



CPA BIMR

Election Observation Mission to the Falkland Islands

December 2025



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

"We are deeply grateful for the warm hospitality and genuine openness shown to our international observer team during our time in the Falkland Islands. From the moment we arrived, it was clear that the election process here is conducted with transparency, strong organisation and a high level of professionalism. It is anchored in a democratic tradition that truly reflects the character and values of the community. Throughout our stay, we have consistently seen the dedication and expertise of everyone involved in administering the election. We hope that our preliminary statement, along with our forthcoming report, will contribute positively to the continued strengthening of democratic practices in the Islands."

Alun Davies MS, Head of Mission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Thursday 11 December 2025, the Falkland Islands held its General Election in a calm and well-administered process. Polling stations were well prepared, staff were trained, and election officials acted professionally and impartially. Special voting arrangements, including postal ballots, proxies and mobile teams, ensured broad access, upholding international standards.

The Falkland Islands, a UK Overseas Territory with around 3,600 residents, operates under the 2008 Constitution through the Executive Council, Legislative Assembly and Judiciary, with the UK-appointed Governor retaining authority over defence and external affairs. Eight non-partisan Members of the Legislative Assembly govern by consensus, and the Election followed the Assembly's dissolution on 31 October. Current priorities include economic diversification and infrastructure upgrades.

The election was conducted under the Constitution and the Election Ordinance, supported by related laws such as the Media Trust and Communications Ordinances, all of which provide a sound basis for democratic elections, though some provisions may need review. MLAs are elected in two constituencies, Stanley and Camp, using "block vote", a system unchanged since 1989.

The Chief Executive acted as Returning Officer, supported by the Registrar General. Professionalism of election administration was widely praised. Voter registration is high, aided by linking a travel credit benefit to registration, though modernisation and voter identification could be considered in the future. The final register listed 1,590 voters in Stanley and 239 in Camp.

Voting rights are given to Falkland Islanders aged 18 or over who meet citizenship and residency requirements. A recent Supreme Court ruling clarified constitutional provisions for some holders of multiple citizenships. Still, voter and candidate eligibility rules remain restrictive and some may challenge international standards. Nominations were inclusive and efficient, with 19 candidates standing in total.

The campaign was calm and competitive, with no violations reported. Candidates relied on manifestos, hustings and social media rather than outdoor advertising. Spending limits were doubled in October 2025. Media outlets provided impartial coverage and encouraged public debate.

Women are well represented in public service and election administration but remain underrepresented in politics: only three of 19 candidates were women, and two were elected. Persons with disabilities face no formal exclusion but encounter practical obstacles such as limited accessibility

and absence of assistive technologies. Migrant communities also remain hesitant to stand for office, suggesting gaps in inclusion strategies.

Mobile voting on 10 December and polling on election day were assessed as Good or Very Good in all Mission observations. Procedures were followed, vote secrecy respected, and staff demonstrated professionalism and care, including for elderly and infirm voters. Minor delays and one instance of family voting were noted but did not affect confidence in the process. Counting was efficient and transparent, with results announced promptly and accepted by all candidates. Turnout was high at 81 percent in Stanley and 90 percent in Camp.

Judicial remedies exist but are rarely invoked. No complaints or petitions were filed in this election, and the recent Supreme Court ruling on candidate eligibility was the first election-related judgment in Falklands history. Availability of legal redress remains an important safeguard of electoral integrity.

Over a 10-day period, the Mission met a wide range of election stakeholders to hear their views on the electoral process. We are grateful for their time and engagement. Observers attended hustings, followed mobile voting on East and West Falkland and, on election day, observations took place in all four polling stations, as well as at the count.

In addition to this statement, a longer final report, that may include recommendations, will be published within three months of election day. We hope that these will be of benefit to the people and institutions of the Falkland Islands and contribute to strengthening democracy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MISSION

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association British Islands and Mediterranean Region (CPA BIMR) conducted an international Election Observation Mission to the Falkland Islands for 11 December General Election. This is the first time CPA BIMR has observed an election in the Falkland Islands. The Mission was invited by H.E. the Governor and received broad support from across the institutional and political landscape, with many candidates and stakeholders engaging constructively. Observers were deployed from 01 to 12 December 2025.

The Mission consisted of seven observers, including three Commonwealth parliamentarians. The Head of Mission was Alun Davies MS (Wales) with Akierra Missick MP (Turks and Caicos Islands) and Rob Callister MHK (Isle of Man). The election analysts were Vasil Vashchanka (Sweden) and Stefan Szwed (Poland), supported by two CPA BIMR staff members who co-ordinated the Mission.

The Mission conducted an independent assessment of the Falkland Islands General Election process against international standards, commitments and obligations, as well as the Islands' domestic laws. The Mission maintained impartiality and did not interfere in the process in any way. 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 and attended hustings organised by the Chamber of Commerce, Falklands Radio and the Youth Parliament. The Mission observed the opening of the postal ballots and mobile polling on East and

West Falkland. On Election Day itself, the Mission observed voting across all four polling stations, visiting each one several times throughout the day. The Mission also observed the counting process.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Falkland Islands is a self-governing UK Overseas Territory located in the South Atlantic, stretching some 4,700 square miles (12,173 square kilometres) with a population of approximately 3,600 residents. The Falkland Islands' status as an Overseas Territory, alongside a remote location and small population, shapes a distinctive governance and electoral system grounded in self-determination and a close constitutional relationship with the UK.

Under the 2008 Constitution, the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) operates through three branches: the Executive Council, Legislative Assembly and Judiciary. The UK-appointed Governor – the Crown's representative, sworn in most recently in July 2025 – retains reserved authority over defence, external affairs, internal security and key public appointments, including the Chief Executive (a position held by a Falkland Islander for the first time since April 2025), Financial Secretary and Attorney General.¹

The Legislative Assembly consists of eight non-partisan MLAs. It legislates for the “peace, order and good government” of the Islands, handling areas such as budgets, infrastructure, education, health and economic policy. MLAs govern by consensus and share portfolios through committees. Any MLA may introduce legislation except for financial or taxation measures, which require the Governor's prior consent; bills pass by simple majority and take effect upon receiving the Governor's assent.

The Executive Council is the FIG's principal policy-making body. Chaired by the Governor, it includes three Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) elected annually by legislators, who alone hold voting rights. It includes *ex officio* by the Chief Executive and Financial Secretary, with the Attorney General and Commander British Forces partaking when relevant. The Council advises the Governor on strategy, legislation and major administrative decisions, while the Chief Executive, as head of the civil service, oversees implementation of government policy and day-to-day administration.

The Governor dissolved the Legislative Assembly on 31 October, acting on the advice of the Executive Council and ahead of the four-year term's end. The election timetable, announced on 07 August, set out that the Proclamation and Notice of Election would be issued on 31 October, with polling scheduled for 11 December. During the interim, between dissolution and the new Assembly's first sitting, the existing government continued in caretaker mode.

Recent political discussions in the Falkland Islands emphasise economic development under a 15-year strategy adopted mid-2025 following public consultation, diversifying into aquaculture, tourism, hydrocarbons, clean energy and technology, while prioritising air/sea connectivity, telecoms, serviced housing plots and skilled labor. Key projects include the Stanley Port contracts replacing the ageing Falklands Interim Port and Storage System (FIPASS) by 2028; the Sea Lion hydrocarbon field, with a go-ahead decision announced on the eve of the elections; March 2025 Energy Strategy targeting 100 percent renewables by 2045; and the July 2025/26 budget funding power station upgrades, waste facilities, wind turbines, alongside financing for infrastructure, as well as the November 2025 satellite

¹ The current Governor of the Falkland Islands was appointed in May 2025 and officially sworn in on 29 July at the Court and Council Chambers in Stanley.

licensing, ending a broadband monopoly. Disagreements over sovereignty with Argentina persist and were mentioned by many stakeholders.²

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A number of international human rights treaties which include standards for democratic elections have been extended to the Falkland Islands, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Elections in the Falkland Islands are regulated primarily by the 2008 Constitution and the 1988 Electoral Ordinance. Other legislative acts are of indirect relevance to the electoral process, such as the 1989 Media Trust Ordinance and the 2017 Communications Ordinance. The Electoral Ordinance has been amended several times since its adoption, to reflect constitutional changes and evolving electoral practices. The most recent change took place in October 2025 and increased election spending limits. The legal framework is comprehensive and facilitates the conduct of democratic elections. However, it may benefit from a review in order to better meet future challenges and address the issues identified in this report.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

Eight members of the Legislative Assembly are directly elected in two constituencies, defined in the Constitution. The boundaries of both constituencies are determined in accordance with the Electoral Ordinance and the 1989 Elections (Boundaries of Constituencies) Regulations: all those parts of the Islands that lie within the distance of 3.5 miles from the spire of Christ Church Cathedral in Stanley constitute the Stanley constituency and the rest of the Islands are the Camp constituency. These boundaries have not changed since 1989.

The Stanley constituency returns five members of the Legislative Assembly, while Camp elects three. The electoral system, sometimes referred to as “block vote”, gives each voter as many votes as there are seats to be filled in the constituency, therefore voters in Stanley could mark up to five candidates on their ballot, while voters in Camp – up to three. There is no ranking of choices and candidates who garner the highest numbers of votes are elected. The electoral system has been the same for more than three decades and is well understood by voters and election officials.

Considerable difference between the number of registered voters in the two constituencies (see section *Voter Registration* below) leads to a significant disparity in the weight of the individual vote. There are nearly four times as many voters per elected representative in Stanley than in Camp.³ This

² The Falkland Islands are listed by the United Nations as a Non-Self-Governing Territory, with the UN Special Committee on Decolonization regularly calling for peaceful discussions between the UK and Argentina about sovereignty, while also emphasising the importance of respecting the wishes of the Islanders themselves. The UK government and Falkland Islands authorities reiterate the Islanders' right to self-determination as outlined in the 2008 Constitution Order. In the 2013 sovereignty referendum held on 10-11 March, 99.8 percent of Falkland Islanders (1,513 of 1,516 valid votes on a 92 percent turnout) voted to remain an UK Overseas Territory.

³ The UN Human Rights Committee has interpreted the principle of equal suffrage to mean that “within the framework of each State’s electoral system, the vote of one elector should be equal to the vote of another” (see CCPR General Comment No. 25 (1996), paragraph 21). The Council of Europe’s Venice Commission has recognised

disparity is among the main arguments put forward by proponents of change to a single electoral constituency. However, the latest referendum on this issue, held in September 2020, did not obtain a sufficient majority of votes to adopt the proposal.⁴ Many Camp residents maintain that despite the sparsity of the population, the large geographic area, economic importance and distinctive needs of their constituency justify the inequality in representation.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The law requires the Governor to appoint a Returning Officer either for each or to cover both constituencies. If no such appointment is made, the Chief Executive serves as a returning officer (RO) by default, which has been the case traditionally and also for this election. In turn, the Returning Officer appointed the Attorney General and the Registrar General as Deputy Returning Officers. Presiding officers for polling stations, as well as Polling and Counting Clerks appointed by the Returning Officer were drawn primarily from the ranks of civil servants who expressed interest in election duties.

Polling and Counting Officers received a briefing from the Registrar General, who also provided them with written guidance and was available for any inquiries throughout the pre-election period and on election day. Assisted by an associate, the Registrar General carried out most of the electoral preparations, including distributing information packages and receipt of candidate nominations, printing of ballots, preparing copies of the electoral register and other documents for conducting the polls, dispatch and receipt of postal ballots, issuing of proxies, organising mobile teams and publishing information on voting procedures, among other tasks. All stakeholders met by the Mission expressed confidence in and appreciation for the Registrar General's professionalism, impartiality and efficiency. Retaining this institutional memory of election administration will be vital for ensuring that future polls are conducted at the requisite level of impartiality and integrity.

SPECIAL VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

Several additional arrangements provide an opportunity to vote to those who are unable or unwilling to cast their ballot in a polling station on election day. Any voter may apply for a postal ballot, until the day before the last day for candidate nominations. By the same deadline, any voter may authorise another eligible voter in their constituency as a proxy, who may vote on her or his behalf. A duly authorised proxy may also apply for a postal ballot. After the statutory deadline for proxy applications expires and up until 16:00hr on the third working day before election date, a voter may apply for an emergency proxy, in case of unforeseen intervening circumstances. In total, some 85 voters applied for a postal ballot, mostly in the Camp constituency, while nearly 90 voters authorised proxies, with more than 80 of these in Stanley. Additionally, emergency proxies were issued for 27 voters, all but two of which were in Stanley.

In addition to proxy and postal voting, on the day preceding election date several mobile teams take ballot boxes to voters in the Camp constituency. On election day another mobile team travels to the

that constituency boundaries may also be determined on the basis of geographical criteria and historic boundary lines, which often depend on geography (see Explanatory Report at paragraph 14).

⁴ The Constitution requires a 2/3 majority in favour of change in each constituency. While nearly 58 percent of voters in Stanley supported a single constituency, only 32 percent voters in Camp did so. Similar proposals were also rejected in 2001 and 2011.

prison and health care institutions in Stanley. The routes and schedules of the mobile teams were published and circulated in the media well in advance of election day. Voters who received postal ballots but did not return them were given the opportunity to cast them in mobile and stationary polling stations. The wide range of special voting arrangements facilitated the exercise of the right to vote, showcasing how related international standards are being upheld.⁵

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Under the Constitution, the right to vote belongs to any person who is at least 18 years of age and has Falkland Island status, provided they are a citizen of the UK, British Overseas Territories or a British Overseas Citizen and meet the residency requirement in the Falkland Islands. The right to vote is withdrawn from persons certified to be insane or adjudged to be of unsound mind; those serving a sentence of imprisonment for at least 12 months or convicted of an offence related to elections; and those who by virtue of their own act are under any acknowledgement of allegiance, obedience or adherence to a foreign Power or State. The latter restriction was recently interpreted by the Supreme Court of the Falkland Islands.

In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court disagreed with the Attorney General, who sought to disqualify an elected member of the Legislative Assembly due to her registering citizenship of New Zealand, to which she was entitled by birth. Importantly, the Supreme Court emphasised that provisions affecting constitutional rights should be construed narrowly. The Court held that the act of applying for and receiving New Zealand citizenship in this case did not constitute acknowledgement of allegiance, obedience or adherence to a foreign power contemplated in the Constitution.⁶ The Court was not called upon to examine compatibility of the restriction with international human rights law. While definitive for the case at hand, the Court's judgment may not suffice to ascertain consequences for some eligible voters holding multiple nationalities.

The Mission had the opportunity to meet several young candidates and attend hustings organised by the Youth Parliament, which has taken a commendable initiative to give young people an opportunity to bring their concerns to the candidates' attention. While lowering the voting age has not been discussed in the campaign, these initiatives show that there may be space to hold such discussions in the future.⁷

VOTER REGISTRATION

The voter register, maintained by the Registrar General for the Falkland Islands in her capacity as electoral Registration Officer, is compiled on the basis of the annual canvas, which is carried out by way of a paper registration form sent to each household. Eligible voters must show that they meet the residency requirement in the Falkland Islands and any temporary absences fall under permitted exceptions, such as studies or employment.

⁵ The UN Human Rights Committee has made it clear that "States must take effective measures to ensure that all persons entitled to vote are able to exercise that right" (see CCPR General Comment No. 25 (1996), paragraph 11).

⁶ *The Attorney General for the Falkland Islands v. Teslyn Barkman*, Supreme Court of the Falkland Islands, judgement of 12 December 2023.

⁷ The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has invited member states to investigate the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16 years in all countries and for all kinds of elections (see Resolution 1826 (2011) "Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16").

The completeness of the voter register is very high and only a handful of eligible voters have chosen not to register. This high rate is facilitated by tying receipt of a popular social benefit, a travel credit scheme, to being registered as a voter.

As foreseen in the law, the preliminary list of electors was published in the official Gazette on 1 May. It included 1,518 registered voters in Stanley and 237 in Camp. Since then, over 70 additional electors registered before the election. The final numbers on the voter list were 1,590 for Stanley and 239 for Camp. Overall, the voter registration process was seen by Mission interlocutors as satisfactory, but some felt that there is room for modernising the system.

The latest population census held in October 2021 recorded a usually resident population of 3,662, including 2,089 Falkland Islander status holders and 331 permanent residence permit holders.⁸ If this data has not changed substantially since 2021, it would suggest that the Islands are home to several hundred long-term residents who are not entitled to vote. The issue of representation for the non-voting population was brought up during the campaign at one of the Falklands Radio hustings, with all participating candidates agreeing that they strive to serve all the Islands' residents.

Currently, in order to obtain a ballot, voters do not need to present any ID, but only to state their name and address and confirm that they have not already voted. This system essentially relies on polling staff knowing each voter personally, which may not necessarily be the case now and in the future. Substantial growth of the population since the 1980s, when the Electoral Ordinance was adopted, prompts a question about whether these rules may need to be revisited in the future. Several Mission interlocutors supported the idea of discussing additional voter identification requirements.

THE RIGHT TO STAND FOR ELECTION

To stand for Legislative Assembly, candidates must be at least 18 years old on election day and be registered to vote, which requires Falkland Islands status. They must also meet elector qualifications as per the Constitution, including UK citizenship and residency.⁹ In addition, they must not be subject to disqualifications, such as being judged mentally unfit; serving a prison sentence longer than 12 months; been convicted for an election offence; have proactively acknowledged allegiance, obedience or adherence to a foreign power or state.¹⁰

Some of these restrictions may unduly limit the right to stand and/or conflict with international standards for democratic elections. Disqualifying individuals based on mental incapacity – even when

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<https://www.falklands.gov.fk/policy/downloads?task=download.send&id=219:falkland-islands-2021-census-report&catid=13>

⁹ Members of the UK armed forces stationed in the Falkland Islands who do not hold status are not eligible to stand.

¹⁰ In the 2023 Barkman case, the Falkland Islands Supreme Court ruled that Teslyn Siobhan Barkman could retain her Legislative Assembly seat despite applying to register her New Zealand citizenship by descent. The Court determined that this action did not constitute an “acknowledgement of allegiance, obedience or adherence to a foreign Power or State” under the Falkland Islands Constitution, implying that holding dual nationality with a Commonwealth country specifically does not automatically disqualify individuals from holding office.

court-determined – runs counter to the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which to date has not been extended to the Falklands.¹¹ The rules concerning relationships to foreign powers potentially undermine legal certainty and may challenge international standards.¹² A less restrictive approach would not necessarily exclude qualified individuals from participating in the democratic process, promoting broad political engagement and reflecting universal human rights principles.

CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

The nomination period for the 2025 Falkland Islands General Election opened on 31 October with the publication of the writ and closed at 16:00 on 21 November. To qualify, candidates needed to submit nomination papers signed by two registered voters as proposer and seconder from the relevant constituency (Stanley or Camp), plus four additional registered electors as supporters, delivered to the Returning Officer (Chief Executive) by the 21 November deadline. No individual could appear as a proposer, seconder or supporter for more candidates than available seats (five in Stanley, three in Camp). Excess signatures were rendered inoperative after the limit with subscriptions for withdrawn or deceased candidates excluded from the count. There is a £100 deposit, which is refundable for candidates who secure at least one-eighth of the votes cast. In the absence of political parties, all candidates stand as independents; while joint candidacies are legally permitted, these provisions remain unused.¹³ The Supreme Court adjudicates eligibility disputes but none were raised during the process.

Post-deadline, the Returning Officer validated submissions and formally published the list in the official Gazette on 21 November, alongside FITV video confirmation and social media announcements. In total, 19 nominations were received, with none rejected. Fifteen candidates stood in the Stanley and four in the Camp constituency.¹⁴ Among them, six incumbents sought re-election, including five in Stanley and one in Camp. Despite the eligibility restrictions above, stakeholders, including all candidates met by the Mission, described the process as inclusive, efficient and professionally administered, expressing no concerns.

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Prospective candidates may engage with voters at any time, with the formal campaign commencing upon nomination for the purpose of reporting expenses. No statutory campaign silence period exists, though media campaign coverage and discussions maintained distance in their conduct on election day. Active campaigning, posters and materials are prohibited inside polling stations or their vicinity.

¹¹ See Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Articles 12 and 29 CRPD Committee, Communication No. 4/2011: *Zsolt Bujdosó and five others v. Hungary*, CRPD/C/10/D/4/2011 (2013), para. 9.4 and CRPD Committee, General Comment No. 1 on Article 12: Equal recognition before the law, UN Doc. CRPD/C/GC/1 (2014), para. 48.

¹² See UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25, para. 4. The Committee states that the right to vote “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, Judgment of 3 December 2015, which affirms that restrictions on electoral rights must be lawful, necessary in a democratic society and proportionate.

¹³ No candidates expressed interest in seeing a political party system develop in the Falklands, citing past failures of such albeit limited attempts.

¹⁴ Pointing to the relatively low number of contestants in the Camp constituency, some Mission interlocutors also noted that three of the four Camp candidates resided there.

Regulation of the campaign is light overall. The Electoral Ordinance prohibits corrupt practices such as bribery, treating, undue influence and corrupt withdrawal. Illegal practices include canvassing by public officials and members of the police, unauthorised use of community venues for campaigning, paying canvassers, paying for the display of campaign materials to business owners and misusing public resources to campaign. Candidates must not disrupt meetings, incite disorder or make misleading claims. Violations may result in penalties: corrupt practices carry fines up to £5,000 and a maximum of 12 months imprisonment, while illegal practices are subject to fines up to £1,000 and up to three months imprisonment. Personation incurs more severe penalties, with violators also risking election voiding and longer disenfranchisement. No violations were identified during the campaign.

Campaigning in the Falkland Islands sees virtually no outdoor activity, with an absence of any visuals such as posters or banners. Instead, candidates publish their election manifestos, which outline their policy priorities and tenure objectives. All 19 candidates availed themselves of one opportunity to mail their materials free of charge to households across the Falkland Islands. Some candidates in Stanley relied on chance encounters with the electorate in more densely frequented areas, while all four Camp contestants conducted door-to-door visits in the thinly populated Camp across the Falkland Islands outside the capital, a method essentially unknown in Stanley. Several also organised small public events to present policies, some also having purchased advertising space to publicise them.

A prominent feature of the campaign was a series of hustings organised by non-state and media entities, including the Falkland Islands Chamber of Commerce and Falklands Radio, which hosted three to four events each, grouping several candidates at a time. The Chamber of Commerce held separate sessions for Camp candidates and divided Stanley contestants between first-timers and incumbents, while Falklands Radio mixed categories across its events. While voter attendance was modest overall, extensive media dissemination enabled broader participation. Formats featured moderator-led questions alongside lively audience engagement, occasionally sparking debates among candidates and affording the electorate clearer insight into prospective representatives. The Youth Parliament, which tables annual motions to the Legislative Assembly on youth-relevant topics, also conducted sessions primarily aimed at youth engagement at the secondary school.

Candidate manifestos and platforms addressed a wide range of issues, including high cost of living and fiscal belt-tightening in light of higher spending and declining revenues in some sectors; economic diversification via oil exploration, sovereign wealth fund and tax review; public service size and reform; transparency in Executive Council and MLA voting under collective responsibility; sustainable immigration management amid housing shortages and service pressures; land provision for housing; education/vocational training (e.g. apprenticeships) to attract young Falkland Islanders back; infrastructure (port, power station, renewables); user-pays policies and Sure telecom monopoly review; as well as agricultural support.

Several interlocutors perceived the 2025 campaign as featuring pointed accountability for outgoing MLAs' records. Moreover, some campaign events featured heated discussions and divided opinions on the Legislative Assembly and FIG's handling of the salmon farming review and public consultation, leading certain candidates to decline answering questions to safeguard their potential future involvement in decision-making, following the Attorney General's comments that firm pre-existing

views could disqualify participants. Some viewed the resulting self-censorship as being detrimental to an open democratic debate.

Online campaigning played an increased role, with the Falkland Islands Election Facebook group offering a platform for personalised voter engagement on a variety of voter driven topics. While some content was occasionally repetitive and did not always foster a focused debate, it provided a space for the digitally-versed electorate to probe some of the contestants. Some practices raised concerns about fairness, which may have led administrators to pause the group three days before Election Day. In addition to personal social media pages, at least one candidate used targeted ads as a cost-effective strategy to reach voters, potentially marking a new frontier in local digital campaigning.

The campaign atmosphere was calm overall, despite more animated discussions of contentious topics. Overall, fundamental freedoms were respected, with contestants competing on a level playing field and no apparent incumbent advantage observed.¹⁵ Despite limited outdoor campaigning, voters faced no obstacles making informed choices through candidate outreach and media and other events.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The law establishes campaign spending limits, which differ slightly between the constituencies: candidates may spend up to £1,000 in Stanley and £1,200 in Camp. These amounts were increased in October 2025, doubling the previous ceilings. In addition, up to £100 may be incurred in personal expenses. Campaign expense returns must be submitted to the returning officer within 35 days of the conclusion of the election. There are no public subsidies, other than one free postal communication per candidate to each voter.

Most candidates and other interlocutors indicated to the Mission that campaign spending limits are adequate and fair, as they serve to level the playing field. There is no regulation of campaign donations and no tradition of giving to candidates. Most interlocutors were certain that such donations, even if offered, would be negatively perceived by the public.

MEDIA

Media in the Falkland Islands is primarily governed by the 1989 Media Trust Ordinance, which establishes the Falkland Islands Media Trust to oversee editorial policy for print and radio outlets. The Trust is tasked with ensuring editorial independence through the appointment of resident trustees. Additionally, the 2017 Communications Ordinance establishes an independent Communications Regulator, appointed by the Governor, responsible for licensing and regulating telecommunications and broadcasting services. The Regulator's focus is on infrastructure, spectrum management, licensing and consumer protection, rather than direct content oversight. These frameworks aim to ensure reliable communication, equitable access and compliance with constitutional freedoms of expression, without the presence of a dedicated media commission.

¹⁵ Some interlocutors expressed concerns about a potential conflict of interest in the case of one candidate, who continued to serve as Head of the FIG's Communications and Media Office. Additionally, both this and another candidate continued to host weekly radio shows, which some believed could afford them additional public exposure, not available to other contestants.

The Falkland Islands' media landscape consists of three main outlets: *Penguin News* (print), *Falklands Radio* (radio) and *Falkland Islands Television* (FITV, TV).

Penguin News is the only print newspaper, published weekly, providing coverage of local affairs, government developments and community issues. It is regarded as a source of independent and impartial content, despite public ownership and limited subsidy, as well as a commitment to balanced reporting on matters critical to island life. *Penguin News* published manifestos and interviews with 18 of the 19 candidates, providing voters with important insights into their positions on key issues, including housing, taxes and oil exploration.¹⁶ *Penguin News* is available in hardcopy and online.

Falklands Radio offers regular programming that includes local news, music, phone-ins and community updates. It also airs international content such as the BBC World Service. The station was actively engaged in the campaign, organising three hustings events, broadcasting candidate interviews and providing ongoing news bulletins, updates and public service announcements. Its coverage and programming were deemed to be impartial and revered for their thorough examination of candidates' viewpoints. In addition to traditional radio waves, the station uses online platforms for broader reach.

Falkland Islands Television (FITV) is privately owned, providing extensive local TV programming, including news coverage, community event reports and featured dedicated election content. FITV aired all four Chamber of Commerce hustings events, alongside interviews with candidates. These programmes, available on TV and online platforms (e.g. YouTube), have helped make neutral election coverage accessible to a broader audience.

Overall, despite the media landscape's limited diversity and partial dependence on state funding, the existing outlets upheld impartiality, ensuring that all political viewpoints are represented fairly. Their reporting and coverage created a balanced environment conducive to professional scrutiny of candidates' policies and in several instances debates among contenders were encouraged. This in turn sparked greater public engagement on key issues. By providing voters with insights into the candidates' positions, the three media outlets played an important role in ensuring that voters were equipped to make informed choices at the polls.

PARTICIPATION OF UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Women are well-represented in the workforce and key sectors, including government, business and election administration. The Chief Executive, appointed in early 2025, is the first woman and Falkland Islander to hold this position; also serving as the Returning Officer for the 2025 elections. Additionally, another woman occupies the senior role of Registrar General, with women serving as the vast majority of election clerks and staff. However, women's representation in the Legislative Assembly, both among the outgoing MLAs and as candidates in the 2025 elections was low. Of the eight outgoing MLAs, two were women; among the 19 candidates, only three were women: two in the Stanley and one in the Camp constituency. Two women were elected on 11 December.

Although women enjoy equal legal rights standing for office, the low number of women candidates suggests that socio-cultural barriers, the nature of political life and a lack of targeted support

¹⁶ One candidate opted not to participate.

mechanisms may inhibit some from running. The absence of initiatives such as mentorship, gender-sensitive policies and electoral incentives, could hamper the development of strategies to increase women's representation. .

The Constitution includes provisions that align with the protection of human rights and equality, which implicitly extend to individuals with disabilities.¹⁷ Full and equitable access to the electoral process sees some shortcomings, however. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is not extended to the Falklands.¹⁸ The Constitution disqualifies persons certified as incapable due to mental incapacity from voting or standing for office. In effect, the legislation permits participation by persons with disabilities unless individually deemed incapable, aligning with the European Court of Human Rights rulings requiring individual assessments. However, this conflicts with CRPD Committee decisions that exclusion on disability grounds in any form constitutes discrimination.¹⁹

In practice, while there are no obvious barriers, independent participation and vote secrecy are not always assured for voters with disabilities.²⁰ The lack of sign language interpreters and assistive technologies may further hinder inclusion of voters with hearing or visual impairments. Positively, voters facing barriers could take advantage of a mobile ballot.

Several interlocutors also expressed concern that members of larger migrant communities remain hesitant to stand for office; a gap that some suggested could be explored and potentially addressed with targeted support measures.

POLLING

MOBILE VOTING

On 10 December observers accompanied all three mobile teams serving voters in East Falkland and one mobile team that traveled in West Falkland. The voting process was assessed as Good or Very Good in all Mission observations. The mobile teams generally adhered to the published schedule and the few short delays did not appear to affect the number of voters who turned up to cast their ballots at the designated stops. The polling staff followed the procedures related to identifying the voters and issuing ballots, as well as ensuring ballot secrecy. The process was assessed as transparent and well administered in all Mission observations.

Due to many voters expressing concern that they may be engaged with cruise ship arrivals on election day, the returning officer decided to keep one mobile team at the Town Hall in Stanley for an hour after the completion of their route in East Falkland. This initiative facilitated the exercise of franchise for more than 40 voters and demonstrated agility and responsiveness by the election administrators.

¹⁷ Legislative work on an anti-discrimination bill remains incomplete.

¹⁸ CRPD 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.

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 Ramps were available for voters in Stanley and Goose Green.

On Election Day, the Mission also observed the mobile voting team that visited the health care institutions, allowing over 70 staff and patients to cast their ballots. As with the other mobile teams, the Mission noted that voting was administered smoothly and professionally, with care and patience shown by polling staff to elderly and infirm voters. Several voters in a care home who thought they were on the voter list were not registered, presumably due to family members not including them during the household canvass.

ELECTION DAY

All three polling stations observed by the Mission opened on time and the opening procedures were followed. Ballots, voter lists, polling instructions and other electoral materials were in place and ballot boxes were sealed after being shown to be empty to the first voter.

The polling process was well run and assessed as Good or Very Good in all 12 observations by the Mission during the day. The polling staff followed the procedures and issued ballots only after identifying voters and asking whether they had already voted elsewhere. Proxy voters were found on the lists and several postal voters delivered their ballots to polling stations. Secrecy of the vote was consistently preserved; however, voter numbers were recorded on the ballot counterfoils, which in principle may jeopardise secret ballot. Only one instance of family voting was observed, with spouses voting together in one booth.

A long queue which formed in the Stanley Town Hall polling station in the morning hours was orderly and voters were processed efficiently. Observers did note that arrangements were made to use multiple ballot boxes consecutively, with the ballot paper account prepared for the filled ballot box before the next ballot box was put to use. This resulted in reduced processing capacity for some 20 minutes in the morning, followed by about 10 minute suspension of voting, during which time the queue has grown considerably. Following resumption of voting, however, the queue was processed rather quickly.

All four polling stations closed on time - two polling stations in Camp at 16:00hr and two polling stations in Stanley at 18:00hr. Polling staff did not have difficulties with filling ballot account forms and election materials were securely packed and sealed. By 18:30hr all ballot boxes reached the counting centre at the Town Hall in Stanley, and verification of their contents commenced, followed by mixing of ballots and vote count. The Mission assessed the verification and counting process as Very Good, noting efficiency and commitment of the counting staff. Trust in election administration was again on display during this stage, with candidates not availing themselves of opportunities to monitor the process. All votes were counted twice by the counting staff, with an additional check in case of discrepancies. Results were tallied manually and, for the first time, supplemented by a double blind entry electronically.

Camp constituency results were announced before 21:00hr, followed by Stanley constituency results at 22:00hr. There was only one invalid vote, which attested to the effectiveness of voter education and general awareness of the polling procedure. All candidates accepted election results and no requests for recount were made. Turnout was 81 percent in Stanley and 90 percent in Camp, demonstrating a high level of civic engagement in these elections.

ELECTORAL DISPUTES

While the law provides for redress to courts on electoral issues, there is little or no history of these provisions being invoked. No appeals related to voter registration have been made to the Magistrate's Court in recent years. Candidates have not sought the Senior Magistrate's or Supreme Court's relief for failure to submit their election expenses returns. Nor has any election in recent history been questioned by way of an election petition. Indeed, the case of MLA disqualification on the basis of acquiring second nationality mentioned above (see The Right to Vote section) appears to be the first election-related court judgment in the history of the Falkland Islands. Be that as it may, availability of judicial remedies in electoral legislation is an important bulwark against violations of electoral rights and all stakeholders should be aware of these legal provisions.

FINAL REPORT

This statement is the Mission's initial findings, published on Friday 12 December. Within three months of Election Day a further in-depth report will be published. This may include recommendations to enhance future elections.

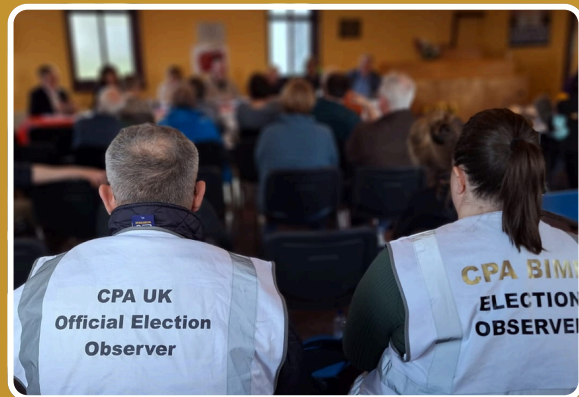
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The CPA BIMR Election Observation Mission wishes to express its gratitude to all in the Falkland Islands who supported the work of the Mission, including election officials, candidates and 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