



**UGANDA HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
(UHRC)**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE 2026
GENERAL ELECTIONS**

18TH JANUARY 2026

UHRC HEAD OFFICE

INTRODUCTION

On 15th January 2026, Ugandans went to the polls to elect their President, Directly Elected Members of Parliament, and District Women Members of Parliament. The Electoral Commission registered 21,649,068 voters, who were assigned to 50,739 polling stations across the country. Each polling station served approximately 300 to 600 voters, covering 71,214 villages nationwide.

Uganda's Constitution, as well as the regional and international human rights instruments to which the country is a party, guarantees key democratic rights. These include the right to participate in public affairs; to vote and stand for election; freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly; access to information; equality before the law; and protection from discrimination and arbitrary arrest or detention. Uganda is further obligated to conduct regular, free, fair and transparent elections.

The Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) congratulates the Electoral Commission (EC), all candidates, and the people of Uganda on the successful conclusion of the exercise.

We also commend the 1,655 election observers drawn from international, regional and national institutions, accredited by the Electoral Commission to observe the 2026 general elections, including the African Union (AU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), China, Korea, South Africa among others.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

The UHRC deployed 121 observers, comprising Members of the Commission and staff, to **990** polling stations across 78 of

Uganda's 146 districts. Observation was conducted through the Commission's 12 regional offices located in Arua, Kampala, Gulu, Fort Portal, Hoima, Jinja, Kabale, Lira, Masaka, Mbarara, Moroto, and Soroti, as detailed below:

NUMBER OF POLLING STATIONS OBSERVED BY UHRC DURING THE 2026 GENERAL ELECTIONS

S/N	REGION	Disctricts	NO OF POLLING STATIONS
1	Arua	6	52
2	Fort Portal	6	63
3	Hoima	7	83
4	Jinja	8	45
5	Kabale	3	29
6	Kampala	10	393
7	Lira	5	56
8	Masaka	6	51
9	Moroto	6	44
10	Mbarara	8	54
11	Gulu	7	61
12	Soroti	6	59
Total		78	990

It should be noted that the UHRC did not monitor parliamentary elections in Kibanda North Constituency in Kiryandongo District and Ibanda Municipality as the Electoral Commission suspended the elections due to the mismatches between candidates' names and their respective symbols on the printed ballot papers.

DISTRIBUTION OF POLLING MATERIALS

Polling materials were delivered on time at the majority of polling stations observed. However, delays were recorded in Kampala, Wakiso, and Mukono, with some materials arriving as late as 10:00 a.m. Consequently, voting commenced between 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. at several polling stations.

VOTER TURN OUT

The Electoral Commission reported 21,649,068 registered voters, of whom 11,366,201 cast ballots for presidential and parliamentary candidates.

While voter turnout during the 2021 "scientific" elections stood at 59.35%, turnout in the 2026 General Elections declined to 52.50%, reflecting a 6.85% decrease.

Higher turnout was observed in rural areas compared to urban centers, with particularly low participation recorded in Kampala and Wakiso Districts.

The UHRC observed that voters generally arrived as early as 6:30 a.m. and remained calm despite delays in the opening of polls.

USE OF BVVK MACHINES

In October 2025, the Electoral Commission unveiled the Biometric Voter Verification Kits (BVVKs) to enhance transparency and electoral integrity, with each polling station designated at least two kits (primary and backup).

On polling day, however, widespread technical challenges were reported. The BVVKs functioned effectively at only a limited number of polling stations visited, including those in Kyankwanzi, Buliisa, Bunyangabu, Karenga, Kaabong, Moroto, Napak, parts of Nakapiripirit, and Rwentojo Ward in Mbarara District.

In addition to the technical challenges, the UHRC noted, BVVKs were not delivered at some polling stations in Yumbe and Wakiso Districts.

At about 9:30 a.m., the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission directed polling officials to revert to the use of the manual National Voters' Register where BVVKs had failed.

The UHRC commends the Electoral Commission for enabling citizens to vote despite these challenges, including extending polling time from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The UHRC however notes that because the official communication was made a few minutes before the 4:00 p.m. deadline, some presiding officers did not receive the guidance in time. However, every registered voter that was present at the polling station was allowed to vote.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS

The UHRC noted that the Electoral Commission identified polling station locations that were accessible to all persons or voters, including older persons, Persons with Disabilities, expectant mothers, among others. For instance, UHRC observed that elections were conducted in polling stations located on open grounds such as school compounds, churches, football fields, and other open flat grounds that were generally accessible. The UHRC, however, noted that in Moroto and Nakapiripirit, some areas were inaccessible with voters walking long distances from the mountains to the lowlands to vote.

UHRC further observed that the vulnerable persons, especially those who needed help, were supported by their personal helpers, while Electoral Commission officials helped or assisted those who did not have personal helpers.

MANAGEMENT OF THE POLLING STATION BY POLLING OFFICERS

Polling officials generally demonstrated professionalism by explaining voting procedures, identifying and recording the required minimum number of voters (10) for poll opening, and relaying information received from the Electoral Commission.

POLLING DAY SECURITY

The security situation remained largely calm nationwide. The UHRC observed regular police patrols around polling stations that did not interfere with voting. The deployment of multi-agency security personnel was visible and consistent with Article 212 of the Constitution.

Most security personnel were unarmed or lightly equipped. However, in a few areas of Kampala, Sembabule, and Mbarara, polling constables were observed carrying firearms. Each polling station was manned by at least two polling constables.

Careful calibration of security deployments remains essential to safeguard free participation.

CLOSING, COUNTING, AND TALLYING PROCESS

Vote counting and tallying were conducted in accordance with Electoral Commission guidelines and procedures, in the presence of candidates' agents, voters, and observers. Tallying times varied across polling stations. Although most polling stations closed at 5:00 p.m., counting and declaration of results extended beyond 8:00 p.m. at some locations. All candidates' agents present received copies of the Declaration of Results Forms.

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HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS

• LIMITED INTERNET ACCESSIBILITY

Security concerns

The UHRC noted that the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) implemented a temporary suspension of public access to the internet on 13th January 2026, two days before polling day. According to UCC, the limitation of internet access was "to mitigate the rapid spread of online misinformation, disinformation, electoral fraud, and related risks, as well as preventing the incitement of violence that could affect public confidence and national security during the electoral period."

This partial shut down impacted 17 million internet subscribers (UCC, 2024) in Uganda, limiting the right of access to information and freedom of expression and association.

The Commission notes that the limitation of access to mobile money services affected rural communities which increasingly use mobile money as an alternative to the formal banking system.

• VIOLENCE AT POLLING STATIONS AND TALLY CENTRES

Although polling was generally peaceful, incidents of violence were reported in Lwemiyaga, Bukedea, Mukono, Butambala, Mityana, Kampala, Kayunga, Luweero, and Wakiso. Media reports cited seven deaths, three gunshot injuries, and 25 arrests in Butambala and Kalungu.

• INVALID VOTES

According to the Electoral Commission, the valid votes were 11,090,848, and the invalid votes were 275,353. UHRC

observers noted that some votes were invalidated due to incorrect marking or not marking at all.

The UHRC notes that the number of invalid votes remains high with a similarly high number of invalid votes (393,500 representing 3.66%) recorded in the 2021 general election.

. CHALLENGES OF CANDIDATES' AGENTS

UHRC observed that the candidates' agents from various political parties were present at the polling stations, including the independent. It was, however, noted that while the majority of these polling stations had agents for all the National Resistance Movement (NRM) and the National Unity Platform (NUP) political parties, others like DP, ANT and FDC hardly had agents at the polling stations visited. It was also observed that agents of the majority of parliamentary candidates were present at most of the polling stations visited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The UHRC makes the following preliminary recommendations:

1. The Electoral Commission should conduct comprehensive training and large-scale testing of all electoral technologies prior to polling.
2. A mandatory percentage of election financing should be allocated to voter education.
3. Candidates' agents should be permitted to verify voters on the manual register where digital verification is unavailable.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges observed, Ugandans were able to exercise their right to vote in a generally peaceful and secure

environment. The UHRC will continue to engage stakeholders and issue further statements as the electoral process progresses.

Signed,

.....*M. Wangadya*.....

MARIAM WANGADYA

CHAIRPERSON

18/01/2026