

## CHAPTER 4

### The Poll and the Count



**MAKING SURE . . .**  
voters checking  
registration numbers at  
a polling station on  
polling day

On Wednesday, 5 December 2001, polling stations were scheduled to open at 7 a.m. and close at 5 p.m. While some of us were able to witness the opening of the poll, others were unable to do so as the ballot boxes had been closed before the arrival of all polling agents. At most of the polling stations we visited, there were few people in the queue, but most persons to whom we spoke expressed their satisfaction with the manner in which the poll was conducted. We were, however, concerned that in some instances the procedures were not entirely followed in accordance with the manual prepared by the Electoral Commission for Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants.

Since the last elections in 1997, the number of polling stations had been increased from 566 to 749. In addition, it had been decided that on average, no more than 750 voters would cast their ballot at any polling station. These additional provisions appeared to work very well in reducing waiting times to vote.

Most polling stations were located in schools, community centres and public buildings. A few were located in private residences. In the majority of cases, they were well lit and adequate space was provided for accommodating electors and polling staff. We were satisfied that the secrecy of the ballot was assured although in some cases this could be compromised in the following ways:

- the elector was left alone in the enclosed polling booth thereby making it possible to come out with the ballot paper;
- in some instances, the ballot box keyhole was not sealed;
- the random and inconsistent order in which the ballot boxes were placed in the polling booths could have influenced voter choice;
- ballot papers were handed to voters folded, thus obscuring the signature of the Presiding Officer and the serial number, resulting in invalid votes; and

- we also observed that where there were women candidates, their boxes were placed at the furthest position from the entrance.

We were informed that in one instance the distribution of ballot boxes was allegedly held up until the register included the names of a number of supporters. It is further alleged that the opening of the polling station was delayed in contravention of the instructions issued to Presiding Officers.

In the North Malaita constituency, it was observed that with the exception of one voter, an entire village was omitted from the electoral list and were therefore disenfranchised. The village was known to be openly supportive of a particular candidate. We cannot rule out therefore that significant intimidation of voters took place in those two constituencies, particularly as those elected were leaders of militant groups.

We observed that in many cases, the names of the electors were not called out by the Polling Assistant and were generally inaudible when this was done. At some polling stations, processing of voters remained slow during voting hours. The presence of security officers, though strong, was discreet in most places.

A few cases of personation were reported, in which case the persons involved were arrested by the police.

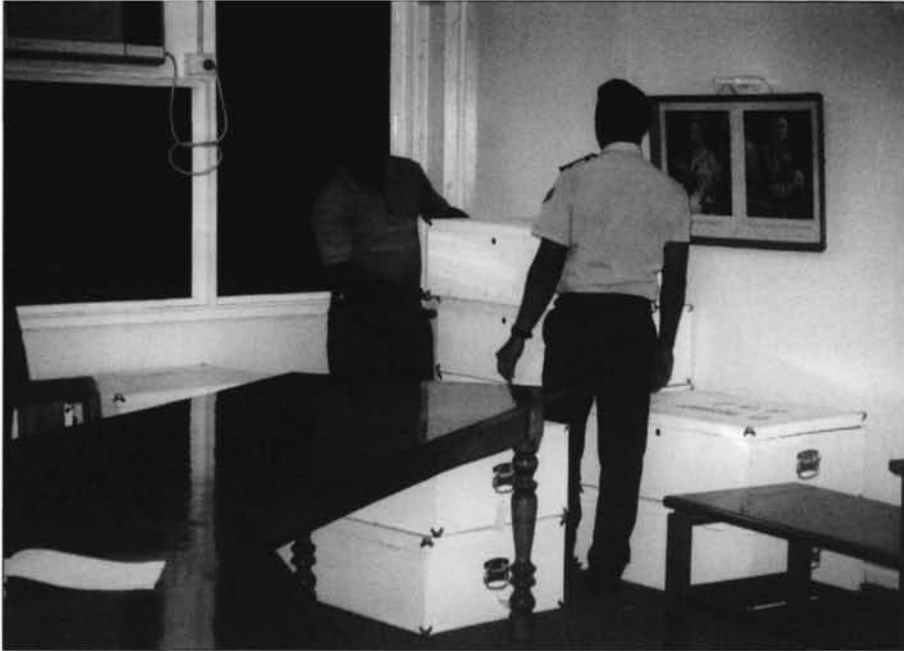
**INK MARK . . .**  
voters had  
indelible ink  
applied to the little  
finger of the left  
hand, to prevent  
the possibility of  
double voting



In Honiara City, the turnout was 32.08 per cent in West Honiara; 32.2 per cent in Central Honiara and 29.39 per cent in East Honiara. In other islands, the percentage ranged from 56.58 per cent in Malaita/Baegu/Asifola to 80.89 per cent in Makira/Ulawa/Ugi.

This was attributed to the fact that most persons residing in Honiara had withdrawn to their provinces of origin where they had also registered to vote. Double voting was prevented by the use of indelible ink applied to the little finger of the left hand.

We were concerned that a number of Presiding Officers and police officers on duty at polling stations where they did not register were disenfranchised



**BRIEFLY IN STORAGE . . .**  
ballot boxes were stored  
in crates prior to the  
count at the counting  
centre

because their names were not on the register. This situation must also apply to other voters engaged in essential services and should be redressed for future elections.

## **Close of Poll and Count**

In most areas the poll closed as scheduled at 5 p.m., although we observed in one case the polling booth was closed much earlier. Although most Presiding Officers followed the procedures for the close of poll, there were instances where the sealing of the ballot boxes was not executed in accordance with set procedures. This may be attributed to the lack of a clear understanding of the procedures as set out in the *Manual for Presiding Officers and Polling Assistants*. The transit period from polling station to counting centre was in some cases well over three days. Counting at each polling station immediately after the close of poll might be quicker and more secure in future elections.

The count, though orderly, was very slow and tedious. Generally, the transparent method of counting the votes – whereby the ballot boxes are taken from the crates in which they were stored, emptied and counted in batches of tens by officers in the presence of representatives of candidates – is to be commended. However, the sorting, opening and counting of ballot papers by the Returning Officer who then passed them on to the Assistant Returning Officer for a re-count followed by an announcement of the total votes for each candidate by the Counting Officer unnecessarily prolonged the process. This procedure should be reviewed to expedite the count. After the count, the Returning Officer verified the election results by cross-checking the total figure with those in attendance. We recommend that consideration be given to the provision of a single ballot box with a ballot paper listing all the candidates.

The presence of observers was acknowledged and warmly welcomed. We encountered no difficulty in observing the count and were very impressed by the spirit of co-operation among all those present.

**KEEPING TALLY . . .**  
counting of votes



## **Security of the Poll**

The Electoral Commission produced a *Guidance Manual for the Police on Security Arrangements* for election-related activities, particularly in respect of events leading up to polling day itself and the period immediately following polling day. The *Manual* was also aimed at improving police awareness and understanding of the election process.

Security and the maintenance of law and order on election day was the responsibility of the police. Each polling station included members of the regular Solomon Islands Police Force (SIPF) and special constables. Members of the Police Field Force (PFF) were stationed at police stations to assist with security arrangements on polling day, if necessary. Members of the Peace Monitoring Council (PMC) were also present in Guadalcanal and Malaita.

The presence of the police at the securing of all election material and during transportation to counting centres, as well as their presence at the latter, lent credibility to the process.

The International Peace Monitoring Team provided logistical support to the Electoral Commission in the transportation of ballot boxes to polling stations and counting centres as well as transporting some international observers to and from polling stations. The Australian and New Zealand Governments also provided additional air and boat transportation which was crucial to the success of the elections.

## **Announcement of Election Results**

Up to the time of writing our Report, final results were still outstanding in seven constituencies. Pending the declaration of the final results, it was not possible to determine which party or group of independent candidates would



**OUTCOME . . .**  
patiently awaiting  
announcement of  
results in Honiara

eventually command the support to elect a Prime Minister and form the government. As these events unfold, we are concerned that the success of the elections might be jeopardised and the selection of a Prime Minister further delayed. Such developments would unfortunately detract from what have otherwise been praiseworthy achievements in these elections.