officer's table, stated his or her name, and produced his or her identification card. The person's name was then called out and a mark placed against the number of the elector on the voters list. The picture list was also consistently checked as a secondary means of voter identification. The elector's right index finger was then checked to ensure there were no markings. The ballot was stamped with the official seal and given to the elector who was advised how to fold it after voting. The elector then proceeded to the voting booth to vote. After voting, the elector returned to the presiding officer's table with the marked ballot folded. The presiding officer then instructed the elector to dip the appropriate finger in the ink provided before the elector placed the ballot in the ballot box and exited the polling station. Party agents were present in each room where voting took place.

Figure 6.2 Voter casts her ballot



While the Group notes that these procedures were followed for the most part, observers deployed in Barbuda observed that in most of the polling stations, the right index finger of voters was not checked for electoral ink before and after they marked their ballot, raising the possibility of double voting. The observers noted that political party agents did not raise complaints of irregularities or double voting.

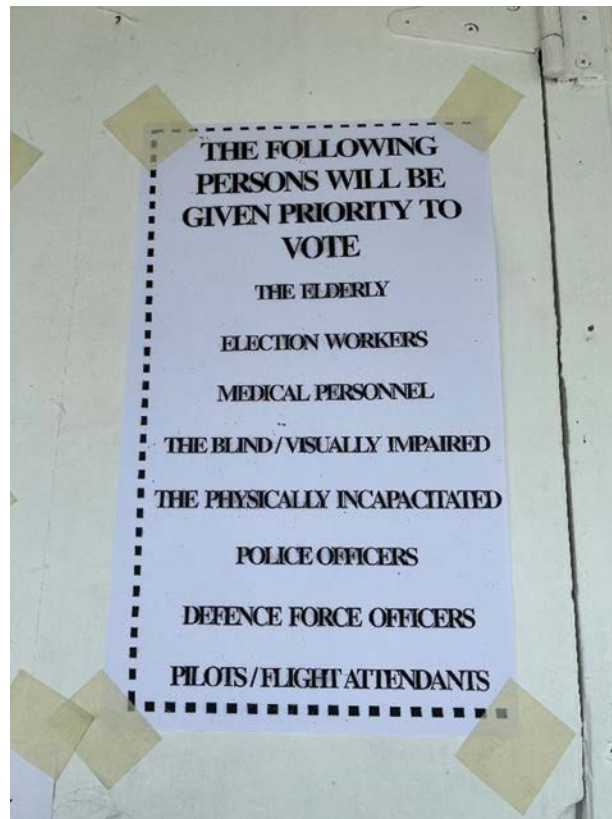
Recommendation	The Group recommends that further training be given to ensure that all polling day procedures are followed.
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For the first time in general elections in Antigua and Barbuda, transparent ballot boxes were used. They were also used in the by-election in the St Philip’s North constituency in March. ABEC said the initiative formed part of its ongoing commitment to strengthening electoral integrity, enhancing transparency and building public confidence in the democratic process. The Supervisor of Elections, Ian Hughes, said transparent ballot boxes are widely recognised as an international best practice and represent a practical and effective measure to reinforce the integrity of the election throughout the voting process.

Figure 6.3 Elderly voters were given priority



Figure 6.4 ABEC poster about which persons would receive priority to vote



The teams observed that the queues were orderly, with longer lines in the early part of the day, an afternoon lull, then an uptick closer to the close of the polls. Observers witnessed PWDs, the elderly and pregnant electors being permitted to go to the front of the queues at the various voting sites. While all polling stations were on ground level, some had steps that presented challenges for some electors. Those needing assistance received it.

Observers saw no evidence of anyone campaigning or wearing campaign paraphernalia at the various polling stations.

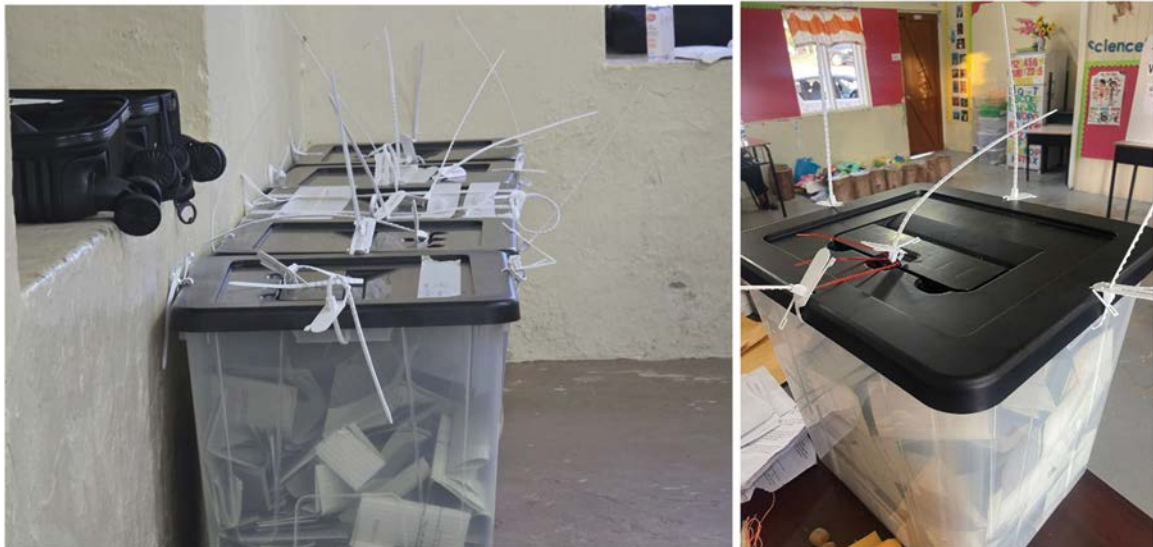
Security

Police officers and constabularies were present on the outside of every polling station playing a non-intrusive role, as electors exercised their democratic right.

Closing

The polls closed promptly at 6:00pm across all constituencies. In accordance with the procedures, police officers were stationed at the end of the queues at the close of the poll to ensure that only those electors already in line were permitted to cast their ballots. The Group notes that the police consistently followed election procedures. Following the departure of the final voter, the presiding officer, in the presence of political party agents and observers, formally sealed the ballot boxes. Each candidate's agent was invited to affix their own seals to the boxes before they were transported under police escort to the designated constituency counting centre. However, in some polling stations, the Group observed that the opposition party agents did not have seals to affix to the ballot box. The Group observed that the polling officials and party agents followed the transporting of the ballot boxes to the counting centre. All political party agents present were allowed to witness these closing procedures to ensure the transparency of the election processes.

Figure 6.5 Sealed ballot boxes ready for counting



Results transmission

The transmission of results was managed at the constituency level, following the protocol established by ABEC. Once all boxes for a constituency were delivered, the returning officer commenced the count. Authorised agents and international and local observers were permitted to witness the opening of each box and the subsequent tallying of ballots. Preliminary results for each constituency were announced locally

Figure 6.6 Ballot boxes are delivered to the Counting Centre



before being transmitted to ABEC for final verification and issuance of official publication on its website. The use of transparent ballot boxes throughout the process was noted as an effective measure for improving the integrity of the election processes.

Summary

A total of 37 candidates were nominated across 17 constituencies, with the ABLP fielding a full slate of candidates. The election saw 63,313 registered voters, a 3.9 per cent increase from 2023. International observation missions, including the Commonwealth and the Organization of American States (OAS), commended the transparent and orderly conduct of the polls. The ABLP secured a historic fourth term with a landslide victory, winning 15 of the 17 parliamentary seats, improving its representation in Parliament from 9 in the 2023 election.

The 2026 general elections in Antigua and Barbuda marked a notable step in electoral transparency, as they were the first general elections in the country to use transparent ballot boxes. This innovation allowed voters and observers to clearly see that ballot boxes were empty before voting began and securely sealed afterwards, helping to strengthen public confidence in the integrity of the process. While Antigua and Barbuda has a long history of democratic elections, the introduction of transparent ballot boxes reflects a continued effort to modernise electoral practices and align with international standards for openness and accountability.

The Group also commended ABEC for providing observers with a comprehensive information pack, which included key details such as polling station locations, the number of registered voters per polling station, and age- and gender-disaggregated data. By making this information readily available, the initiative helped to prevent any disruptions and ensured the smooth conduct of voting at polling stations. This highly commendable practice contributed to greater efficiency and transparency in the electoral process.

Results

Table 6.1. presents the elected members for each constituency in the 2026 general elections, based on official data.

Table 6.1 Elected members for each constituency in 2026 general elections

No.	Constituency	Elected candidate	Party
1	St John's City West	Gaston Browne	ABLP
2	St John's City East	Melford Nicholas	ABLP
3	St John's City South	Steadroy Benjamin	ABLP
4	St John's Rural West	Michael Joseph	ABLP
5	St John's Rural South	Daryll Matthew	ABLP
6	St John's Rural East	Maria Browne	ABLP
7	St John's Rural North	Charles Fernandez	ABLP
8	St Mary's North	Philmore Benjamin	ABLP
9	St Mary's South	Dwayne George	ABLP
10	All Saints East & St Luke	Jamale Pringle	UPP
11	All Saints West	Anthony Smith Jr	ABLP
12	St George	Michael Freeland	ABLP
13	St Peter	Rawdon Turner	ABLP
14	St Philip North	Randy Baltimore	ABLP
15	St Philip South	Kiz Nathaniel-Johnson	ABLP
16	St Paul	E.P. Chet Greene	ABLP
17	Barbuda	Trevor Walker	BPM

Table 6.2 Voter turnout, general elections 2014–2026

Election year	Registered voters	Actual votes	Turnout percentage
2014	47,721	43,077	90.27%
2018	51,258	39,220	76.51%
2023	60,916	42,849	70.34%
2026	63,313	39,513*	62.41%

The overall seat distribution resulted in the ABLP holding 15 seats, with the UPP and BPM holding one seat each.

Recommendations	The Group recommends that ABEC should establish mechanisms to count at the polling stations to improve the integrity of the elections.
	The Group recommends that ABEC should consider reviewing polling hours as most polling stations had fewer than 500 registered voters and queues were not observed for the most part during the day. This could allow for all registered voters to cast their ballots while reducing the strain on poll workers and allow for conclusion of results earlier.

Annex I. Composition and Biographies of the COG

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Hon Dr Pelonomi Venson (Botswana)



Hon. Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi is ranked among Africa's forerunners in the field of governance, particularly local government. She holds a Masters in Administration and another in Human Resource Development. She served the Botswana government for a total of 40 years. When she first left government, after 20 years, she was at the rank of Permanent Secretary. She then was recruited by the African National Congress to help set up local government in the new South Africa. At the end of that contract, she was honoured with a Service Excellence award by the South African Local Government Association.

After returning home she joined politics and rejoined government, for another 20 years as a Member of Parliament and Minister. She was initially a Specially Elected MP but subsequently won three consecutive elections before retiring in 2019. During her term of office she was appointed as Minister to the Ministry of Works, then to Trade and Industry, then to Tourism, then Communications Science and Technology, then Education and Skills, then Foreign Affairs and her final assignment was at Local Government. The Botswana Local Authority Association has honoured her for her contribution to the restructuring of local government in Botswana. She is an accredited trainer recognised by the Botswana Qualifications Authority.

Observers

Candia Dames (The Bahamas)



Candia Dames is executive editor of The Nassau Guardian, the oldest newspaper in The Bahamas, which is based in Nassau. Dames, who also worked as a TV reporter, joined the media company in 2008 after spending 13 years with Jones Communications where she ended her time as news editor. As a senior editor at The Nassau Guardian, Dames helps formulate the paper's editorial positions on a broad range of issues and is among those responsible for staff training for the company's print, online and broadcast arms. In her role, Dames analyses issues of a national nature, ranging from political and business to social and cultural. She has represented The Guardian extensively, both in The Bahamas and abroad.

Dames holds a Bachelor's degree in mass communications from Clark Atlanta University and a Master's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland. She is also a graduate of The College of The Bahamas (now University of The Bahamas) and is a former lecturer in journalism at that institution. She was an observer with the Commonwealth Observer Group, which observed the 2021 presidential election in The Gambia.

Ian-Michael Anthony (Dominica)

Ian-Michael Anthony is a retired public officer and former Chief Elections Officer of Dominica. During his tenure as Chief Elections Officer, and assistant to the Electoral Commission of Dominica Mr. Anthony presided over parliamentary and local government elections. He also played a pivotal role in Dominica's electoral reform process, particularly in the review of the then electoral reform legislative bills.

Mr. Anthony is the holder of a bachelor's degree in law from the University of Huddersfield, Holborn College, in the United Kingdom and a Post Baccalaureate Diploma in Legislative Drafting from Athabasca University, in Canada. Currently, he is drafting a thesis on the need for political finance regulation in Dominica. This is to fulfil the requirements of the master's degree in Electoral Policy and Administration (MEPA). Mr. Anthony is an avid vocal soloist and choir member.

Aiman Rasheed (Maldives)

Aiman Rasheed is a civil society leader in the Maldives. He has served as the Deputy Director of International Republican Institute Maldives and as Executive Director of Transparency Maldives. He has worked on elections in twelve countries over a career spanning two decades. His expertise includes elections, decentralisation and good governance. He is passionate about institutional reform, civic education and empowering the next generation of youth.

Staff Team

Lindiwe Maleleka (Staff Team Leader) Political Adviser, Electoral Support Section – Governance and Peace Directorate

Mukhtar Adesunkanmi, Political Officer Good Offices and, Caribbean and the Americas Political Section – Governance and Peace Directorate

Temitope Kalejaiye, Public Relations and Engagement Officer, Governance and Peace Directorate

Annex II. Arrival Statement

2026 Antigua and Barbuda General Elections

Arrival Statement by Hon. Dr Pelonomi Venson, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Botswana

Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

27 April 2026 St. John's

The Antiguan and Barbudan 2026 General Elections is attracting close attention across the region and the wider Commonwealth. It reflects both the importance of the country's democratic institutions and the continued focus on the integrity of electoral processes in small island states.

The Commonwealth has maintained a consistent presence in Antigua and Barbuda's electoral processes since 1999, undertaking a series of observer engagements over that period. This marks the eighth such deployment to the twin island, including our presence at the last general election, and we return once again to take stock of both progress achieved and the challenges that remain within the electoral environment.

These elections provide an important opportunity to further strengthen democratic institutions and build public confidence in the electoral process. It is therefore important that all stakeholders uphold the principles of inclusive, transparent and participatory democracy, where every vote carries equal weight.

Antigua and Barbuda is an active participant in the Commonwealth Election Professionals Programme, an initiative designed to strengthen professional development, peer learning, and knowledge exchange among electoral administrators across the Commonwealth. It is our expectation that the skills, lessons, and good practices from through this initiative are reflected in the conduct of these elections.

Our Group was constituted following an invitation from the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

I am honoured that the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon. Shirley Botchwey, has invited me to serve as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group for this election.

I am joined by fellow eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth, representing diverse regions and professional backgrounds, including election administration, politics, media, and civil society. Together, we bring a broad range of experience to the work of this mission.

Members of the Group have now arrived and will remain in country for the duration of our mandate. As independent observers, our role is to observe, not to intervene, and to provide an impartial assessment of the electoral process.

In fulfilling this mandate, we will assess the pre-election environment, polling day activities, and the post-election period, viewing the process as a whole against national law, Commonwealth values, and relevant international standards. Our findings will be independent and will reflect the collective view of the Group.

Accordingly, from tomorrow, we will begin our engagements with a wide range of stakeholders, including election officials, political representatives, civil society organisations, security agencies, the diplomatic corps, and other observer missions.

Following these engagements, members of the Group will be deployed across the twin island to observe the electoral process on the ground, including polling, counting, and results management.

An interim statement of our preliminary findings will be issued on the first of May, followed by a final report submitted to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), political parties, and other stakeholders, and made publicly available.

In this regard, we urge all stakeholders to play their part in ensuring a credible and peaceful electoral process.

On behalf of the Group, I would like to thank the people of Antigua and Barbuda for their warm welcome and for the opportunity to accompany them at this important moment in their democratic journey.

I THANK YOU.

Annex III. Deployment Plan

The Deployment Plan – Antigua and Barbuda General Elections 2026

Team	Observers	Constituencies
1	Chair: Hon. Pelonomi Venson Lindiwe Maleleka Temitope Kalejaiye	St John's City West St John's City East St John's rural North St John's rural East St George St John's city south St John's rural south St John's rural west
2	Candia Dames Mukhtar Adesunkanmi	St Mary's North St Mary's South All Saints East & St Lukes All Saints West St Peter St Philip North St Philip South St Paul
3	Ian-Michael Anthony Aiman Rasheed	Barbuda

Annex IV. Interim Statement

Interim Statement by Hon. Dr Pelonomi Venson Former Foreign Affairs Minister of Botswana Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

1 May 2026 / St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda

Background

1. The people of Antigua and Barbuda, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, members of the media, fellow observers, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for honouring our invitation.
2. The Commonwealth is honoured to have been invited to observe the 2026 General Elections in Antigua and Barbuda. It was in response to that invitation from the government, that the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Hon Shirley Botchwey, constituted this Group to observe the electoral process.
3. The Group arrived in the country on 25th April and will remain until 6th May 2026 to complete its mandate. As Chairperson, I am honoured to lead a Group of eminent persons drawn from across the Commonwealth, including experts in election management, civil society, and the media.
4. Our role is to provide an independent, informed, and impartial assessment of the electoral process, in accordance with the laws of Antigua and Barbuda, and to consider all factors that may affect the overall credibility of the elections. We are also to assess whether the elections were conducted in line with the democratic standards set out in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the 2018 Revised Guidelines on Commonwealth Election Observation, to which Commonwealth member countries are committed, including Antigua and Barbuda.
5. I now have the privilege to present our preliminary findings, based on our observations and engagements with a wide range of stakeholders.
6. Our final report, which will include key recommendations, will be submitted to the Secretary-General and shared with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, political parties, and other stakeholders, as well as the public.
7. For a contextual understanding and assessment of the pre-election environment, the Group met with the Governor General, Prime Minister, leaders of the three political parties participating in these elections, the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, police, media, civil society, including organisations representing women, youth and persons living with disabilities, as well as those promoting electoral integrity.

Pre-election

8. The pre-election environment was characterised by sustained and highly visible campaigning across constituencies, with the political parties maintaining active outreach through rallies, community meetings, and media engagement. The contest between the incumbent administration led by the Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party and the major opposition United Progressive Party shaped much of the public discourse.

Campaign

9. The Commonwealth Observer Group observed final campaign activities across Antigua and Barbuda, including rallies and political events in various constituencies. These events were peaceful, well attended, and reflective of active citizen engagement in the democratic process. The fundamental rights of candidates, political parties, and their supporters' rights to assemble and campaign appeared to have been respected.

10. The Group notes concern regarding the regulatory framework governing campaign finance. While stakeholders highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability in political financing, there remains limited formal regulation in this area. This issue has been identified by stakeholders as an area requiring reform and greater oversight. Previous Commonwealth Observer Groups have also made recommendations to strengthen campaign finance legislation. In this regard, the Group encourages relevant authorities, political parties, and stakeholders to consider measures to strengthen the regulation and transparency of campaign financing, in line with international best practices, to enhance public confidence in the electoral process.

Media

11. The Opposition parties raised concerns that they did not receive equal treatment on state-owned platforms, which they felt contributed to an uneven playing field during the campaign period.
12. In contrast, privately owned radio stations and newspapers tended to provide more diverse viewpoints, although some were aligned with political or ideological interests, which could influence how news was framed. Observers did question the long-term effect of this environment if it remained unmonitored given the reality that political propaganda does polarise.
13. Observers noted that during the election period, there were instances of polarised and personal attacks exchanged between political parties and candidates on radio stations and across social media platforms. We would advise that this be discouraged through editorial standards and clearer guidelines for respectful political communication, particularly during campaign periods, in order to promote more constructive public debate.
14. It is good practice for media workers and journalists to come together in an association to further advance their professional interests, including the drafting and promotion of codes of conduct in collaboration with civil society. These codes should guide responsible reporting generally and during elections in particular, helping to strengthen ethical journalism and public trust in the media.
15. We consider that the revival of the media association, which is currently defunct, could provide a useful platform for coordination, professional development, and the reinforcement of ethical standards across the sector.

Deployment

16. Our teams were deployed across all 17 constituencies in Antigua and Barbuda. In these locations, we observed pre-election preparations and engaged with election officials, security personnel, and other stakeholders to gain a deeper appreciation of the electoral process and the broader pre-election environment.

Election Day

Pre-poll procedures

17. The Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC) distributed election materials to all polling stations observed. Polling staff carried out the required pre-poll procedures in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

Signage

18. The Group commends the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission for providing clear and helpful signage at polling stations to support the smooth flow and organisation of the voting process. The deployment of information clerks outside the polling station is laudable. We observed information clerks and other polling officials assisting voters upon arrival and directing them to their assigned polling stations, which contributed positively to voter experience.

Conduct of the Polls

19. Most polling stations were at schools, churches and community buildings. The layout at polling stations observed ensured the protection of the secrecy of the ballot.
20. Polling officials generally adhered to opening procedures and polling stations that we observed were opened on time. Voting was conducted in a peaceful and orderly environment. Polling officials are to be commended for carrying out their duties with professionalism and transparency.

Political Party Agents

21. Political party agents were present at many polling stations observed by the Group and conducted themselves in a professional manner.

Presence of Security

22. Security personnel, including members of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda and constabularies, were present at polling stations observed and maintained a non-intrusive presence.

Participation and Inclusion

23. The Group noted active participation of both men and women as voters. A significant number of polling officials and party agents were women. In particular, the Group noted that Presiding Officers were mostly women.
24. The Group observed that elderly persons and persons with disabilities were assisted at observed polling stations. Despite challenges to accessibility in some locations, the assistance provided by polling officials to persons with disabilities and elderly voters is commendable and contributed to greater participation.

Citizen and International Election Observers

25. The Group interacted with the CARICOM and OAS Observer Missions.
26. The Group commends the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission for providing a comprehensive information pack to observers. This pack included detailed information such as polling station locations, the number of registered voters per polling station, age and gender disaggregated data. This initiative reduced the need for observers to interact frequently with polling officials and helped avoid any obstruction to the smooth flow of voting at polling stations. This is a highly commendable practice that contributes to greater efficiency in the electoral process.

Close and Count

27. At the close of polls at 6:00 p.m., most polling stations had no significant queues. Polling officials largely followed established closing and counting procedures in a transparent and professional manner.

Conclusion and Post-Election Period

28. The Group commends the people of Antigua and Barbuda for participating in the electoral process in a peaceful and orderly manner. We also commend the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission, polling staff, political parties, security personnel, and the media for their respective roles in contributing to the overall conduct of the elections.
29. The Group notes the relatively short timeframe within which the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission had to organise and conduct the elections, as well as the commitment demonstrated by its officials within a competitive electoral environment. We urge the appropriate authority to ensure that adequate resources and support are provided to enable the Commission to effectively

discharge its constitutional mandate and considering that an election is a constitutional right to be accessed by all citizens, all effort must be made to ensure that all players are accorded equal opportunity to participate for democracy to indeed thrive.

30. The Commonwealth Observer Group extends its congratulations to the Honourable Prime Minister Gaston Browne on his re-election and swearing-in following the 2026 General Elections. The Group wishes the Prime Minister every success in his leadership and looks forward to continued efforts to strengthen democratic governance, uphold the rule of law, and advance the development of the nation for the benefit of all citizens.
31. The people of Antigua and Barbuda have once again demonstrated their commitment to democratic principles through their participation in the electoral process. Our overall conclusion is that the elections were conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner. The Group will provide detailed recommendations on how the electoral process may be further improved in its final report, which will be made public.
32. The Group further encourages the conduct of a post-election review to assess and implement recommendations made by observer missions.
33. We are grateful not only for the hospitality extended to us, but also for the opportunity to witness the vibrant democratic engagement of the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

I thank you once again.

Issued on 1 May 2026

Annex V. Antigua and Barbuda Recommendations Tracker



The Commonwealth

Status of 2023 COG Recommendations as at April 2026.

The 2023 COG Report is available on this link: [2023 Antigua and Barbuda COG Report](#)

• Total Recommendations	<u>17</u>
• Fully Implemented	-
• Mostly Implemented	-
• Partially Implemented	4
• Not Implemented	13
• Not Yet Determined or N/A	-

No.	2023 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
Electoral Framework & Electoral Administration				
1	The appointment of a politically neutral Chair, such as a former High Court judge, agreed to by both government and opposition, might help with the perceived impartiality of the Commission. This recommendation was made also in 2018. We recommend that this issue be considered to ensure ABEC remains independent, not only in the way that it conducts its business but also in the perceptions of the electorate.	Legal/Regulatory	Partially	The 2025 COG noted that process of appointing the Chair still engendered some controversy in 2024 when the appointment was made.
2	The body tasked to review the constituency boundaries should be fully independent, politically neutral and sufficiently resourced to do its work in a timely manner.	Administrative/technical	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out
3	A review of the number and boundaries of constituencies should be completed as a matter of urgency in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of voters. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed well ahead of the next election.	Administrative/technical	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out
Participation & Inclusion				
4	The Government of Antigua and Barbuda could consider enacting a gender policy as a national framework for strengthening gender equality and advancing women’s political participation and representation.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.

(Continued)

No.	2023 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
5	The Government of Antigua and Barbuda could consider establishing a National Council of Women, which could serve as a non-partisan platform for strengthening women's agendas, as is the practice in many democracies in the Commonwealth.	Administrative/technical	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
6	The Government of Antigua and Barbuda could consider ways in which women could be more actively supported in entering political life, including through robust mentoring and leadership programmes. The Group encourages political parties to nominate more women for future elections and to establish party-based affirmative action as may be appropriate in advancing female candidature and electability.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
7	Greater efforts should be made by relevant authorities to strengthen youth confidence in electoral institutions and youth participation in the electoral process as candidates and voters. ABEC should consider improving access to electoral information for young people, particularly election reports.	Administrative/technical	Partially	The COG learnt from youth groups that more needs to be done with youth inclusion in politics.

(Continued)

No.	2023 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
8	The Government of Antigua and Barbuda could consider improving the process of maintaining the secrecy of the ballot. Efforts should be made to enable polling stations to be more accessible for PWDs. For future elections, ABEC could consider conducting polling unit accessibility audits on the use of disability-assistive material.	Administrative/technical	Partially	In the 2026 general elections, the COG noted the continued absence of tactile ballot templates or stencils for the blind and visually impaired.
Campaign & Media				
9	Current legislation needs to be strengthened to include limits on campaign expenditure and stricter enforcement.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
10	There should be an independent body, separate from ABEC and government, charged with regulating and enforcing campaign finance legislation.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
11	The incorporation of ABS as a state-owned entity with an independent board of directors governing its policies, operations and programming could help mitigate some of the challenges regarding accessibility, fairness and bias.	Legal/Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
12	The establishment of an independent and adequately funded media council or monitoring body could provide oversight and enforcement of Section 36 (1) of the RPA (Amendment) 2001 and Section 62 (3) of the RPA (Amendment) 2002.	Regulatory	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.

(Continued)

No.	2023 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
13	<p>Campaign finance legislation: ABEC should seek to expeditiously complete its report to Parliament on legislation to govern campaign funding. By identifying the source and use of funds and limiting the contribution from donors as well as the expenditure by candidates and parties, the political process should benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a reduction in the possible control of elected representatives by donors; • an elimination of or reduction in the possibility of illicit money undermining or corrupting the process; • a levelling of the playing field to broaden the democratic process by ensuring those without access to huge sums have equal access to the electoral process; • a reduction in the possibility of bribery in an effort to influence electors' votes. 	Legal/Regulatory	Partially	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this has not been completed.
Voting, Counting & Results				
14	<p>Advance polling: If the police are allowed to vote ahead of the rest of the population, this will ensure they are able to concentrate on securing the integrity of the process on election day by being allowed to concentrate fully on their core functions instead of leaving their assigned duties to vote.</p>	Legal/Regulatory / Administrative	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.

(Continued)

No.	2023 COG Recommendations	Type of Recommendation	Status of Implementation	Comments
15	<p>Use of alternate means of identification: The current system of using only the voter registration card to vote prevents anyone who comes without the card from voting. Persons unable to find their card close to election day may be unable to access the replacement for several reasons, including the prohibitive cost of EC\$100 for a replacement. Persons who forget the card may not be inclined to return to the voting location. It is suggested that a copy of the Elections Record at registration, to include photographs, be kept at the station and be used in conjunction with the Picture Voters' List to allow such person to vote.</p>	Administrative	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
16	<p>Uniform dress for poll workers: It is recommended that all poll workers be provided with clearly marked T-shirts to facilitate identification and access by voters needing assistance.</p>	Administrative	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.
17	<p>Counting in polling stations: The preliminary counting should be carried out in each polling station. This should be pursued as it would ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the count is more transparent; • the count is completed in a timelier manner; • the results are available in a shorter time following the close of polling 	Administrative	Not Implemented	As at the time of the 2026 general elections, this is yet to be carried out.

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