



CPA BIMR

Election Observation Mission to St Helena

SEPTEMBER 2025



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

"We are deeply appreciative of the warm and open reception our international team of observers received in St Helena. On Election Day, we observed a process that was transparent, well-organised, and professionally managed. The commitment and professionalism of those involved in delivering the election were evident throughout the day. We hope our initial observations and forthcoming report will support the people of St Helena in continuing to strengthen democratic processes on the island. On a personal note, I would like to say, and I believe that I speak on behalf of all seven members of the observation mission, that St Helena has seven new ambassadors for your wonderful island."

Gary Clueit MLC, Head of Mission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the invitation of the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Council, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association British Islands and Mediterranean Region (CPA BIMR) conducted an independent Election Observation Mission to the St Helena General Election held on 3 September 2025. This was the second observation of an election in St Helena, following a virtual effort in 2021. The mission assessed the process against international standards and domestic law, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and observing all stages of the election.

St Helena's unique political context, characterised by its small population, remote geography, and status as a UK Overseas Territory, shapes its governance and electoral systems. The transition to a ministerial model in 2021 was a significant step toward enhancing accountability and modernising public administration. While progress is ongoing, further clarity in roles and responsibilities, as well as improved transparency would help consolidate these reforms.

The legal framework provides a sound basis for democratic elections, and the electoral process was conducted in a peaceful, orderly, and professional manner. The Returning Officer and election team were widely regarded as impartial and competent, meeting all statutory deadlines and ensuring a transparent process. Voters demonstrated civic responsibility, and polling staff facilitated inclusive participation to the extent possible. The mission has, however, identified several areas where enhancements could increase democratic engagement and accessibility.

The current block voting system is simple and familiar, but the requirement to cast the ballot in a specific district, combined with limited alternative voting methods, may affect turnout. Stakeholders expressed interest in exploring more flexible and inclusive voting options.

While campaigning was generally subdued, some stakeholders reported that it was more active than in previous elections, with social media playing an increasingly important role. Voters had access to candidate information, but the absence of structured debates and campaign finance regulation limits transparency and informed choice. The emergence of more assertive campaign tactics suggests a shift in political culture that may benefit from clearer guidance and oversight.

Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to full political and electoral participation. While women hold leadership roles and their participation in election administration is notable, representation in the Legislative Council declined in 2025. Addressing these challenges will be essential to ensuring equality and inclusion in future elections.

The mission commends the professionalism of election officials and the peaceful conduct of the election. In its final report, CPA BIMR will offer recommendations aimed at supporting St Helena's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions. Drawing on good practices from other Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, the island has a valuable opportunity to build on its achievements and further enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MISSION

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association British Islands and Mediterranean Region (CPA BIMR) conducted an international election observation mission to the St Helena General Election on 3 September 2025. This is the second time CPA BIMR has observed general elections in St Helena, with the previous mission in 2021 held virtually, due to Covid-19. The mission was invited by the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Council and received broad support from across the political spectrum, with many candidates and stakeholders engaging constructively. Observers were deployed from 23 August to 6 September 2025.

The mission consisted of seven observers, including three Commonwealth parliamentarians. The Head of Mission was Gary Clueit MLC (Isle of Man). Short-term observers were Deputy Chris Blin (Guernsey) and Minister Leslie Bruzon (Gibraltar). Election analysts were Stefan Szwed and Craig Whittaker, supported by two CPA BIMR staff members who co-ordinated the mission.

The mission conducted an independent assessment of the St Helena General Election, measuring the process against international standards, commitments, and obligations, as well as the island's domestic laws. It operated with full independence in its composition, findings, and conclusions, in line with the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and the *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*.

In the period leading up to Election Day, observers met with a wide range of electoral stakeholders, attended a campaign debate organised by the Youth Parliament, and observed training sessions for Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers. On Election Day itself, the mission observed voting across all eight districts of the island, visiting every polling station three times throughout the day. The mission also observed the counting process.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

St Helena is part of the UK Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, located in the South Atlantic Ocean. The island covers 47 square miles and is home to just over 4,000 residents, with some ninety percent of voting age. Its status as an Overseas Territory, combined with its remote location and small population, underpins the island's distinctive political and electoral systems.

The UK Government retains constitutional and legal responsibility for its 14 Overseas Territories, including St Helena, particularly in areas such as security and governance. The partnership between the UK and its Territories is grounded in shared values and the principle of self-determination, as set out in the United Nations Charter.

The unicameral Legislative Council comprises 12 directly elected members, as well as the indirectly elected Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and *ex officio* the Attorney General.¹ Legislation passed by the Council requires assent by the Governor.

Since 2021, St Helena has operated under a ministerial system of governance, replacing its former committee-based model. In November 2024, the Legislative Council commissioned an independent review by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to assess the effectiveness of these reforms. The review concluded that while accountability has improved, overall progress has been slow. It highlighted continuing uncertainty over roles and responsibilities, as well as limited transparency. The report recommended a programme of gradual reforms aimed at clarifying responsibilities, strengthening oversight, and enhancing openness.

¹ The Speaker and Deputy Speaker are elected by Members, but must be eligible voters who are not sitting Members.

St Helena Government comprises a Governor appointed by His Majesty the King on UK Government advice and five Ministers led by a Chief Minister who, together with the Attorney General as an *ex officio* member, form the Executive Council, which formulates policy. The Governor retains constitutional responsibility for internal security, including policing; external affairs; defence; public service; administration of justice and finance; with several aspects of these responsibilities delegated to Ministers or the Public Service. The Governor appoints key officials, including the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and Attorney General.

The last Legislative Council elections took place in October 2021. Following a resignation in May 2024, a by-election was held in August 2024. With only one candidate nominated, no poll was needed, and the candidate was declared elected unopposed.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework for elections in St Helena is primarily based on the 2009 St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Constitution Order (as amended to 2021), 2009 Elections Ordinance and several pieces of secondary legislation, including: 2009 Elections Regulations; 2009 Registration of Electors Regulations; 2013 Electoral Districts (Boundaries and Names) Regulations; and 2019 Provisions made by the Governor under Section 6(3) of the Elections Ordinance to enable certain public officers to qualify to stand for election.²

Other relevant laws include the 2011 Immigration Ordinance; 1989 Communications Ordinance; and the Media Standards Code of Practice (as amended to 2023). The 2009 Elections Regulations were amended by 2025 Legal Notice No. 9, providing for the presence of election observers in polling stations on election day for the first time.

The outgoing Legislative Council formed several working groups to review recommendations from earlier bodies, including those from the 2021 CPA BIMR mission, focusing on electoral reform. Key areas under consideration include amendments to the 2009 Election Ordinance, improving access to elections for persons with disabilities and modernising voting methods to leverage enhanced connectivity. While no changes have been implemented, it is expected that efforts will continue in the new Legislative Council's term. International good practice states that fundamental changes to election law should be made within one year before an election.³

International instruments do not automatically apply to UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.⁴ However, international human rights law may create obligations related to election conduct in St Helena. Treaties that extend, include: 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); 1953 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and 2005 UN Convention against Corruption.

However, some key instruments do not extend to St Helena, including the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In response to the 2022 Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council, the UK acknowledged that implementation of certain human rights recommendations may be limited in its Overseas Territories due to their distinct constitutional arrangements and local governance.

² The 2017 Revised Edition of the Laws consolidated St Helena's laws under the authority of the 1999 Revised Edition of the Laws Ordinance.

³ See European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) 2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters Section II Art 2 which states that fundamental elements of the law should not be changed less than a year before the election.

⁴ UN ICCPR Committee (2015) CCPR/C/GBR/CO/7 noted with concern that human rights instruments applicable to the UK are not directly applicable to the UK Overseas Territories.

The St Helena Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is an independent statutory body established under Section 100 of the Constitution and empowered by the *Equality and Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2015*. It is mandated to promote and protect human rights, monitor compliance, investigate complaints, and advise the Government across the Territory.

Overall, the legal framework supports the conduct of democratic elections. While fundamental freedoms are constitutionally protected, legislative and institutional safeguards remain underdeveloped, with gaps in legal protections and their practical implementation.

St Helena currently lacks formal Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection laws. A 2014 Code of Practice encourages information access but lacks legal force, and a draft FOI ordinance was abandoned in 2020. Although the Constitution offers limited privacy protections, there is no dedicated data protection legislation. However, a Data Protection Policy was approved for public consultation in 2024, indicating intent to develop future legislation.

Finally, St Helena lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, with no detailed statutory protection in some areas. Concerns also exist regarding access to justice due to resource constraints, geographic isolation and limited legal aid. While the constitutional right to political association exists, the absence of enabling legislation or regulations for political parties restricts the practical exercise of this right, potentially affecting political organisation and accountability.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

The electoral system for the Legislative Council is set out in the Constitution (as amended to 2021). St Helena operates as a single, island-wide constituency in which voters elect 12 councillors through a plurality-at-large system, also known as block voting. Each voter may cast up to 12 votes, with the candidates receiving the highest totals declared elected. Elections are held every four years, with universal suffrage extended to eligible residents aged 17 and above.

The Constitution (as amended to 2021) provides for a single electoral roll for a single constituency; or, it does also allow for multiple constituencies with separate electoral rolls if desired. The 2009 Elections Ordinance further authorises the Governor in Council to divide a constituency into electoral districts as 'catchment areas' for polling stations.⁵ Since the 2013 election, St Helenians have voted in a single electoral constituency. However, the 2013 Electoral Districts Regulations subdivides this constituency into eight electoral districts, each with a single polling station.⁶ Voters may register in any district but can only vote at the polling station in the district where they are registered – a limitation many stakeholders say negatively impacts voter turnout, particularly because election day falls on a workday. The impact is heightened by the fact that many voters are unaware of this provision.

St Helena allows proxy voting as an Alternative Voting Method (AVM), enabling voters with justified reasons to vote through a trusted representative. However, this method is restrictive and compromises ballot secrecy, making it unsuitable for many. Interlocutors advocated exploring additional AVMs, such as mobile, advance, postal or Internet voting, to enhance accessibility, reduce queues and boost participation, especially for voters abroad, those with mobility challenges, or residents in remote areas.

When the ministerial system was introduced in 2021, government communications stated that each of the seven Legislative Council Members without ministerial portfolios would represent or serve as the

⁵ The 2009 Elections Ordinance also set out that the Governor in Council may divide St Helena into electoral constituencies and determine the number of Legislative Council members to be elected by each constituency.

⁶ Districts laid out in the schedule include: Jamestown, Alarm Forest, Longwood, Levelwood, Sandy Bay, Half Tree Hollow, St Paul's and Blue Hill.

first point of contact for St Helenians across the eight districts (with one Member covering two districts). Despite this, the system failed to gain widespread public support.⁷

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

St Helena's election administration operates through a two-tier structure. The Returning Officer, supported by three Assistant Returning Officers, is responsible for overseeing the entire electoral process, including voter registration, candidate nominations, conduct of polling, vote count and the declaration of results. Then, working under the Returning Officer's authority are Presiding Officers, who manage individual polling stations on election day.

While the law establishes the Registration Officer as a separate position from the Returning Officer, in practice the two roles are combined and carried out by a single individual⁸. The combined role is held by a civil servant appointed by the Governor and is not a full-time position; instead, it is incorporated into the post-holder's broader responsibilities outside of election periods. While regarded as the primary expert on electoral issues, the Returning Officer may consult the Attorney General on legal matters when required.

All election staff – including Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks – are recruited by the Returning/Registration Officer. Most are current or former public servants. Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers were generally assigned to polling stations in the districts where they were registered, which facilitated voter recognition and enabled them to vote more easily. All polling and counting officers were provided with training sessions with the Returning Officer in the weeks before election day. This training covered the full scope of responsibilities and was accompanied by detailed notes and guidance documents.

Overall, most interlocutors expressed confidence in the professionalism and competence of the election administration. The Returning Officer and the team were widely viewed as impartial and efficient, meeting all statutory deadlines and carrying out their duties in accordance with the law. No direct concerns were raised about their independence, however, some observations were made in relation to the complaints process.

Voter education efforts remain limited. Information is primarily disseminated through newspaper notices and radio broadcasts. Although the Mission noted the presence of an informative YouTube video explaining candidate registration, this was one of the few examples of digital outreach observed. Stakeholders widely considered voter education to be under-resourced and in need of a more coordinated and sustained effort.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The right to vote is established by the Constitution (as amended to 2021) and operationalised through the 2009 Elections Ordinance, which sets out eligibility criteria for voter registration. The practical procedures for voter registration are detailed in the 2009 Registration of Electors Regulations. Holders of St Helenian status who are aged 17 or older on the day of application, and who are present and ordinarily resident in St Helena, are eligible to register and vote.⁹ Exceptions to the residency requirement apply only to those absent for specifically defined reasons and for no longer than 30 months, or an aggregate of up to 625 days within the preceding 30 months.¹⁰ The law also disqualifies

⁷ Several EOM interlocutors expressed apprehensiveness about the system of district representation in light of the lack of more direct input legitimacy and accountability, as well as discrepancy in the number of voters in each district.

⁸ Elections Ordinance, 2009, Part I: Administration, Section 3(1), p. 3 ([Revised Edition of the Laws of St Helena, 2017](#))

⁹ St Helenian status is defined in the 2011 Immigration Ordinance.

¹⁰ Exceptions are made for persons who are ordinarily resident on the island, but are away temporarily for the purpose of (their or their spouse or life partner's) employment, education/training or medical treatment.

individuals from registering if they express “allegiance or adherence” to a foreign power or state; however, the lack of clear definitions or guidance risks arbitrary application, which runs counter to international good practice.¹¹

The Elections Ordinance further excludes from voting any person certified as incapable due to mental incapacity. Such blanket restrictions, even when court-supported, conflict with international standards on the rights of persons with disabilities.¹² Individuals serving prison sentences longer than 12 months are barred from voting. These blanket disenfranchisements, rather than case-by-case assessments or restrictions limited to serious crimes, contravene international standards.¹³ Voters convicted of electoral offenses are disenfranchised for seven years following their conviction, inconsistent with international standards.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration in St Helena is active, requiring individuals to apply for inclusion on the Register of Electors. The Registration Officer oversees this process, which formally began with the publication of the Provisional Register on 9 May, open for public inspection and objections until the statutory deadline of 16:00 on 23 May, as mandated by law. Following the resolution of challenges, the final Register was gazetted on 30 June, serving as the official list for the election.

By law, no additions to or deletions from the Register are permitted between the publication of the Provisional and Final Registers, nor from the writ of election on 1 July until election day on 3 September. Voters may register in only one electoral district. These timelines, designed to allow for gazetting and legal scrutiny of the Register, are widely regarded as overly restrictive, limiting opportunities for voter registration during the critical campaign period. Many stakeholders expressed a preference for extending registration deadlines, including up to election day.

The timing of the registration deadline also poorly aligns with nomination and campaign phases, curtailing candidates’ ability to promote voter registration. Voter education efforts were limited, largely confined to notices in local newspapers and were generally considered insufficient.

A total of 2,041 individuals were registered, out of the island’s estimated population of approximately 3,800 (in December 2024, based on the 2021 census). The figure includes ineligible voters but excludes non-St Helenians. Younger voters were notably underrepresented, a trend often attributed to voter apathy. The linkage with jury service may discourage some residents from registering, given the implications of serving on juries involving neighbours in a small community.

Maintaining an accurate electoral roll is further complicated by St Helena’s unique demographics. The island has a significant diaspora, with many St Helenians living abroad – particularly in the UK and South Africa, as well as in Ascension Island, where residents do not have right of abode, and the Falklands. Temporary and seasonal migration complicates tracking residency and voter eligibility. Limited data compatibility and coordination between St Helena Immigration Office and the Registration Officer may hinder effective verification and timely removal of ineligible voters, contributing to inconsistencies in the Register.

¹¹ See UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25, para. 4 (1996), which states that the exercise of voting rights “may not be suspended or excluded except on grounds which are established by law and which are objective and reasonable.” See also European Court of Human Rights, *Seyidzade v. Azerbaijan*, App. No. 77169/11 (2017), affirming that restrictions on voting rights must be lawful, necessary, and proportionate.

¹² See [CRPD](#), Arts. 12 and 29; [CRPD Committee](#), Communication No. 4/2011 (*Zsolt Bujdosó v. Hungary*), para. 9.4; and [CRPD Committee’s 2024 General Comment No. 1 to Article 12 \(2014\)](#), para. 48.

¹³ See [UN Human Rights Committee’s](#) General Comment No. 25, para. 14; and [Resolution on the Execution of the European Court of Human Rights \(ECtHR\) judgment in *Hirst v. the UK* \(No. 2\)](#) on the UK’s blanket ban on prisoner voting and human rights standards and was partially repealed following the 2018.

THE RIGHT TO STAND FOR ELECTION

The 2009 Elections Ordinance requires candidates for the Legislative Council to be registered voters aged 21 or older. The Constitution (as amended to 2021) disqualifies certain categories from standing, including those who: owe allegiance to a foreign state; are declared bankrupt; are mentally incapacitated; are serving prison sentences longer than 12 months; and have been convicted of electoral offenses within the past seven years.

These restrictions unduly limit the right to stand and conflict with international standards for democratic elections.¹⁴ The ambiguous rules on allegiance to a foreign state potentially undermine the legal certainty and international standards. Disqualifying individuals based on mental incapacity – even when court-determined – runs counter to international norms; as do blanket bans on prisoners, without individualised sentencing assessments or focus on serious crimes. The seven-year ban on candidacy following electoral offense convictions similarly conflicts with international standards.

Individuals involved in election administration, voter registration and the judiciary are prohibited from standing as candidates. Public servants – who constitute about half the island's workforce – are ineligible unless granted dispensation by the Governor, which is routinely provided. Special arrangements support their transition between public service and elected office.¹⁵ Additional rules restrict certain professions; for example, the Media Standards Code (as amended to 2023) requires broadcasters and journalists to take leave if they stand for election.¹⁶

CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

The nomination period for the 2025 general election opened on 1 July with the publication of the writ and closed at noon on 20 August. A total of 23 nominations were submitted, with no applications rejected. Eleven incumbent candidates sought re-election.

To be nominated, candidates required endorsements from two sponsors – whose signatures had to be attested by the Returning Officer or a Justice of the Peace – and support from five additional registered voters, whose signatures had to be witnessed. Unlike the sponsors and supporters, witnesses were not required to be registered voters. Each person could act as a sponsor or supporter for up to 12 candidates, corresponding to the number of contested seats. Most interlocutors described the nomination process as straightforward.

However, some candidates raised concerns about the nomination form. Specifically, although the form required support from registered voters, several interlocutors opined that guidance issued by the Chief Secretary (who leads the public service) unduly restricted certain civil servants from acting as sponsors or supporters, and that an expansive interpretation of rules resulted in a degree of self-censorship among public servants and employees of state owned enterprises. At least one candidate was required to resubmit his application with new signatures after his nomination had been initially accepted. Additionally, election staff and members of the police force are prohibited from supporting candidates in any capacity. Candidates were allowed to withdraw up to the close of nominations. On the final day, all candidates had the right to inspect other nomination applications. Although candidates were entitled to file objections to nominations, none were submitted. The Returning Officer's decision to uphold an objection may be appealed in court via an election petition.

¹⁴ See footnotes in the *Right to Vote* section for standards also applicable to passive franchise (right to stand).

¹⁵ See the 2025 [Provision Made by Governor for Enabling Public Officers to be Qualified to be Elected](#) (Schedule 1, section 49(3)).

¹⁶ See the [Media Standards Code of Practice](#), Section 3.3. See also the 2011 [Media Standards Ordinance](#), p. 25.

There are currently no registered political parties in St Helena, and all candidates ran as independents. While no legal obstacles to party formation exist, there is also no legal framework to formally recognise parties, support their participation, such as permitting party names on ballot papers, or regulate their activities and finances.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

There is no formal commencement of the campaign period, but most candidates started to engage with the electorate on nomination day. Campaigning remained steady thereafter, with numerous A4 and A5 posters displayed across the island. There is no campaign silence period. While the campaign was largely subdued overall, some stakeholders described it as more visible than in most recent elections. One candidate stood out through greater visibility and spending, producing merchandise and securing more advertising space than others in local newspapers.

Candidate manifestos typically focused on practical measures rather than broader ideological positions or major issues, reflecting the low level of political polarisation on the island. These included raising educational standards, offering tax breaks, promoting reverse migration and addressing the high cost of living. One candidate pledged to forgo their salary if promises were not met within 100 days of taking office. This sparked community discussion and concern, with some fearing that candidates may be making promises unlikely to be fulfilled.

Several candidates publicly expressed interest in becoming Chief Minister, a position elected by Members of the Legislative Council in their first session. Some went further, pledging to resign if unable to advance their agendas, a stance that raised concerns about potential governance paralysis. Additionally, some stakeholders questioned candidates' grasp of the governance system, again reinforcing the potential for unrealistic expectations.

A single hustings event, organised by the Youth Parliament in the Castle Council Chamber, saw 19 candidates participate. The event was broadcast live on radio, streamed on Channel 31 TV, and is available via the SAMS radio podcast and on YouTube.

The Mission noted an increased role of the Internet and social media platforms in the campaign. This shift is attributed to the 2023 introduction of the Equiano subsea cable, which lowered Internet cost and improved reliability. St Helenians worldwide actively engaged via social media, commenting on campaign posts. Despite a limited campaign and lack of vibrant public debate, voters were able to make informed choices, with no apparent incumbent advantage observed.

Some stakeholders noted that with 23 candidates and their diverse manifestos, a party-political system might benefit St Helena's future elections. They argued that unified party platforms could help foster good governance by providing a coherent strategy and potentially fostering collective accountability, hence also increasing engagement and reducing voter apathy. Currently, no legislation exists to regulate political parties.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance remains unregulated. There are no limits on candidate spending, no restrictions on the amount or sources of campaign funds or donations, including foreign contributions, and no obligations for candidates to report, disclose or have their financial activities audited. There is no public monetary or in-kind support for election contestants. Candidates financed their campaigns mainly through personal resources, with typical expenditures generally modest, ranging between £250 and £500. The low spending reflected the territory's small electorate and predominance of modest campaigns. However, the 2025 election marked a shift, with more spend and visibility from some candidates than before. This sparked debate, including calls for campaign finance regulation.

The lack of campaign finance regulations detracted from greater transparency and accountability. It highlights vulnerabilities in the political environment and does not facilitate the assessment of the process's integrity. Without mandated disclosure or audit, the scale and sources of campaign funds remain opaque, limiting public oversight and informed voter choice.

MEDIA

Media is regulated primarily by the 2011 Media Standards Ordinance and Media Standards Code of Practice (as amended to 2023). Oversight is provided by a panel led by the Chief Magistrate with two to four other members; no members represent media organisations. One of the Ordinance's regulatory objectives is "ensuring compliance with any international obligations of St Helena relating to Media Services."¹⁷

There are two main media companies operating on the island:

- **South Atlantic Media Services (SAMS) & The Sentinel:** Publishes a weekly newspaper distributed every Thursday and operates a radio station broadcasting locally and online.
- **The Independent Newspaper:** The newspaper produces print editions weekly and maintains an online presence. The community radio station ceased operations following this event; currently, music is streamed online from abroad, with plans to resume volunteer-run radio broadcasting locally in the future.

The coverage of the elections by local media was primarily factual and informational, focusing on official announcements and candidate interviews. While these offered additional insights, the overall content lacked editorial commentary or in-depth analysis. Media coverage was cautious and largely avoided critical scrutiny or investigative reporting. This resulted in a surface-level presentation of election debates and issues, with limited challenge to candidates or government policies. The absence of diverse viewpoints and analytical perspectives meant voters had fewer opportunities to engage with complex electoral issues.

Social media and online platforms supplemented traditional coverage, with many candidates managing their pages and St Helenians participating in discussions across various channels. Advertising options for candidates included:

- SAMS and The Sentinel provided two media packages priced at £100 and £50. They included a half-hour interview and jingle broadcast on the radio, later available as a podcast; their campaign posters printed in the paper and posted on social media; and a short campaign video for social media. At least 16 candidates opted to use these packages.
- The Independent Newspaper offered 20 percent discounts on additional pages purchased after a first full-price page. At least 9 candidates took advantage of this offer.

The Sure TV system broadcasts numerous South African channels, including one dedicated to locally produced content. It aired the election debate organised by the Youth Parliament.

St Helena Government is the main financial supporter of local media, regularly publishing government and election-related information. The government Press Office also put out press releases at each stage of the election process, following publication of the official gazettes, including one announcing the final list of candidates. Outlets' dependence on government advertising revenue may contribute to a generally passive media stance toward challenging government policies or candidates, with interviews tending to be more cordial than confrontational, providing limited possibility for holding political figureheads to public account.

¹⁷ See the 2014 [Media Standards Code of Practice](#), Section 5.1

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND WOMEN

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is not extended to St Helena.¹⁸ The 2009 Elections Ordinance disqualifies persons certified as incapable due to mental incapacity from voting; the Constitution (as amended to 2021) restricts candidacy for those adjudged to lack the cognitive ability. St Helena permits electoral participation by persons with disabilities unless individually deemed incapable, aligning with European Court of Human Rights rulings requiring individual assessments. However, this conflicts with CRPD Committee rulings that any exclusion on disability grounds in any form constitutes discrimination.¹⁹

Physical and procedural obstacles persist. Although ramps were present in all but one location, other hindrances such as narrow entrances and high door thresholds impeded access for persons with disabilities. The Legislative Council chamber is inaccessible, which prevented a wheelchair-dependent Deputy Speaker from fully participating and discharging her mandate.²⁰ The failure to remove these barriers highlights alarming deficiencies in addressing the needs of persons with disabilities. This violates principles of equality and reasonable accommodation, demanding immediate remediation.

No measures encourage greater participation of persons with disabilities. Visual impairments are unaccommodated: there are no braille stencils or magnifying aids, precluding independent voting. Ballot design – dense layout, no candidate photos, similar names and no provision for ‘nicknames’ that are in common use – may complicate voting for some voters.

In accordance with the law, assistance is provided by the Presiding Officers; voters may not be aided by trusted individuals. Although voting pauses and everyone is asked to leave the polling premises, requiring voters to disclose their choices to officials breaches ballot secrecy. Proxy voting is permitted but inadequate for independent, confidential and full participation.

Absence of alternative voting methods – a mobile ballot box, early, postal or internet voting – further restricts greater participation, disproportionately impacting persons with disabilities and others facing access challenges, thus serving to exclude some St Helenians.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was extended to St Helena in 2017; however, some provisions remain unincorporated into domestic law. No targeted measures exist to promote women’s representation, despite Article 4’s explicit reference to such a tool.

Women occupy several key political and public positions, including five women directly elected Members of the outgoing Legislative Council, as well as the indirectly elected Deputy Speaker. Additionally, the Chief Secretary and the CEO of the Equality and Human Rights Commission are women. However, candidacy by women declined to 26 percent (six of 23) in the 2025 elections, and overall representation of women in the newly directly elected Legislative Council (four of 12) remains below parity.²¹ Women are well represented in election administration: the Returning Officer, all three Assistant Returning Officers and most Presiding Officers are women.

¹⁸ Article 29 provides for the participation in political and public life of persons with disabilities, and Article 21 requires parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure access to fundamental freedoms by those concerned. See United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), December 13, 2006, UN Treaty Series, vol. 2515.

¹⁹ Paragraph 48 of the CRPD Committee’s 2014 [General Comment No. 1](#) to Article 12 of the CRPD states that “a person’s decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising their political rights, including the right to vote [and] the right to stand for election”.

²⁰ The incumbent Deputy Speaker opted not to stand again.

²¹ Notably, two of the top three returned Members are women, including the first-place holder. See [CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation No. 30 \(2013\)](#) on gender parity.

ELECTION DAY

Election day was conducted in a calm, orderly and peaceful manner, with no incidents reported. Voters demonstrated civic responsibility and respect throughout the day, contributing to a positive atmosphere overall. Professionalism of polling staff was evident, with Presiding and Assistant Presiding Officers managing proceedings with competence and in accordance with the law.

The polling stations opened promptly at 10:00 and closed on time at 19:00. The Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officers visited each location and facilitated voting for polling staff. Members of the Mission visited all eight polling stations three times to observe the full range of activities, including opening procedures, voting, closing and the transfer of materials.

Out of 2,041 registered voters, 1,151 votes were cast, with 63 proxy votes and four ballots were rejected. This reflects a turnout of 56.6 percent. Numbers of voters registered in each electoral district varied from 103 at Blue Hill to 471 at Half Tree Hollow. The disparity highlights a need to review polling station capacity.

While polling stations were generally well-prepared, several accessibility challenges were noted. The assistance procedure, in which polling stations temporarily close to allow Presiding Officers to assist voters, was observed to slow the process and contribute to delays in busier locations.

Some stakeholders expressed frustration with the requirement that voters must cast ballots in the district of their registration, suggesting that allowing voting in any electoral district could improve efficiency and potentially increase turnout. Additionally, observers noted concerns regarding the legal provision that prohibits voters from receiving ballots if they are not inside the polling station by 19:00. This rule risks disenfranchising voters caught in long queues.

After the polls closed, Presiding Officers conducted final checks and securely transported ballot boxes and materials to a single counting location at the Court House in Jamestown. The delivery process was smooth and well-organised, with no discrepancies reported during verification.

The count was broadcast live on SAMS Radio 1, and observers received reports that many St Helenians follow the tally from home, reflecting public interest and trust in the transparency of the process. The official results were declared just after 05:00 on Thursday 4 September.

Overall, the conduct of opening, voting, closing and counting was assessed as very good. Polling staff were cooperative and welcomed the Mission's presence, facilitating transparent observation at all stages. While the election was professionally administered and reflected the will of the voters, several procedural and structural issues merit further consideration to enhance the future electoral process.

ELECTORAL JUSTICE

The law regulates electoral offences, with penalties capped at fines of £1,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months.²² Higher sanctions apply to corrupt practices and offences committed by election officials, with fines reaching £2,000 and imprisonment up to 18 months.

A formal system for electoral complaints and appeals, known as election petitions, is in place but only available on specific grounds, including offences likely to have influenced election results; corrupt practices that invalidate the election; disqualification of a candidate; or improper election of a candidate. Standing to file a petition is restricted to eligible voters, candidates, persons entitled to

²² Offences regulated by the 2009 Elections Ordinance include among others: violation of the secrecy of the vote; 'personation' (i.e. voting for someone else, other than as a delegated proxy); undue inducement (with goods or services); vote-buying; and pressure or intimidation of voters.

stand, and the Attorney General. Petitions must generally be submitted within 14 days of the official results announcement, though allegations of corrupt practices may be lodged within 28 days of the alleged act. A petition is subject to a £50 deposit applied towards the cost of the proceedings. All petitions are heard in open court to ensure transparency.²³ No election petitions were filed before, during or immediately after the 2025 election.

Objections to the Register of Electors may be raised by any person eligible to vote or the Attorney General. They must be submitted in writing to the Registration Officer within 14 days of publication of the Provisional Register. Those dissatisfied with the Registration Officer's decision may appeal to the Magistrates' Court within seven days, which issues a decision within 10 days. These decisions are final. No formal objections were submitted in advance of the 2025 election.

While informal complaints about the wider election process may be raised with the Returning Officer, the election administration lacks a formal complaints mechanism. It is unclear whether grievances may be addressed through the public service complaints procedure. Some stakeholders questioned the adequacy of the current framework, citing issues such transparency, institutional independence, potential conflicts of interest, and insufficient timeframes for submitting and resolving complaints.

The absence of an ombudsperson office in St Helena further limits avenues for impartial review and redress. While some stakeholders opined that the EHRC could serve as intermediary for electoral complaints, its ability to seek legal advice or pursue legal action on behalf of complainants is limited by funding and other resource constraints.

The Attorney General received enquiries on two topics. The first involved the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) acting on behalf of two claimants objecting to the use of a church as a polling station, citing concerns over respect for different religions or none and the principle of separation of church and state.²⁴ The second was addressed by the Returning Officer and related to a query from a member of the public concerning one candidate's recorded promise to donate their prospective salary upon failing to meet their campaign pledges and their giving out of merchandise. The question raised was whether such a promise constituted a corrupt practice or inducement. The police were consulted and advised that they did not consider the matter to fall within the offence of bribery. The complaint was formally replied to by the Attorney General and the Governor.

FINAL REPORT

This statement is the mission's initial findings, published two days after Election Day. Within two months of Election Day a further in-depth report will be published. This may include recommendations to enhance future elections.

²³ The Chief Justice regulates the practice, procedure and cost of election petitions and related trials.

²⁴ St Helena does not have a formal separation of church and state. The Church of England is the established church. In practice, the government operates largely secularly, and freedom of religion is observed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The CPA BIMR Election Observation Mission wishes to express its gratitude to all in St Helena who supported the work of the Mission, including election officials, candidates and civil society organisations. We are also grateful to our team of observers and analysts for taking part.

CPA BIMR ELECTION OBSERVATION SERVICES:

The first objective of the BIMR Strategy is to strengthen parliaments and the skills of their members. As part of this work, CPA BIMR facilitates election observations when invited to do so.

For more information about these services, please contact the CPA BIMR Secretariat at:
cpabimr@parliament.uk



CPA BIMR Secretariat Westminster Hall
London | United Kingdom | SW1A 0AA
T: +44 (0) 20 7219 5373 | E: cpabimr@parliament.uk
W: www.uk-cpa.org | X: @CPA_BIMR