



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
Sustainable Democracy.

Elections in Vanuatu

2020 General Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Asia-Pacific

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | www.IFES.org

March 18, 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

When is Election Day?..... 1

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? 1

What is the campaign timeline? 1

What are the government and electoral systems? 1

What is the election management body? What are its powers? 2

Who is eligible to run as a candidate and what is the registration process? 3

Who is eligible to vote?..... 4

What is the voting process?..... 5

What is the level of women’s representation?..... 5

What provisions for accessibility are there for voters with disabilities? 6

Is there out-of-country voting?..... 7

How will election disputes be adjudicated? 7

Who can be an election observer, and how are observers registered? 9

How will the results be calculated and when will they be announced? 10

Resources 11

Disclosure:
These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Ni-Vanuatu elections authorities as of March 18, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

Vanuatu will hold general elections on March 19, 2020, to elect its 12th legislature. President Obed Tallis declared Election Day a national holiday in Vanuatu. The previous general elections were held on January 22, 2016.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Vanuatu citizens will vote for 52 members of Parliament from 18 constituencies to form their 12th Legislature. The Electoral Commission (EC) certified 231 eligible candidates for the general elections in early March.¹ The candidate list was published on the [EC website](#) and [Facebook page](#) and read on public broadcasts.²

What is the campaign timeline?

Potential candidates submitted nomination applications to the Vanuatu Electoral Office from January 21-February 11, 2020. Candidates were going to be declared on March 2; however, this was delayed until March 4.³ The political campaign period ran from March 2 through midnight on March 16. Voting will take place on March 19.

What are the government and electoral systems?

Vanuatu uses a Westminster-style parliamentary system with both direct and indirect elections.⁴ The electoral framework of Vanuatu is made up of the [Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu](#) (1980), [the Representation of the People Act](#) (1982), [the Municipalities Act](#) (1980), [the Decentralization Act](#) (1994), [the National Referendum Act](#) (2004) and amendments to those acts. The Constitution guarantees the universal, equal and secret franchise for all citizens 18 years or older, “subject to any conditions or restrictions established by parliament.”

Vanuatu conducts direct elections for national parliamentary, provincial and municipal elections. The president of the Republic of Vanuatu and chairman of the Council of Chiefs (*Malvatumauri*) are elected indirectly via the electoral college. The Parliament appoints the prime minister from among its members, and the prime minister appoints a Council of Ministers from among the members of Parliament (MPs). Vanuatu also conducts national referendums on constitutional amendments, though no national referendums are currently scheduled.

¹ Malapa, Terence, (March 4, 2020), “231 Eligible Candidates,” *Daily Post*, https://dailypost.vu/news/eligible-candidates/article_211f540a-5d95-11ea-8069-ef3866ab52f9.html

² Electoral Commission, <https://electoral.gov.vu/elections/2020-national-general-elections>

³ Daily Post (October 30, 2019) “Local Community Leaders march for a brighter future for Ni-Vanuatu Citizens,” https://dailypost.vu/news/local-community-leaders-march-for-a-brighter-future-for-ni/article_00d40368-fa93-11e9-bc10-cf5b85c1b81c.html, Radio New Zealand (March 4, 2020), “Vanuatu election campaign swings into action.”

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/2018736805/vanuatu-election-campaign-swings-into-action>

⁴ Electoral Commission, “Electoral Systems and Legal Framework,” <https://electoral.gov.vu/elections/electoral-systems-and-legal-framework>

Vanuatu's unicameral National Parliament has 52 members representing 18 constituencies. MPs are elected through a combination of single nontransferable vote (SNTV) in constituencies represented by more than one MP and first past the post (FPTP) in constituencies with a single MP. Voters cast a single vote for one candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins. Vanuatu is divided into 18 constituencies. There are six single-member constituencies and 12 multimember constituencies.

Vanuatu Local Government Councils (provincial assemblies) are elected through a combination of FPTP in single-member constituencies and the SNTV system in multimember constituencies, using the same model as the parliamentary system.

Vanuatu holds Municipal Council elections in its two main cities, Port Vila and Luganville. Previously a proportional representation (PR) system was used for municipal elections, but in 2018 Vanuatu moved to a SNTV system.

Vanuatu's government system also includes the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs, a 22-member body that advises the government on "Melanesian indigenous values, custom and tradition." Members of the Malvatumauri are elected by fellow chiefs and the chair of the council is elected indirectly by the electoral college.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

Vanuatu's election management body (EMB) is comprised of two "separate but inter-related institutions:" the Electoral Commission (EC) and the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO).⁵ The EC is the highest electoral authority in Vanuatu and is tasked with supervising electoral operations. Article 20 of the Constitution outlines the roles and powers of the EC. The EC is comprised of three members who are appointed by the president on the advice of the Judicial Service Commission. EC members serve a five-year term.⁶

The EC is responsible for the conduct of parliamentary, provincial and municipal elections and has a supervisory role in indirect elections of the president and chair of the *Malvatumauri*. In addition, the EC oversees voter registration and maintenance of the electoral rolls and announces electoral results. The EC provides relevant policy advice to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Parliament and other government agencies as needed and is authorized to conduct research and to develop and interpret electoral laws.

The EC has the authority to deal with election disputes at certain levels. This includes determining if votes are void or null, deciding on voter registration appeals, calling for recounts of contested results and declaring candidates elected when they run unopposed.

The VEO is the operational arm of the EMB. The role of VEO, which is outlined in Article 19 of the Constitution, includes administering the budget for elections and demarking voter registration areas. The EC handles technical aspects of elections such as issuing electoral cards to voters; producing

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Electoral Commission, "About the Electoral Commission," <https://electoral.gov.vu/about/the-electoral-commission>

electoral lists, ballots and other materials; and maintaining equipment and providing security at polling stations. The principal electoral officer manages the VEO and is accountable to the EC.

The EMB also provides public education and awareness materials on elections and voting. The EMB seeks to provide targeted and accessible materials for all voters, including women, youth and people with disabilities. The VEO works with the Department of Women's Affairs to develop "gender sensitive training materials" and to promote voter awareness among women.⁷ Because of Vanuatu's large youth population, the VEO also seeks to involve youth in electoral processes and encourage them to be voters and candidates. The VEO is also working to accommodate voters with disabilities and is actively encouraging people with disabilities to register to vote. The VEO notes that it is collaborating with civil society organizations representing people with disabilities to improve voting access.⁸

Who is eligible to run as a candidate and what is the registration process?

To run for parliamentary elections, candidates must be Vanuatu citizens and at least 25 years old. They must not have been disqualified from voting, must not be serving a prison sentence, and cannot owe debts to the government or a government agency or be in "undischarged bankrupt."⁹

The law prohibits current public servants and certain office holders from also standing as candidates for Parliament, specifically:

- (a) the president of the republic; (b) judges and magistrates; (c) members of the police force; (d) members of the National Council of Chiefs, any member of the District Council of Chiefs, Island Council of Chiefs and Area Council of Chiefs, who holds the position of chairman, vice chairman, secretary or treasurer of these councils; (e) members of the teaching service; and (f) members of the Citizenship Commission

In parliamentary elections, political parties must demonstrate that their candidates meet the basic requirements for taking part in elections. To register as parliamentary candidates, potential candidates must lodge a declaration with the Vanuatu Electoral Office and pay a fee of VT 100,000 (approximately USD \$833.13). Candidates must provide a list of 10 sponsors who are registered voters in their constituency and are not family members. Candidates are not permitted to run in more than one constituency in the same election. Political parties may nominate more than one candidate per constituency.

In the case of parliamentary and local elections, the principal electoral officer compiles a list of declared candidates and provides this to the Electoral Commission (EC) with documentation of candidate validity. The EC may declare a candidacy invalid if the candidate does not meet the requirements or is disqualified. In cases where the EC believes that the candidate has made a bona fide error resulting in

⁷ Electoral Commission, "Voter Awareness," <https://electoral.gov.vu/awareness/voter-awareness>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Electoral Commission, "Handbook for Candidates," https://electoral.gov.vu/images/PDFs/VEO_Candidate_Handbook_digital.pdf

invalidation, the candidate may resubmit a valid declaration within 72 hours, provided there are at least 14 days before Election Day. If the candidate is declared invalid by the EC for other reasons, or if the candidate dies before Election Day, another candidate may lodge a declaration – again within 72 hours and at least 14 days before the election.

Who is eligible to vote?

Vanuatu citizens who are 18 years or older by the qualifying date for registration updates – six weeks before Election Day – are eligible to vote.¹⁰ Voting is not compulsory in Vanuatu. Voters must possess an electoral card to vote.¹¹ According to the Electoral Commission (EC) voter guide, the new national photo ID is not required to vote.

Continuous voter registration was established in Vanuatu in 2017 and voters who registered in previous elections remain registered. To improve the voter registration process and build trust, the government decided to link voter registration data to ongoing digitization of civil registration data. In 2019, Vanuatu began a voter registration drive and national ID process to register voters and provide new national IDs to citizens.¹² These changes were in line with recommendations from the Commonwealth Observation Group, which observed the 2016 snap elections and made recommendations for improving the voter roll and registration process.¹³ The Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) and Civil Status Office collaborated on a civic and voter registration effort that aimed to register 160,000 citizens to vote. Teams set up at mobile registration centers established at potential polling stations or other identified locations. During the voter registration period, new national ID cards were provided free of charge to those who registered.

To register to vote, voters must produce their birth certificate and two witnesses living in the same area who also have birth certificates. Voter registration is carried out throughout the year at the VEO office in Port Vila. During the mobile registration process, voters were permitted to register to vote at any registration center, provided they had proof of residency in their home polling district. The VEO, however, strongly recommends that voters complete their voter registration in the district where they intend to vote. A voter must reside in a polling district for at least three months at the time of preparation of the electoral list to register for the electoral list in that district. In case of doubts over a person's registration, the dispute will be referred to the principal electoral officer.

The number of registered voters is not publicly available prior to the 2020 elections. In 2016, there were 200,159 registered voters, just over half of whom voted in the election.¹⁴ In 2019, the EC sought to

¹⁰ Electoral Commission, "How to Register," <https://electoral.gov.vu/voters/how-to-register>. For this year, the registration deadline was February 5.

¹¹ The electoral card is not a photo ID.

¹² United Nations Development Programme (June 24, 2019), "Extra funding boosts efforts to provide ID Cards for all Vanuatu citizens," <https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/extra-funding-boosts-efforts-to-provide-id-cards-for-all-vanuatu-citizens.html>

¹³ The Commonwealth (2016), "Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group: Vanuatu General Election 22 January 2016," http://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/VanuatuCOGReport_2016.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/230/>, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/304/40>

register at least 160,000 new voters and conducted registration drives at several locations throughout Vanuatu, so the number of registered voters in 2020 will likely exceed the 2016 number.

What is the voting process?

Voting procedures for Vanuatu are the same for national, provincial and municipal elections. Voting takes place from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The presiding officer of a polling station has the option to extend voting hours, if voters are still waiting, after consultation with polling station clerks and candidate agents.

There is generally at least one polling station in each district, with additional polling stations in larger urban districts. Polling stations, which are approved by the Electoral Commission (EC) after consultation with the principal electoral officer, are generally in schools and community centers. Locations of polling stations are published in the *Vanuatu Official Gazette*. A full list of the 352 polling stations for the 2020 general elections is available on the [EC website](#). Polling stations are managed by presiding officers and police provide security.

Prior to the start of voting, elections officials are required to display empty ballot boxes to anyone present, including candidates, their agents and electoral observers. Ballot boxes are then locked for the duration of the voting period. To vote, a voter presents his or her electoral card to a polling clerk who checks his or her name on the electoral roll.¹⁵ The clerk also checks the voter's electoral card and finger to verify that he or she has not voted yet in this election. The polling clerk provides a booklet of ballot papers and an envelope. In a voting booth, the voter selects the ballot paper of his or her candidate and places it in the envelope. The voter deposits his or her envelope in the ballot box and discards unused ballot papers in a specially marked location. The polling clerk marks the voter's electoral card with a government stamp and inks his or her finger with indelible ink to demonstrate proof of voting and prevent electoral fraud.

During vote counting, the presiding officer has the authority to declare ballots invalid. Ballots are considered invalid or void if: "(a) any writing or mark in the ballot identifies the voter; (b) the ballot is not in an envelope or is in a non-official envelope; or (c) the ballot is in an envelope containing more than one ballot paper."¹⁶

What is the level of women's representation?

Civil society organizations have continually advocated for greater gender equality in politics and elections in Vanuatu and policies to support women politicians.¹⁷ However, these efforts have thus far had limited success.¹⁸ There are currently no women members of Parliament (MPs) in Vanuatu and

¹⁵ Electoral Commission, "How to vote," <https://electoral.gov.vu/voters/how-to-vote>

¹⁶ Electoral Commission, "How are ballots counted," <https://electoral.gov.vu/voters/how-are-ballots-counted>

¹⁷ Bjornum, Yasmine (March 14, 2020), "'2020 will be my year': the push to elect women in Vanuatu, a nation with no female MPs," *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/15/2020-will-be-my-year-the-push-to-elect-women-in-vanuatu-a-nation-with-no-female-mps>

¹⁸ Radio New Zealand (August 15, 2019), "Campaign pushing votes for women launches in Vanuatu," <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/396749/campaign-pushing-votes-for-women-launches-in-vanuatu>

there have only been five women MPs since independence.¹⁹ While a record 17 women ran for Parliament in 2012, no women candidates were elected to the National Parliament in 2012 or 2016.²⁰ This year, at least 11 women are running for MP, and more women candidates may be declared as the candidate list is finalized.²¹

The “Vot Woman” campaign, supported by civil society, has pushed for 50 percent reserved seats for women in Parliament or a gender quota.²² Municipal Councils have had 30 percent reserved seats for women for two terms, and women politicians have advocated similar measures in Parliament to increase gender equality.²³ However, some politicians and political parties have resisted calls for greater gender inclusion and accused international civil society of “interfering” in the country’s politics.²⁴ As a result, some women politicians have chosen to run as independents and to seek support outside of the political party system, which has not been supportive of women candidates.²⁵

The Electoral Commission urged women to apply to be candidates in its voter booklet and has featured information for women voters on its website.

What provisions for accessibility are there for voters with disabilities?

Voters with disabilities or who are ill can apply for a proxy vote to allow someone to vote in their place. Proxy vote applications were due by March 4, 2020. The proxy voter must also be a registered voter. To apply to vote by proxy, a voter must provide proof to a registration officer that it is impossible for him or her to go to the polling place and must complete a form requesting a proxy vote. On Election Day, the proxy voter will take the voter’s electoral card to the polling station and vote on that person’s behalf.²⁶

¹⁹ Baker, Kerryn, (November 11, 2019) “Reserved seats in Vanuatu: gender equality and ‘foreign interference,’” <https://devpolicy.org/reserved-seats-in-vanuatu-gender-equality-and-foreign-interference-20191112/>

²⁰ United Nations Women, (October 30, 2012), “Record number of women candidates in Vanuatu elections,” <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2012/10/record-number-of-women-candidates-in-vanuatu-elections>

²¹ Ligo, Goodwin, (February 15, 2020), “More women candidates expected,” https://dailypost.vu/news/more-women-candidates-expected/article_afbb9e6c-5043-11ea-93cd-5fa324fe8106.html; Selmen, Harrison (March 4, 2020), “Tough battle for Vanuatu women candidates ahead,” *Islands Business*, <https://islandsbusiness.com/breaking-news/item/2725-tough-battle-for-vanuatu-women-candidates-ahead.html>

²² Radio New Zealand (November 4, 2019), “Vanuatu women urged to unite, elect female MPs,” <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/402494/vanuatu-women-urged-to-unite-elect-female-mps>

²³ Daily Post (October 30, 2019) “Local Community Leaders march for a brighter future for Ni-Vanuatu Citizens,” https://dailypost.vu/news/local-community-leaders-march-for-a-brighter-future-for-ni/article_00d40368-fa93-11e9-bc10-cf5b85c1b81c.html, Radio New Zealand (November 4, 2019), “Vanuatu women urged to unite, elect female MPs,” <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/402494/vanuatu-women-urged-to-unite-elect-female-mps>,

²⁴ Baker, Kerryn, (November 11, 2019) “Reserved seats in Vanuatu: gender equality and “foreign interference,”” <https://devpolicy.org/reserved-seats-in-vanuatu-gender-equality-and-foreign-interference-20191112/>,

Radio New Zealand (November 2, 2019), “Vanuatu scolds foreign NGOs over political interference,” <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/402354/vanuatu-scolds-foreign-ngos-over-political-interference>

²⁵ Selmen, (2020), “Tough battle for Vanuatu women candidates ahead,” <https://islandsbusiness.com/breaking-news/item/2725-tough-battle-for-vanuatu-women-candidates-ahead.html>

²⁶ International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019, “IFES Pacific Islands Good Governance Initiative Country Election Commission Information and Observer Recommendations.”

The electoral law provides for penalties for electoral officers who refuse any person with a disability access to assisted voting. The law also punishes electoral officers who allow voters without disabilities access to assisted voting.

The voter education booklet produced by the Vanuatu Electoral Office suggests that voters assist anyone they know who is “disabled and cannot move” to vote on Election Day because it is “the right of every man and woman” to take part in elections.²⁷ The booklet also suggests that people inform those who cannot read about the election and voting and notes that literacy is not required to vote.

Disabled people’s organizations and civil society groups in Vanuatu have urged greater support for voters with disabilities. Disability advocates asked that electoral officials provide inclusive campaign materials, transportation for voters with disabilities and reasonable accommodations.

Is there out-of-country voting?

Vanuatu allows for out-of-country voter registration and voting. Voters who wish to register to vote while living abroad must apply to the principal electoral officer (PEO) and provide proof that they are living outside of the country and the reason why.²⁸ The PEO has the authority to decide on the registration and register the voter in the constituency in which they would have voted had they been in Vanuatu.

Voters living outside of their home districts, including abroad, may register proxy voters to cast votes on their behalf. A voter must have proven that he or she is unable to go to the polling station in his or her home district and have applied for a proxy vote by March 4. On Election Day, the proxy voter, who must also be a registered voter, takes the voter’s electoral card to the polling station and casts the proxy vote.

Currently, there is only one out-of-country polling station in Noumea, New Caledonia. The Electoral Commission indicates that there are plans to establish additional out-of-country polling stations in the future.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The legal framework in Vanuatu establishes several different types of election disputes and resolution mechanisms.²⁹ These are:

Objections: Voters who believe they have been incorrectly omitted from an electoral list may lodge an objection to the principal electoral officer (PEO) with evidence for their claims. Voters may appeal PEO decisions, but the Electoral Commission’s (EC) ruling cannot be challenged in court.

²⁷ Electoral Commission, *My Election Week by Week*,

https://electoral.gov.vu/images/PDFs/VEO_My_Election_handbook_EMAIL.pdf

²⁸ Electoral Commission, “How to Register,” <https://electoral.gov.vu/voters/how-to-register>

²⁹ Electoral Commission, “Complaints,” <https://electoral.gov.vu/complaints>

Complaints Against Electoral Officers: Stakeholders may lodge complaints against electoral officers for several offenses, including:

- Entering false information into the record;
- Preventing registered voters from voting;
- Refusing to count any valid ballot;
- Refusing to allow voters with disabilities access to assisted voting;
- Allowing voters without disabilities access to assisted voting; and
- Any other act that is a breach of official duty.

Elections complaints are handled through the regular court system. Complaints must be lodged no later than 21 days from the date of the alleged offense. Officials who are found guilty face imprisonment, fines or both.

Electoral Offenses: Vanuatu law prohibits a number of electoral offenses. These include:

- Defacing or destroying cards, documents and notices;
- Forging declaration of candidatures;
- Unlawfully possessing ballot papers;
- Destroying or interfering with sensitive electoral materials;
- Voting in an unauthorized manner, such as in a nondesignated polling station or voting more than once;
- Impersonating another person while voting, whether that other person is living, dead or fictitious;
- Bribery;
- “Treating:” giving, providing or paying voters for the purpose of influencing voters;
- Undue influence;
- Making false statements about candidates;
- Engaging in activities prohibited on Election Day; and
- Compromising the secrecy of the vote.³⁰

People accused of electoral offenses have the right to assemble a defense and a conviction must meet the standard of criminal proof. The EC outlines main electoral offenses, including voting fraud, bribery, making false statements about candidates or interfering with elections officials, elections materials or ballot boxes. The EC voter education booklet reminds voters that bribery is an offense and that both voters who accept bribes and anyone who attempts to bribe them face penalties.

The law allows for an appeal process.

Electoral Petitions: An electoral petition is a legal challenge to official election results. Electoral petitions are heard directly by the Supreme Court. Any registered voter or candidate may present an electoral petition. Petitions must be presented in writing within 21 days of the publication of election results in

³⁰ Ibid

the *Vanuatu Official Gazette*, a publicly available documentation of Vanuatu law and official statements. To lodge a petition, a person must pay a deposit of VT 20,000 (approximately USD \$166.67) for security costs. The deposit is returned after the petition is heard, though the Supreme Court may deduct any costs the petitioner has been ordered to pay from the deposit.

The Supreme Court may take several actions, including dismissing the petition and declaring election results valid, declaring a different candidate the valid winner or invalidating the election. The Supreme Court may declare the election invalid if it is proven that:

- The result of the election was affected by bribery, treating, undue influence or other misconduct;
- There was noncompliance with the law in the conduct of polling or any other matter that affected the election results;
- The candidate was not qualified as a candidate at the time of the election; or
- There was an irregularity in the tallying of votes that affected the outcome of the election.

Additionally, the election of a candidate may be declared invalid if that candidate is convicted of corruption or conspiring to commit corruption. There are no legal provisions for appealing Supreme Court decisions on electoral petitions.

Who can be an election observer, and how are observers registered?

Vanuatu law allows for international and domestic election observers, as election observation is an important “exercise in support of democracy.”³¹ The Electoral Commission (EC) and Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) note that they “invite” domestic and international groups and organizations as observers and that groups that wish to observe elections must apply to the VEO for permission and accreditation.

According to the EC, electoral observers have the right to observe election preparations prior to polling and in polling stations, including ballot counting at the polling station, and to ask questions of poll workers as long as this does not interfere with the duties of the workers or conduct of the polling station. Election observers are required to respect the laws of Vanuatu, not interfere with the work of election officials, act impartially and objectively, and not exhibit bias or preference in the elections. They must also respect local customs. Elections observers are specifically prohibited from interfering with conduct of election officers, physically handling polling materials without permission, encouraging voters inside the polling station to vote in a certain way or assisting in vote counting.

Groups that work as election observers much provide an observation report, including recommendations, to the EC and VEO upon completion of the observation. The Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 54 independent former British colonies, has provided international elections observers for past elections in Vanuatu.³² As of early March, no information was publicly available about international observation missions for the 2020 Vanuatu elections.

³¹ Electoral Commission, “Electoral Observers,” <https://electoral.gov.vu/media-observers/electoral-observers>

³²The Commonwealth, “Elections Observation,” <https://thecommonwealth.org/elections-observation>

Candidates and political parties are also permitted to observe elections and to nominate agents or representatives to observe at polling stations. Candidate agents observe and monitor the voting process, ensuring that voting takes place in accordance with the law. They also represent the interests of their parties and candidates and are permitted to make comments and lodge disputes regarding the voting process. They are prohibited from campaigning in polling stations and risk losing accreditation if they violate this rule.

Candidates may select two agents for each polling station. However, only one agent is permitted to be in the polling station at a given time. Agents may be authorized for more than one candidate and to observe at more than one polling station. Candidates may not serve as candidate agents and are therefore not permitted to observe inside polling stations, except to cast their own ballots. Candidates are permitted to be present at vote counting.

How will the results be calculated and when will they be announced?

Ballots are counted at each polling station at the close of polling. During vote counting, the presiding officer has the authority to declare ballots invalid. Ballots are considered invalid or void if: “(a) any writing or mark in the ballot identifies the voter; (b) the ballot is not in an envelope or is in a non-official envelope; or (c) the ballot is in an envelope containing more than one ballot paper.”³³

At the end of the count, the presiding officer at the polling station announces the number of votes cast for each candidate. Upon declaration that vote counting is complete, the presiding officer provides an official report documenting the number of registered voters, number who voted, number of invalid ballots, number of votes cast for each candidate and any other information the principal electoral officer may require. Candidates or candidate agents also countersign the report. The constituency returning officer transfers the results to the Electoral Commission (EC).

The EC conducts a tally of results at the EC headquarters in Port Vila. Candidates who won the highest number of votes win the corresponding seats and are declared elected. As soon as possible after the election, the EC announces the election results and the total number of votes cast for each candidate in each constituency. Results are circulated by the EC and published in the *Vanuatu Official Gazette*. In 2016, election results were released within a week of polling.

³³ Electoral Commission, “How are ballots counted,” <https://electoral.gov.vu/voters/how-are-ballots-counted>

Resources

- The Electoral Commission and Vanuatu Electoral Office produced a booklet, *My Election Week by Week*, to educate voters on the general elections. It is available at: https://electoral.gov.vu/images/PDFs/VEO_My_Election_handbook_EMAIL.pdf
- Electoral Commission website: <https://electoral.gov.vu/>
- Previous Electoral Commission website: <https://www.gov.vu/en/public-information/86-electoral-commission> (out of date)
- Vanuatu Constitution: http://www.paclii.org/vu/legis/consol_act/cotrov406/