

# Polling stations open but many

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Under the Electoral Commission guidelines, voting officially opens at 7am and closes at 4pm. However, several polling stations across the country had not opened by 7am because the minimum number of 10 voters required to witness the commencement of the voting exercise had not shown up.

## BY MONITOR REPORTERS

A remarkably low voter turnout was yesterday registered across Kampala as voters went to polls to elect their city and division mayors, and councillors.

Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) is made up of the five divisions of Makindye, Central, Rubaga, Kawempe, and Nakawa.

In Makindye Division West, Mr Deo Genza, a boda boda rider, contesting for the Urban LC3 councilor seat, said he had to embark on a mobilisation drive after many polling stations in his area remained deserted for hours after voting was scheduled to begin.

He said the voter turnout was "worryingly low despite the division boasting of 436 polling stations and more than 255,000 registered voters. "I am moving across all the 12 parishes of Makindye Division West to encourage people to vote before the 4pm closing time," he said.

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Mr Genza said some of the residents he encountered said they had chosen to boycott because of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the presidential and parliamentary elec-

tions held last Thursday.

The EC last Saturday declared incumbent President Museveni, the winner of the January 15 presidential poll with 71.65 percent against his closest challenger, Mr Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, aka Bobi Wine, of the National Unity Platform (NUP), who garnered 24.72 percent.

Bobi Wine has rejected the results and asked Ugandans to demand what he called their stolen victory.

Mr Genza said: "NUP party supporters are saying their candidate (Mr Kyagulanyi) was unfairly declared the loser, and feel any more participation is meaningless," he said.

A polling agent for the NRM party candidate at Madirisa-Kasawe Polling Station in Makindye II Parish, said most voters stayed away because they believe their presidential and parliamentary candidates were unfairly defeated.

At Makindye I Parish, Mr Juma Muwonge, a polling agent for Kampala Lord Mayoral candidate, Mr Ronald Balimwezo (NUP), cited intimidation by security personnel as a key factor for the low voter turnout. "This area has six polling stations, but it is within the Military Police barracks. The presence of armed personnel has intimidated many voters."

Makindye Division is widely regarded as an Opposition (NUP) stronghold. However, the EC disqualified all 11 candidates who had been nominated for the Makindye Division mayoral race, leaving only Mr Yasin Omari (NRM) to run unopposed, a decision that further dampened voters' enthusiasm.

Despite this decision, polling agents remained on duty to protect their mayoral candidates' interests for Ms Beatrice Mao (DP), Ms Nabilah Naggayi Sempala (Independent), Mr Moses Nsubuga Kizito (NRM), Charles Luba Lwanga (Independent), Mr Ibrahim Kasozi (Forum for Democratic Change - FDC), incumbent Erias Lukwago (People's Front for Freedom - PFF), and Mr Ronald Balimwezo (NUP).

At both Makindye Division East and West, voting was delayed at several polling stations.

However, unlike during the January 15 polls, when delays were largely blamed on late delivery of materials and malfunctioning biometric voter verification kits (BVVKs), yesterday's delays were forced by the absence of voters.

EC guidelines dictate that polling offi-

## Some of the candidates



Andrew Muwonge, Kayunga District chairperson (NRM)



Bazirondere Pafuladito Kyeyune, Mubende District chairperson (NUP)



Erasto Kibirango, Luweero LC5 chairperson (XXX)



Fred Kadimba, Gomba District chairperson (Ind)



Fred Gasaaka, Buikwe District chairperson (Ind)



Ignatius Kiwanuka Koomu, Nakaseke District chairman (NRM)

cials cannot open any ballot box unless at least ten registered voters are present to witness the process, a safeguard to enhance transparency.

Although voting materials were delivered nationwide as early as 6am, with polling scheduled to begin an hour later, many stations had not opened by 10am due to failure to meet this requirement, raising concerns among ob-

servers about voter fatigue, post-election disillusionment.

### Polling cancelled

The EC yesterday cancelled voting at Ggaba Mission Polling Centre, one of the ten polling stations at St Denis Ssebugwawo S.S., after discovering it had been supplied with ballot papers of Makindye II candidates instead of

Makindye III, affecting some 600 voters. The ballot papers that were initially supplied were missing the names of the NUP candidate for the Makindye West Woman Councilor LC5 seat, Dr Judith Nalukwago, and Ms Josephine Nassazi (Independent), among others.

Dr Nalukwago blamed the EC for what she termed as "inconsistencies" and urged the electoral body to "al-

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DISTRICTS IN  
UGANDA

# voters stay away

## BALLOT STUFFING ALLEGATIONS

Voting in several parts of Kisenyi, including Kiganda Zone, Buwankura, Muzana, and Central, Kampala City, was marred by allegations of ballot stuffing.

In some instances, street children were seen voting despite not being listed on the voters' register, while elsewhere, polling assistants issued voter slips without verifying names against the official register books. The EC was yet to

respond to these allegations by the time of filing this story.

Unlike last week's presidential and parliamentary elections, where voting materials arrived late, and polling began after 9am in many other areas, materials were delivered as early as 7am, but by 9am, only a handful of voters had turned up to cast their ballots.

Mr Adam Kyazze, an EC observer, attributed the low turnout to voter

frustration and loss of trust in the candidates.

"Previously, people used to vote in large numbers, but the leaders they elected often failed to address the issues they were voted in to solve," Mr Kyazze said.

He said the decision not to declare the polling day a public holiday also contributed to the low participation, as many residents opted to attend to their jobs instead of voting.

ways be organised", while Ms Nassazi welcomed the decision, saying despite people having voted for different candidates and not their own representatives, the vote would not matter.

Generally, the voting process in the entire Makindye Division was marred by low voter turnout, with some polling stations having not more than 10 voters by 9am.

At Golden Eagles Junior School, which combines two polling stations in the Nsambya-Kabalagala area, by 7am, voting materials were already on the ground, with about 16 agents of Mr Lukwago, Mr Balimwezo, and Ms Mukisa present. But by 8am, there was only one voter present.

In the Central Division, voting started at around 9.30am, with voters, the majority of whom were youth, seen dropping by the polling stations to cast their votes.

Ms Aisha Babirye Yusurah, a presiding officer at polling station N-Z, said, "We came early, but voting started late at 9.30am because of the low turnout. We waited for the first 10 voter witnesses to arrive," she said.

At polling stations A-M located at Railway Park, the situation was not any different as voters kept coming through one-by-one.

Similarly, in Rubaga Division, the mayoral elections were marked by low voter turnout across several polling stations, with Mr Lukwago saying many polling centres recorded fewer voters than expected.

After casting his vote, Mr Lukwago attributed the low turnout to "voter fatigue" following last week's presidential and parliamentary elections, and unresolved logistical challenges that continue to undermine confidence in the electoral process.

He criticised the persistent failure

of BVVKs, saying they had failed right from the beginning, and up to yesterday, there was no clear response or permanent solution from the authorities. He questioned the accountability for the large sums of taxpayers' money invested in procuring the equipment.

Mr Lukwago warned that continued failures risked discouraging voters from turning up for future elections.

Still across Rubaga division, polling materials, officials, and party agents were reported to have arrived on time at their stations, including at Kabowa Church of Uganda, Mutundwe Church of Uganda Primary School, Wankuluku and Kibuye Market.

However, by mid-morning and throughout the day, voter numbers remained low. At Kibuye Market Polling Station, business continued as usual, with many traders opting to remain in their shops instead of going out to vote.

Mr John Paul Ssenyonga, a businessman at the market, said he did not participate in the exercise due to loss of confidence in the electoral process.

"We have lost the morale to vote because the elections in Uganda are not transparent. Whether we vote or not, the government will declare the person they want," Mr Ssenyonga said, calling for reforms to ensure an independent EC.

Ms Lilian Babirye, who voted early in the morning, said many people were forced to choose between earning a living and voting. She said traders and informal workers had already lost productive time during the election period, including public holidays declared earlier and during the recent internet shutdown.

"People depend on daily income, and after losing time during the internet shutdown and holidays, many decided to go back to work instead of spending

more hours at polling stations," Ms Babirye said.

Nevertheless, she said declaring polling day a public holiday would have allowed more voters to participate.

Some voters and polling agents also pointed out limited voter education on the role of mayors and local government leaders.

After casting her vote in Najjanankumbi on Busaabala Road, MSc Mao, who was accompanied by her husband, who is the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Mr Norbert Mao, also decried the low voter turnout. She attributed it to "frustrations" voters experienced during the January 15 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Despite the challenges, Ms Mao expressed optimism about her chances, saying the people of Kampala had "positively received her manifesto", which focuses on inclusive governance and transforming the city.

Mr Mao urged Ugandans to actively participate in elections, arguing that citizens who do not vote share responsibility for the resultant poor leadership. He, however, acknowledged the concerns about the electoral process and challenged the government to carry out thorough investigations into the failure of the BVVKs.

Compiled by Philip Wafula, Tonny Abet, Jacinta Maria Kannyange, Ruth Aderah, David Walugembe, Jane Nafula, Shabibah Nakirigya, Sylvia Katushabe, Sylvia Namagembe, Daphne Nakabiru, Prossy Kisakye, Juliet Kigongo, Michael Kakumirizi, Damali Mukhaye, Isaac Ssejjombwe & Ndaye Moses.