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Elections held Earlier than Expected

Mauritius is holding a general election on July 3, 2005 to elect a new parliament and thereby a new government. The term of the outgoing government started in September 2000.

The general election is being held ahead of normal schedule and at a time of the incumbent's choosing. The life of the parliament elected in 2000 ends on 11



September 2005. As per the Representation of People Act (1958), as subsequently amended, the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister shall, for the purpose of electing a new Parliament, not later than 55 days after a dissolution of Parliament under section 57 of the Constitution, issue a writ of election directed to the returning officer of every constituency, specifying the day of the election. Election day shall be not less than 15

days nor more than 30 days after the day on which the writ is issued and the day on which a poll is to take place, shall be at least 15 days and no more than 60 days, after the day the nomination of candidates is received.

This means that when the 2000 – 2005 Parliament would have naturally been dissolved, on 20 September 2005, there was a maximum limit of up to 145 days for holding the election, that is up to 3 February 2006.

However, as a general rule elections are never held between January and the beginning of April as this coincides with the cyclonic season and has a concentration of religious festivals. So, one can reasonably conclude, it would have been normal that the 2005 general election be held between September and December 2005.

However, the Prime Minister decided to call the general election six months earlier in order to avoid having to hold a by-election in a particularly difficult constituency. The by-election was caused by the resignation of a member of parliament of the opposition from constituency No. 3. On applying the provisions of the Representation of People Act, a by-election would have become due at the latest in April 2005, i.e. seven months before the general election. The government feared losing the by-election which could have a snowball effect for the general election, with negative consequences, especially since it had already lost a by-election in December 2003. As per the law, the only way to avoid holding the by-election was for government to dissolve parliament before the date for the by-election was due. As from the time of the dissolution, the clock starts ticking, as provided for in the law.

The government presented its national budget in April 2005 ahead of the normal time in June and immediately after approval by parliament proceeded with the dissolution. Parliament was dissolved with effect from 24 April 2005 and the President of the Republic issued writs of election for the purpose of electing a new Parliament on 9 May 2005, appointing 30 May 2005 as nomination day. The President further appointed 3 July 2005, as the day on which the Poll is to be held.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

The provisions for determining members of parliament, the appointment and functions of electoral management bodies, the determination of election dates and official nomination of candidates, the registration of voters, the election management and challenge processes, the mode of election, the mode of voting, and the appointment of additional seats (also known as best losers) are long and well established in the Constitution of Mauritius, the Representation of People Act 1968, and in the National Assembly Regulations 1968 (4th Schedule Act) and 12/68. The Representation of People Act was amended in 2005 to provide for the first time, for international

election observers to observe the election process in Mauritius where, in connection with an election, they have been –

- (a) designated to do so by any international or regional organisation; and
- (b) with the approval of the Electoral Supervisory Commission, authorised to do so by the Electoral Commissioner.

Political representation at both national and local government level in Mauritius is through a fully competitive electoral process. Political representation is based on universal adult suffrage expressed through a secret ballot. The voting age is 18 years and above. The life of a parliament is for a maximum of five years. The members of the National Assembly are elected at a general election. Sixty-two members are elected on a first past the post basis from twenty-one constituencies. Additionally, eight other members are appointed as Best Loser members of parliament, thus giving a national assembly of seventy. The appointment is made by the Electoral Supervisory Commission on the basis of a mechanism prescribed under the Section 5 of the First Schedule of the Constitution and in a manner that ensures adequate representation of the officially recognised ethnic groups without changing the balance of forces between

the parties as obtained through direct suffrage.

Section 5 (1) of the First Schedule of the Constitution states the following: “In order to ensure a fair and adequate representation of each community, there shall be 8 seats in the Assembly, additional to the 62 seats for members representing constituencies, which shall so far as is possible be allocated to persons belonging to parties who have stood as candidates for election as members at the general election but have not been returned as members to represent constituencies”.

The term “community” here means “ethnic group”.

Section 5 (3) The first 4 of the 8 seats shall, so far as is possible, each be allocated to the most successful unreturned candidate, if any, who is a member of a party and who belongs to the appropriate community, regardless of which party he belongs to.

“Appropriate community “in the above section means the community, which is most under-represented. The basis for determining the under-representation is the 1972 population census figure.

Section 5 (4) When the first 4 seats (or as many as possible of those seats) have been allocated, the number of such seats that have been allocated to

persons who belong to parties other than the most successful party, shall be ascertained, and so far as is possible that number of seats (out of the second 4 seats) shall be allocated one by one to the most successful unreturned candidates (if any) belonging both to the most successful party and to the appropriate community. Where there is no unreturned candidate of the appropriate community, seats will be allocated to the most successful unreturned candidates belonging to the most successful party, irrespective of community.

The proclamation of the dissolution of the National Assembly is done by the President of the Republic although the choice of the date for dissolution is the prerogative of the Prime Minister. However, as per the amendment of the Constitution in 1982 and as per section 57(2), the National Assembly is automatically dissolved five years from the date of the first sitting. From the date of dissolution of the National Assembly, the election process follows a well established and well rehearsed pattern.

Electoral Commissions

Two bodies and one official have the constitutional responsibility for the preparation, management and oversight of the election processes. These are the

Electoral Boundaries Commission, the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner.

Section 38 of the Constitution stipulates the following regarding the structure of the Electoral Boundaries Commission and the Electoral Supervisory Commission:

(1) There shall be an Electoral Boundaries Commission which shall consist of a chairman and not less than two or more than seven other members appointed by the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister which is tendered after the latter has consulted the Leader of the Opposition.

(2) There shall be an Electoral Supervisory Commission which shall consist of a chairperson appointed by the President in accordance with the advice of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and not less than two or more than seven other members appointed by the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister tendered after the latter has consulted the Leader of the Opposition.

(3) No person shall be qualified for appointment as a member of the Electoral Boundaries Commission or the Electoral Supervisory Commission if he is a member of, or a candidate for election to, the Assembly or any local authority or a

public officer or a local government officer.

Section 40 describes the office of the Electoral Commissioner:

(1) There shall be an Electoral Commissioner, whose office shall be a public office and who shall be appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission.

(2) No person shall be qualified to hold or act in the office of Electoral Commissioner unless he is qualified to practise as a barrister in Mauritius.

(3) Without prejudice to section 41, in the exercise of his functions under this Constitution, the Electoral Commissioner shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.

The functions of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and of the Electoral Commissioner are clarified under **section 41**:

(1) The Electoral Supervisory Commission shall have general responsibility for, and shall supervise, the registration of the electorate for the election of members to the Assembly and the holding of elections of these members and the Commission shall have such powers and other functions relating to such registration and such elections as may be prescribed.

(2) The Electoral Commissioner shall have such powers and other

functions relating to the registration and elections as may be prescribed, and he shall keep the Electoral Supervisory Commission fully informed concerning the exercise of his functions and shall have the right to attend meetings of the Commission and to refer to the Commission for their advice or decisions regarding any question relating to his functions.

(3) Every proposed Bill and every proposed regulation or other instrument having the force of law relating to the registration of voters for the election of members to the Assembly or to the election of such members shall be referred to the Electoral Supervisory Commission and to the Electoral Commissioner at such time as shall give them sufficient opportunity to make comments thereon before the Bill is introduced in the Assembly or, as the case may be, the regulation or other instrument is made.

(4) The Electoral Supervisory Commission may make such reports to the President concerning the matters under their supervision, or any draft Bill or instrument that is referred to them, as they deem fit and if the Commission so requests in any such report, other than a report on a draft Bill or instrument, that report shall be laid before the Assembly.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission consists of a

chairman and two to seven members, all appointed by the President “acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister tendered after the Prime Minister has consulted the leader of the Opposition.”¹ The Commission may “take into account representations made to it in respect of any proposed alteration of a boundary and it has to give public notice of any proposed alteration to be made and fix the manner in which and the time frame for any representation to be made”.²

The electoral process is well anchored in electoral law, which is accepted as ensuring the autonomy and independence of the electoral management system from all organs of state and political parties. The legitimacy of the electoral authorities as the managers of the electoral process is unanimously accepted by political parties and all candidates, as well as its fairness and the transparency of its activities.

Capacity of the Electoral Management Bodies

The Electoral Commission and Electoral Supervisory Commission are fully able to perform their duties and no blame has ever been laid at their feet.

¹The Constitution of Mauritius section 38 (2)

²The Electoral Boundaries Commission Regulations 1976

The Electoral Commissioner's office comprises the Electoral Commissioner, two Chief Election Officers, Principal Election officers and 10 Election Officers. The Office has a support service of about one hundred secretaries, clerks, messengers and other administrative. The staff is housed in the main office in the capital city of Port Louis. A sub office in the island of Rodrigues is used when elections are held. The staff is generally considered to be adequate for undertaking the activities of Office.

The main officers are based in the capital city, Port Louis. The Electoral Commission uses government primary schools and social welfare centres on a part time basis for the updating of electoral registers and the holding of elections. The officers are well equipped in terms of basic infrastructure. The Commission has been adequately computerised and has for the first time released electoral registers on CDROM.

In election years, adequate provision is made in the national budget for financial resources to be provided to the electoral management bodies.

Electoral system

The electoral system that has been used in Mauritius since

independence is the FPTP (First-Past-The-Post) system. The Mauritius electoral system however distinguishes itself with two unique features. The first is the division of the country into twenty constituencies in which each voter has to vote for three candidates. The three candidates who receive the most votes are elected. The choice of which three candidates to vote for is left open to the voter and no block party vote is legally imposed. The second distinguishing feature is what is known as the Best Loser System (BLS) as explained earlier. This system has worked well in terms of its own stability and the stability of the elected governments, and provided conditions for the establishment of an often fragile yet sustainable democracy in an ethnically diverse society.

Thus sixty-two members are elected on a First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) or rather First-Three-Past-The-Post³ basis, from twenty constituencies on the Island of Mauritius and two elected members from the Island of Rodrigues. Additionally, eight other members are appointed to Parliament through the best loser system, thus giving a national assembly of seventy. The appointment of the best losers is done by the

³ H. Mathur (1991), Parliament in Mauritius, Editions de L'Ocean Indien, p. 32

Electoral Supervisory Commission on the basis of a mechanism prescribed under Section 5 of the First Schedule of the Constitution⁴. This is done in a manner that ensures adequate representation of the officially recognised ethnic groups without changing the balance of forces between the parties as obtained through direct suffrage.

The best loser system has been challenged by a small extra parliamentary party, Lalit, and by some in the elite on the basis that it institutionalises ethnicity as a political instrument. This challenge is however not yet emerged as a mainstream debate. Although some of the dominant political parties are of the opinion that the system should be done away with in the context of a reformed electoral system which would provide the same safeguard BLS is supposed to ensure, none has ventured officially to propose its elimination in the fear that it would be perceived as being against minority representation.

The electoral system of first past the post has been challenged by most dominant parties, particularly when they are out of government. The challenge relates to the unfair nature of the system

⁴ <http://ncb.intnet.mu/assembly/constitution/index.htm>

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where there is a large degree of disproportional representation between the percentage of votes and number of seats obtained in parliament. Thus, in 1982

and in 1995 the result was 60-0, while in 1991 and the year 2000 the presence of the Opposition in parliament barely reached significant levels, and was

disproportionately low with respect to the percentage of votes earned. Table 1 below lists election results for the last three elections and illustrates this point.

Table 1: An overview of elections' results from 1991 to 2000

	1991			1995			2000		
	Parties (Alliances)	Seats	% Votes	Parties (Alliances)	Seats	% Votes	Parties (Alliances)	Seats	% Votes
Government	MSM/MMM	57	56.28	Labour/MMM	60	66.22	MSM/MMM/ PMSD/Les Verts	54 4	52.30 B.L.
Opposition	Labour/PMSD	3 4	39.95 B.L.	PGD Hizbullah MSM-RMM	1 1 0	B.L. B.L. 28	Labour/ PMXD	6 2	36.95 B.L.
Rodrigues Reprs.	OPR	2	65.93	OPR Mouvement Rodriguais	2 2	41.98 B.L.	OPR Mouvement Rodriguais	2 2	51.15 B.L.
Total		66			66			70	

Note: BL means Best Losers

Although there is widespread acceptance of the necessity to correct the gross over- or under-representation of parties produced by the electoral system, there has been no agreement between them on the best solution.

The characteristics of a good electoral system for a plural society such as Mauritius are clearly understood by all as:

- ensuring government stability,
- guaranteeing fairness to parties in terms of representation in parliament,
- promoting gender and diverse representation,
- encouraging accountable government,
- increasing voter choice,
- maintaining constituency links between MPs and their constituents, and

- shunning overtly communal (ethnic) parties.

The present electoral system has delivered well on the first, fourth, sixth and seventh points, but not on the other criteria.

In 2000 the MMM-MSM alliance pledged, in their electoral manifesto, to change the electoral system. Having won the election, the MMM-MSM government set up a Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform in 2001, hereinafter referred to as the Sachs Commission, named after the chairperson of that Commission, Judge Albie Sachs from South Africa to look into the reforms required.

The issue of fairness of representation was the centrepiece of the Sachs Commission mandate. A

number of representations from political parties and other civil society stakeholders were received by the commission. In accordance with the views of the general public, the submissions agreed upon:

- The need to introduce a carefully carved eligibility threshold of 10% to reduce the danger of too much factionalism and to reduce the likelihood of ethnically based parties from emerging.
- Favouring a mixed FPTP/PR system rather than replacement of FPTP by a full PR.

After examining five different models and concluding that “no single model meets all the requirements in an unqualified manner”, the Commission recommended:

The maintenance of 62 seats (20 constituencies x 3 members + one constituency

x 2 members) to be returned on the basis of the present FPTP system, and that in addition there shall be a further 30 members chosen on the basis of lists provided by parties receiving more than 10% of the national vote. Such lists will be in descending rank of eligibility. They will be published in advance of elections and may contain a restricted number of names of persons standing for constituencies (should such persons in fact end up being as constituency members then their names on the list would be disregarded). The objective of the lists is to ensure that the final totals of seats held by the different parties reflect more accurately the support that the parties have received in the nationally. The lists will be structured to secure greater representation of women and to provide the reassurance formerly ensured by the Best Loser System.

In other words, the Sachs Report proposed doing away with the Best Loser System. This was not acceptable to some parties.

As agreement could not even be reached between two of the partners in the ruling alliance, the reform of the electoral system has been shelved and the present 2005 elections shall be run on the same FPTP system as before.

With the shelving of the reform the proposals of the

Sachs report to ensure a better gender balance was also not carried further. The country in the SADC region which has the lowest level of women participation in parliament and cabinet is Mauritius.

The Sachs report suggested that the under representation of women can best be addressed through reform of the electoral system by adopting a mixed PR system, but further highlighted that “the major responsibility for correcting the massive gender imbalance rests with the parties”⁵. The Commission pointed out that there are a number of measures that could be introduced with relative ease for progress to be made on that front.

Review of Previous Elections

Mauritius is holding its seventh general election since independence in 1968. Elections have been held in 1976, 1982, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995 and 2000.

All these elections have been fought between two coalitions of parties, except in 1976 when a three-cornered contest emerged and a coalition was formed after the election to constitute the government. The other six elections were

contested by coalitions formed prior to the elections.

It must be understood that while elections have usually been a competition between two alliances or coalitions, the configurations of these alliances or coalitions have continually shifted. What has remained a permanent feature is the politics of alliance formation itself.

1976: Emergence of MMM

The general election of 1976 was a three cornered fight between the ruling Labour Party (LP), the PMSD and the MMM. After allocation of the best loser seats, the MMM had 34, the LP 28 and the PMSD 8. The LP and the PMSD formed a coalition government, but the MMM had become the largest party.

1982: Defeat of Ramgoolam

For the 1982 general election the LP and the PMSD formed an alliance. That election saw an overwhelming defeat of the LP-PMSD alliance at the hands of the MMM in alliance with the smaller Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM); the MMM-PSM alliance won all the seats contested. The PSM was a new party created by former LP members. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who had been the Prime Minister since independence, was defeated.

1983: Ethnicity resurgences

The MMM/PSM formed a new government with

⁵ Report of the Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform 2001/2002, page 28

Anerood Jugnauth (the president of the MMM) as Prime Minister, and Paul Berenger (the secretary general) as minister of finance. A major split occurred in the government in 1983. Paul Berenger resigned, taking the bulk of the MMM with him, while the Prime Minister and a number of MMM dissidents formed a new party, the MSM (Mouvement Socialiste Militant). Jugnauth then called fresh elections for later in the year. The split was highly loaded with ethnic undertones and the electoral campaign saw the resurgence of ethnicity as a factor in Mauritian politics. The Hindu electorate largely rallied around the MSM and the LP, while the MMM mainly retained the support of the general population, Muslims, Tamil and Marathi voters. The MSM in coalition with the LP and the PMSD won the elections and MMM sat in the opposition benches.

1992: Mauritius becomes a republic

In 1990 the MSM dismissed its partners, the LP and PMSD and formed a new coalition with the MMM. The MSM-MMM coalition won all of the seats in the following election. In 1992 legislation was passed declaring Mauritius a republic within the Commonwealth. The first president elected by parliament, Cassam Uteem, had been a minister in the

1982/83 and in the 1990/91 MSM-MMM governments.

1995: Defeat of the incumbent

In 1993 the governing coalition between the MMM and MSM broke up. Sir Anerood Jugnauth continued as Prime Minister and the MMM went into opposition again. A new party, the Mauritius Militant Renewal (RMM), was formed by a group that split away from the MMM, which supported the MSM government. In 1995 the MMM in alliance with the LP defeated the MSM-RMM alliance. Sir Anerood Jugnauth stood down as prime minister and Navin Ramgoolam, son of late Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, took his place.

2000: Return of Jugnauth, agreement to share the prime minister's post

Half way through its term of government the MMM-LP coalition broke up. Navin Ramgoolam continued as prime minister and the MMM went into opposition. In 2000, the MMM and MSM contracted an alliance, won the subsequent election and formed the new government. Sir Anerood Jugnauth returned as prime minister with Paul Berenger as deputy prime minister and minister of finance. One of the central conditions of the alliance was an agreement to share the post of prime minister. In term of this Paul Berenger was to hold the position from September

2003 to the end of the electoral mandate in 2005. For the first time in its history then, Mauritius shall then have a non Hindu as prime minister.

Results of the three latest previous elections are given in Table 1.

Political Parties, Factionalism, Manifestos, and Party Financing

The two main blocks that will contest the present elections are almost the same as for the 2000 elections, except for two factors. The first is that two parties, the MR and Les Verts, which were part of the MSM-MMM alliance in 2000 and in the ruling coalition in parliament and government, left the alliance and joined the opposition alliance. The second is that the MSM no longer has the strong leadership of Sir Aneerood Jugnauth, who is now the President of the Republic. The party is led by his son, Pravind Jugnauth whose abilities as leader have not yet been fully established in the eyes of many.

The ruling alliance: MMM-MSM-PMSD

MMM – The Mouvement Militant Mauricien whose leader, Paul Berenger, is the outgoing prime minister. He has been presented as the future prime minister for the first two and a half years if the alliance is returned to government.

MSM – The Mouvement Socialiste Militant whose leader, Pravind Jugnauth, is the deputy prime minister and minister of finance. He has been presented as the prime minister designate to take over from Berenger for the last two and a half years in the next parliament.

PMSD – The Parti Mauricien Social Democrite is a minority partner with only one seat in the outgoing parliament and one candidate in for the coming elections.

The challenging Social Alliance: LP-PMXD-MSM-MR-Les Verts.

LP – The Labour Party whose leader, Dr Navin Ramgoolam, has been presented as the future Prime Minister if the Social Alliance wins.

PMXD – The Parti Mauricien Xavier Duval whose leader, Xavier Duval, is the son of the late Gaetan Duval, leader of the second largest post independence party.

MMSM – The Mouvement Militant Socialiste Mauricien whose leader, Madan Dulloo, broke away from the MSM in the early nineties.

MR – The Mouvement Republicain was in the ruling alliance in 2000 but shifted allegiance in 2002. The leader is Rama Valayden.

Les Verts – whose leader, Sylvio Michel, was a minister in the ruling alliance. He left the alliance in 2004, claiming that the alliance would not honour its pledge to seriously examine the issue of compensation for slavery.

Party manifestoes

It is expected that a number of other parties will field candidates for the elections. Parties have not yet made public their political manifestoes, although the ruling alliance has published its rallying slogan, “Progress must continue”. It is campaigning on the basis that it achieved more in its term than the LP in its 1995-2000 mandate. The LP slogan is “Change is needed”.

Party funding

Party funding remains a grey area. In its report the Sachs Commission proposed the public funding of political parties but, as the report has not been implemented, the matter has remained as before. Parties will mobilize their funding on an informal basis from funds accumulated through donations during their term in government or from current private sector funding. The incumbent alliance has no access, whether officially or unofficially, to public financial or material resources for its political activities. Some commentators alleged that

the incumbent alliance may be able to benefit from funds received from corrupt practices while in office.

As far as the private sector is concerned, the question of funding has been raised from the perspective of Good Corporate Governance. The Joint Economic Council, which is a private sector umbrella organization, has issued official guidelines calling on its members to formally disclose to whom they are making donations and the amounts involved in their financial records.

As in previous elections the private sector will be the main funding source for parties. While some companies will fund parties of their preference, the dominant practice is for companies to give to both contenders. Donations may be of different amounts to different parties, depending on the firm’s evaluation of the relative strengths of the parties and of their chances of winning.

The Media

The written media is a 130-year-old institution in Mauritius. Today, the country has over thirty daily and weekly publications. Mauritius has a newspaper circulation level of 74 for 1,000 inhabitants⁶. Ownership of publications is dispersed among a number

⁶ World Statistics Pocketbook, United Nations New York 1997

of different individuals and local press groups. Two big groups control several publications that are viewed as independent of the state, but they are editorially restrained by regard to the major advertising revenue coming from such quarters. Some newspapers are aligned to certain religious or socio-cultural groups, while others are close to particular political parties. Only one newspaper declares itself an organ of a particular party. Readers are in any case mature enough to differentiate between the different newspapers.

During the state of emergency from 1971 to 1976 the fundamental rights and liberties found in the Constitution were suspended. In 1984 the Newspaper and Periodicals Act of 1837 was amended with a view to tightening control of the press by imposing very high licensing deposits. However since 1990 these amendments have been repealed and there are no legal hindrances on the press other than those limits placed by civil and criminal law with regard to defamation, libel, sedition, spreading false news or publishing pornographic material.

In effect, the written media has a role as the fourth locus of power. All newspapers report daily on the political campaign. Some give more or less balanced opinions

while others are clearly supportive of one or other of the contenders.

There is one public television and one radio station operating under the Mauritius Broadcasting Act (1982). The monopoly on radio has been broken since March 2002, but television remains a state monopoly. A national survey⁷ carried out in 2002 showed that 58.3 per cent of the general public considered that public mass media and other public resources as being less accessible to opposition parties than they are to the ruling parties during elections. Successive regimes have used public television to broadcast their own political propaganda. The situation is no different for the coming elections. However, formal political broadcast is well codified and time allocation is worked out in consultation with stakeholders. Time allocation is based on two criteria, namely the number of seats held in the outgoing parliament and the number of candidates fielded. The main parties are generally satisfied with the time allocation, but smaller extra-parliamentary parties are marginalized by this deal.

A new feature of the elections is the emergence in March 2002 of three private

radio stations that are now fully operational. An Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) acts as the regulatory body which supervises them. These private radio stations will undoubtedly be a potent force in these elections. The radios run call-in talk shows where the public can air their views on matters of public interest, debates between politicians, political interviews and similar items. These programs have a wide audience and could certainly have a bigger impact than the traditional political party rallies. To date the radio stations have been relatively well balanced in the exposure given to the different political contenders.

Civil Society

The Mauritian public is highly educated and closely follows public affairs and political activities as well as the debates around them. It is said that politics is the country's most popular sport. However in the recent years, there has been growing despondency and cynicism with respect to politicians and the established political parties. There is a long tradition of organized civil society activity in Mauritius. Organised civil society has evolved and become more diversified in areas of interest. The militancy of women's rights organisations played a critical role in the progress that has been

⁷ Survey carried out for the Study on the State of Good Governance in Mauritius, StraConsult, for UNECA.

achieved on that front. In terms of advocacy and lobbying activities, 'socio-cultural' (a euphemism for ethnic based organizations) are the most active. In these elections such groups are the most active, although recently some women's organizations have been very active in advocating greater inclusion of women on the party lists. A recently created students' organization has emerged, albeit as yet marginally, as a voice pronouncing on political questions.

Foreign donors are not very active in Mauritius and their financial support is primarily directed towards a few charitable organizations. Except for Transparency International, there are no CSOs involved in democracy or governance advocacy funded by foreign donors.

There are no CSOs involved in civic or voter education since democratic practice is well established in Mauritius and the need for them is not felt.

Election Conflict Management

Although scattered clashes between activists may occur levels of political violence have generally been extremely low since the nineties and have declined progressively from one election to the other.

There is no established official mechanism to deal with election related conflict. Any possible conflict arising from non observance of laws are dealt with by the regular law courts. All stakeholders have full confidence in the efficiency and effectiveness of the judiciary. Minor clashes between activists are dealt with at constituency level by candidates through dialogue between the opposing parties. At national level there is a general tacit agreement for leaders and campaign managers to talk to one another.

At the time elections were announced the Prime Minister appealed for peaceful elections and announced that he was opening up a line of communication with the Leader of the Opposition to ensure violent incidents are minimised and effectively managed.

The political campaigning for the 2005 elections was launched with two large political rallies by the two main contending forces on May Day.



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