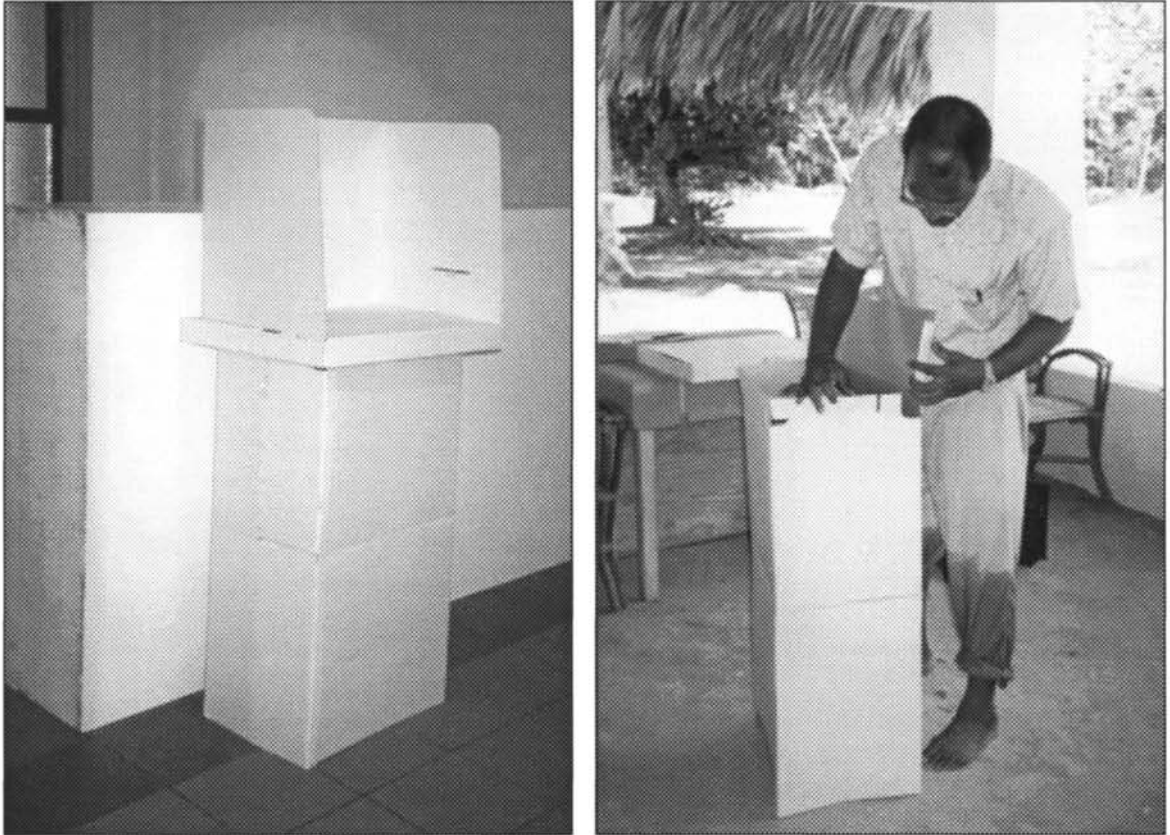


Chapter 4

The Poll and the Count



The cardboard 'snap-to' booths used for polling (above left) packed flat and were light and easy to transport ... (above right) after wading ashore from a boat at Fregate during voting for the Outer and smaller Inner Islands, electoral staff swiftly assembled polling stations

Method of Voting

A person votes by going to the polling station in the district where she or he is registered to vote. The electoral staff verifies that this person has not voted by examining her or his left hand with an ultraviolet lamp. She or he then presents identification (National Identity Card, passport or other acceptable form of identification) to the Electoral Officer. The staff verifies that her/his name appears on the Electoral Register. The voter's name is read aloud as well as her/his National Identity Number, the page and line on the register where the person's name appears. The party agents record this information. Once the voter's name has been checked-off against the register, the electoral staff marks the thumb of her/his left hand with visible, indelible ink and the index finger of the same hand is sprayed with invisible indelible ink which we were told would last for 72 hours. This hand is then examined a second time under another ultraviolet lamp before separate ballot papers for the Presidential and the National Assembly elections are issued. The electoral staff then explains that the voter must enter a booth, mark the candidate of choice on each ballot paper, fold them and put them into the relevant ballot boxes. After this, the voter leaves the polling station.

Elderly people and those who are mentally or physically handicapped can be accompanied by a person of their choosing, usually a relative, and a member of the polling station's electoral staff then assists them to vote. (See also Chapter 2.)

The Voting Process

Polling was conducted over three days from 20 to 22 March. On 20 and 21 March, polling was conducted in the Outer and some of the smaller Inner Islands. On 22 March, it was conducted in Mahé, Praslin and La Digue.

Polling – 20 and 21 March

Mobile polls were used in order to enable the small numbers of voters in the Inner and Outer Islands to cast their ballots. The time and place for polling was announced ahead of time. We are grateful to the Electoral Commissioner for allowing some of us to witness polling on these islands (see *Annex VI*) and to accompany electoral officials and party agents who travelled by plane or vessel with the ballot boxes and election materials. These polls were only open for a short period of time because of the small number of voters on these islands and polling proceeded smoothly, except that on Farquhar and Assumption, no party agents were present to witness the 24 people who cast their votes. The ballot boxes from these mobile polls were returned to Mahé at the close of poll. On 22 March the ballots in their sealed envelopes were distributed to the appropriate electoral districts and counted.

Polling – 22 March

Polling on Mahé, Praslin and La Digue, where the majority of the voters are registered, took place on 22 March. We deployed in all constituencies in order to observe the polling and the count (see *Annex VI*).

Analysis of Polling

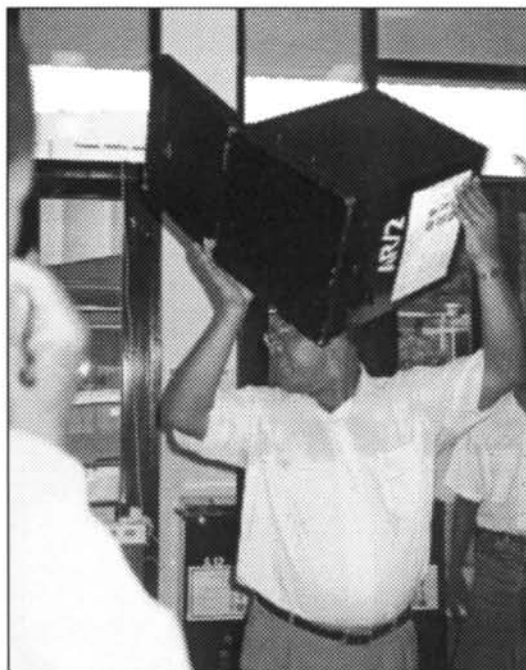
On our deployment, we used check lists (see *Annex VII*) developed by our respective organisations to record the following observations.

Location of and Access to Polling Stations

Polling stations, which had been announced well in advance by the Electoral Commissioner, were usually sited in schools, church halls and community centres. These were well signposted and their location familiar to voters in the area.

Ballot Materials

In the days before polling began, we familiarised ourselves with the voting processes and the relevant ballot materials when we visited the Election Headquarters. On polling day, we found that all stations had sufficient quantities of ballot materials, the voters' register and copies of the reconciliation statement. Electoral officials had organised their stations quickly and efficiently. Each polling station had black metallic ballot boxes with the names of the electoral areas printed on them, two green plastic strips, a pink ribbon and red sealing wax for sealing, portable white cardboard polling booths, two kinds of indelible ink (one visible and the other



Before polling began, electoral staff demonstrated to party agents that the ballot boxes were empty before sealing them



Long queues quickly formed outside the polling stations. In the Glacis electoral district, this queue stretched down the road

invisible), two ultraviolet lamps, a perforator to stamp the station's special code on each ballot paper, and different-sized ballot papers for Presidential and National Assembly voting.

Each polling station was also equipped with a telephone and fax to ensure constant communication with the Electoral Commissioner, especially of the results.

Voting

With few exceptions the polling stations opened exactly on time (7 a.m.) and a large number of voters were already in the queue. The queues in some polling stations remained constant throughout the day. Voting was slower in the morning when many elderly and infirm voters were brought to the stations. We observed an improvement in the flow of electors as the day progressed. We observed that there was an uneven distribution of electoral staff at various polling stations which affected the speed of the voting process. In certain stations voting had to be extended beyond 6 p.m. to allow the people who were in the queue to vote. The set-up of the voting station was left to the discretion of the Electoral Officer and the majority of voting stations were very well organised; however, in a few stations where the layout was less well organised the voting process was affected. The electoral staff in the polling stations were competent, efficient and aware of their responsibilities. Party agents and some of the candidates were present in the polling stations. The three presidential candidates also visited some stations.

The voters of Seychelles, irrespective of gender, age or state of health, turned out in large numbers especially in the first few hours of polling. Some had begun queuing from as early as 5 a.m. Many were familiar with voting procedures because voter education programmes broadcast by the SBC or published in the newspapers were thorough, and electoral staff were also on hand to help others. Some voters had gone to the wrong polling stations by mistake, others did not meet various voting requirements. Some voters whose names did not appear on the station's register were allowed to vote when their names were found on the master register and after the Electoral Officer had consulted with the party agents.

We received no complaints of major irregularities in the polling and overall the secrecy of the ballot was respected.

Some voters grew impatient and frustrated after waiting for many hours to vote. Some of us suggested to the Electoral Officers that the layout and flow of voters through the station may not have been conducive to swift voting and as noted above, improvements were made in such arrangements in the course of the day. In general, voters were disciplined, voted freely, in an orderly manner and peacefully.

Assisted Voting

We observed the strenuous efforts made to assist incapacitated and elderly voters to cast their ballots. We also observed, in certain cases, that these people seemed to have been put in situations that caused tremendous stress. The secrecy of their ballot could not be assured.

Security of Polling Stations

We had been told that the police would be present at the polling stations and found them accordingly deployed in and around the stations to ensure security. No incident involving abuse of police powers was brought to our attention. The atmosphere at all electoral areas was peaceful, including at Cascade where on the night of 21 March the wife of an opposition candidate was seriously injured in a shooting incident. The presence of the police in the stations was not intimidatory.



Electoral staff marked voters' hands with indelible ink. This staff member wore gloves so that her hands would not be accidentally stained with the ink, thus making her ineligible to vote later



Strenuous efforts were made to assist elderly and incapacitated voters though some seemed to have been put in situations which caused tremendous stress

The Count

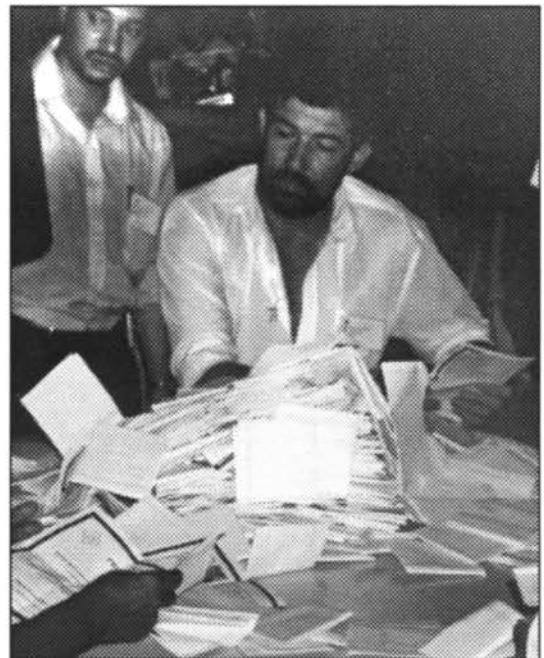
At the close of the polls, the doors of the stations were shut, and the ballot boxes were locked and sealed in the presence of the candidates and the party agents. Electoral Officers calculated the turnout and the ballot paper accounts.

Counting commenced with the presidential ballot papers. Those ballot papers classified as invalid were endorsed by the Electoral Officer in the presence of the party agents and candidates. Objections to decisions were recorded.

The same procedure was followed for the National Assembly election. The votes cast for each candidate were totalled and the Election Station Account form was witnessed and signed by all parties before being faxed to the Electoral Commissioner's office.

The results were verified and aggregated by the Electoral Commissioner before being proclaimed at about 1.30 a.m. on 23 March.

For the presidential election, Mr René was declared elected with 31,048 votes (66.67 per cent of the valid votes cast). The Rev Wavel Ramkalawan of the United Opposition and Sir James Mancham of the Democratic Party got 9,098 votes (19.53 per cent) and 6,427 (13.8 per cent) of the valid votes cast respectively.



The count was conducted at polling stations and began with the presidential ballot papers

For the National Assembly elections, candidates representing the SPPF won 24 of the 25 elected seats, with one seat going to the Rev Wavel Ramkalawan of the United Opposition. The SPPF received 28,640 votes (61.71 per cent), the United Opposition got 12,084 votes (26.06 per cent), and the DP 5,609 votes (12.1 per cent). The sole independent candidate, Mr Marston St Ange got 60 votes (4.07 per cent) in the electoral district of La Digue. The official results can be found at *Annex X*.

The voting and counting processes as well as the announcement of the results of the elections concluded peacefully.