

What observers say about the polls

Remarks. Sheraton Kampala Hotel was yesterday a beehive of activity as local and foreign journalists jumped from one room to another for the marathon briefings by the various election observer mission groups about their assessment of Thursday's presidential elections. *Sunday Monitor's* Frederic Musisi was there and captured the reactions.

EDUARD KUKAN, EU ELECTION OBSERVATION LEADER

Voters showed remarkable determination on election day, waiting long hours to cast their ballots. The EC failed to effectively communicate the steps that would be taken to calm growing frustration and tensions among voters deferred from voting due to the markedly delayed delivery of voting material in certain locations.

There was an imposing presence of police in the vicinity of polling stations and in a few cases teargas was used to disperse crowds. Moreover, the detention of the FDC flag bearer Kizza Besigye late on the election day added to the tense environment. Additionally, the UCC blocked access to social media, which contributed to the overall uncertainty and constrained freedoms of expression and access to information.

The late arrival of electoral material in certain areas marred an otherwise calm and peaceful election day. EU EOM observers reported that 75 per cent of polling stations observed had not opened before 7.30am.

Furthermore, eight teams across the country reported that polling stations could not open before 10am. A number of polling stations, notably in Kampala and Wakiso, had not opened within six hours. Significant delays and lack of effective communication by the EC fuelled frustration and tensions among voters. In at least four cases the police used teargas to disperse voters at polling stations. Only shortly before the official closing of the polling stations at 4pm did the EC chairman announce the three-hour extension of voting in Kampala and Wakiso. This was poorly communicated to the polling staff in affected areas. Throughout Election Day, EU EOM observers noted a number of problems in polling stations visited.



YUFNALIS OKUBO, IGAD

We would like to commend the EC in the manner they have handled the heavy task in the interest of the Ugandan people. We indeed noticed certain practices that would serve as a good example to other member states such as availability of the voter's register to agents at every polling station and presidential debate.

We also wish to point out that we have noticed a remarkable improvement of the whole process as compared to what we witnessed in 2011, and we hope after five years the process will be much better. In the event that there is reason to challenge the results, we urge everyone to resort to the provided legal channels to resolve disputes.



DR SEWANYANA, CEON-U



It is worth noting that these are many of the same problems that have plagued Uganda's elections for many years -- in 2006 and 2011, credible citizen and international observer reports raised these concerns. Whereas CEON-U observed that results were

posted at 91 per cent of polling stations on election day, at the national tally centre results are only released in an aggregated manner, which does not give the opportunity to the public to verify the results at the primary level. This lack of transparency creates uncertainty, which undermines public confidence in the results. This is compounded by the Electoral Commission's restriction on observers from stating "any quantitative results information."

GMALA RASHED, COMESA

The mission



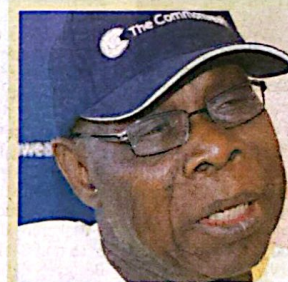
has observed that the environment within which the general election were organised has generally been peaceful. Despite isolated incidences, including the February 15 incident (in which FDC candidate Kizza Besigye was blocked from campaigning around Kampala). Based on the observations, the mission believes that the polling process was generally peaceful and transparent despite the logistical challenges that delayed the opening.

SOPHIA AKUFFO, AFRICAN UNION TEAM LEADER



We congratulate the people of Uganda for turning up in large numbers to perform their civic duty. Our assessment of the 2016 general election thus far, is that they were largely peaceful but without shortcomings; in particular the late delivery of election materials. The late delivery led to hours of delay in the opening of the polling stations. We, however, encourage the EC to adhere to the prescribed 48 hour time for delivery materials as provided in the Electoral Commissions Act, conduct continuous voter education and consider using indoor polling in order to create order around the polling stations.

OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, COMMONWEALTH OBSERVER GROUP



The turnout of voters was reasonably high, with long queues at many polling places prior to the opening of polls at 07:00 hours. However, the delays in the delivery of voting materials, which subsequently led to delays in voting, generated a tense atmosphere outside those polling stations where voters had been queuing for many hours. It also reduced the number of voters, as some went home and chose not to return to vote.

However, in other places, a reasonably calm atmosphere prevailed. Once polling commenced, it was conducted in an orderly manner, with agents and observers present. Most

polling officials worked hard under trying conditions.

The open layout provided for transparency, but it was also apparent that the secrecy of the ballot was not always guaranteed and that polling officials had different and varying levels of understanding of procedures. For instance, in a few instances ballot boxes were not sealed properly, and indelible ink was applied in different manners.

Our teams followed the count at polling stations and tabulation in a number of districts. The method of counting votes in front of a crowd provides for a high level of transparency. However, while poll officials undoubtedly worked hard over a long period, the manner in which the paperwork from the polling station count was completed was inconsistent and lax.

The security presence around polling stations was visible. Given concerns expressed to the group on the politicisation of the police and army, we believe that there is scope to review their role and engagement on election day.

MARIA BURNETT, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

In the run-up to the poll, Human Rights Watch documented barriers to Ugandans ability to exercise fundamental human rights such as free expression, assembly, and association, as well as the often excessive use of force by security forces and threats to the media. Many of the abuses that we have documented over the years in Uganda were

on full display this week, but with so many eyes following #UgandaDecides on Twitter, there was no hiding the brutality. The next few days will be critical, as people will surely scrutinise the election process. Security forces should respect peaceful protest and use only proportionate force in response to any confrontations.

