

## elections

**Election hangover.** Presidential election emotions affect turnout in local council and mayoral elections.

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**KAMPALA.** The emotions running from last week's presidential elections yesterday came to play as voter turnout in the local government elections took a beating with many shunning voting in what analysts said was the after-effect of the jumbled-up presidential poll.

Voting across the country was fraught with similar glitches to those that hit last Thursday's presidential and parliamentary elections, ranging from delays in delivering voting materials to mixing up candidates' particulars on ballot papers.

Though the presidential and parliamentary elections registered an improvement in turn-up with more than 60 per cent of the voters turning up, yesterday's local government elections started on a low note, with polling officials manning empty polling stations. Exact figures of the voter turnout could not be ascertained by press time, but it was clear that less than 50 per cent of the voters turned out on many polling stations across the country.

**"The uncertainty surrounding presidential elections has made people very apprehensive. In most parts of the country, people know that [Dr Kizza] Besigye actually own. It will take time for people to heal,"** SEMUJU NGANDA, FDC SPOKESPERSON.

This was in contrast to the February 18 presidential and parliamentary elections polls when voters swarmed polling stations in the early hours of the morning, even after the government declared yesterday a public holiday.

Mr Jotham Taremwa, the Electoral Commission (EC) spokesperson, yesterday said the commission was yet to ascertain the voter turnout percentages countrywide but denied voter morale was affected by the aftermath of the presidential and parliamentary elections.

"The trend is that presidential elections world over attract more interest and therefore a higher voter turnout than other elections and Uganda is not an exception," Mr Taremwa said.

Asked whether the unresolved dispute over the presidential election had sapped the morale of voters, Mr Taremwa said: "The presidential election is different from other offices and I do not think the morale was affected by the [presidential election] results."

# Voters stay away from local council elections



Polling officials wait for voters to turn up at City Hill Academy polling station in Kisaasi, Kampala yesterday. Many voters across the country shunned the exercise. PHOTO BY RACHAEL AJWANG.

In Kyankwanzi District, voting for the district chairperson was suspended because of a mix-up of candidates' symbols on the ballot papers.

Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) spokesman Ssemujju Nganda, who led the Kampala Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago's team in Kampala,

blamed lack of confidence in the EC and "uncertainty over the presidential elections" for the low turn-up in the local government elections.

## WHAT OTHER STAKEHOLDERS SAY

**M**r Livingstone Sewanyana, the chairman of the Citizens Election Observers Network-Uganda (CEON), a group of non-governmental organisations that is monitoring elections, says unless the presidential results are challenged in court, voter turn-out will continue taking a nosedive. "The results need to be challenged in court so that people can outpour their feelings. Unless there is a process that will lead to knowing the truth, expect low voter turnout even in the coming elections," Mr Sewanyana said.

Mr Sewanyana said the election, which saw EC declaring President Museveni winner with 5.6 million votes (60.8%), did not "reflect the will of the voters" and "restoring confidence in the voting process" will require decisive actions.

Mr Museveni's closest challenger, Dr Kizza Besigye, who garnered 3.5 million votes, rejected the results and has indicated that he is considering petitioning the Supreme Court.

Observer missions also punched holes in the credibility of Mr Museveni's victory, citing late delivery of materials in Opposition strongholds, intimidation and voter bribery as some of the factors that tilted the scales in the incumbent's favour.

The United States, among other countries, noted that the polls were "deeply inconsistent with international standards and expectations for any democratic process," while the Commonwealth Observer Mission led by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said

the polls "fell short of democratic benchmarks."

Mr Crispy Kaheru, the national coordinator of the Citizens Coalition for Electoral Democracy Uganda (CCEDEU), that also raised red flags over the presidential election, says there is a "feeling of disgruntlement" which could have caused the low voter turnout yesterday. "People feel their participation was not valued and that could account for the low voter turnout. Some polling stations were not included in the national tally, in some polling stations, voting was cancelled all together, in other polling stations, getting voting materials there was problematic. So people feel like why should I go there and be mistreated for the second time?" Mr Kaheru said.

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KUMI. The election for the

## Kumi LC5 polls postponed