

Electoral Processes in Uganda

Workshop organized by the Justice Coalition of Religious Network of Uganda (JCoR-Uganda)

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13th January, 2026

VENUE: ZOOM

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission's mandate to conduct "regular free and fair elections and referenda" can be realised if all stakeholders are committed, honest and transparent in the conduct of electoral activities.

Voters are expected to act in accordance with the established laws and electoral guidelines without undue influence and to respect the opinions and choices of others.

Voter Education

Under the constitution of the republic of Uganda one of the mandate of the electoral commission is to “formulate and implement Voter educational programmes relating to elections”. This ensures that citizens understand their rights and responsibilities regarding elections.

Electoral from start to end

1. Category And Mode Of Election Of Representatives At Different Levels
2. Demarcation Of Electoral Areas
3. Re-organisation Of Polling Stations
4. Update Of The Voters' Register
5. The Display Of The National Voters' Register
6. Nomination Of Candidates
7. Campaigns
8. The Polling Process
9. Some Election Offences

1. Category and Mode of Election of Representatives at Different Levels

NATIONAL: President

Parliamentary: Directly Elected Constituency, District Woman, Special Interest Groups (SIGs: Army Council, Workers' Unions, Youth, Persons With Disabilities, Older Persons)

Local Government

District Chairperson

Continued

Directly Elected Councillors, Women Councillors, PWD Councillors, Youth Councillors, Older persons, and Workers

CITY :

Chairperson

Directly Elected Councillors, Women Councillors, PWD Councillors, Youth Councillors, Older Persons Rep, Workers Rep., Workers councils and Professional bodies Rep. (4)

Continued

Kampala City Authority: Lord Mayor Deputy Lord mayor, directly elected Lord councilors, PWDs ,Women Rep, Youth Electoral and Representatives of professional bodies.

Municipalities, Subcounties, Town councils, City & Municipal divisions: Lord Mayor Deputy Lord mayor, directly elected Lord councilors, PWDs, Women Rep, Youth, and Older persons.

Note: all the above are elected by secret ballot only

2. Demarcation of Electoral Areas

Demarcation of Electoral Areas for representation at Local Governments is done in accordance with Article 181 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and the Local Governments Act, Cap 243, sections 108, 109 and 110.

Demarcation is creation of electoral boundaries. The necessity for demarcation of electoral areas arises out of the following:

- a. Constituency,**
- b. Local Government Councils:** The creation of districts sub counties/towns, parishes/wards, Municipal Division level

3. Re-organisation of Polling Stations

It is the mandate of the Electoral Commission under Section 12 (1) (d) of the Electoral Commission Act, to establish and operate Polling Stations. In preparation for General Elections,

the Commission conducts re-organization of Polling Stations country-wide; to enable voters to conveniently cast their votes.

Re-organization of polling stations therefore is the placing of voters in the right polling stations and putting polling stations in the right locations.

Purpose of Re-organisation

Re-organization of polling stations serves to:

- i) Allocate each parish/ward or electoral area at least one polling station;
- ii) Merge Polling Stations that have far less than the optimum number of voters as determined by the Electoral Commission;
- iii) Split polling stations with significantly more than the optimum number of voters into two or more polling stations;
- iv) Rationalise polling stations which had earlier been split on the basis of the alphabet;
- v) Re-locate polling stations on the basis of voter accessibility and management;
- vi) Re-name polling stations according to their physical locations;
- vii) Harmonise parish and village names with the corresponding polling stations

4. Update of the National Voters' Register

The Electoral Commission is mandated by law (Sec 18[1] EC Act) to compile,

maintain and update on a continuous basis the National Voters' Register. Update of the voters' register refers to the process of adding on to an already existing voters' register, names of eligible voters who have never been registered;

according an opportunity to those who would like to change their voting locations and correcting of particulars of voters already existing on the register

Purpose of the Update Exercise

- i) To avail an opportunity to eligible persons who have never registered before to do so
- ii) To effect transfers for voters who would like to change their voting locations in accordance with the law
- iii) To facilitate nomination of candidates i.e contestants , seconders of nominations and supporters
- iv) To enable eligible persons (voters) exercise their right to vote

5. Display of the National Voters' Register

The Electoral Commission is mandated under Sec. 25 of the Electoral Commissions Act to appoint a period of not less than twenty-one days during which a copy of the voters roll for each parish or ward is displayed for public scrutiny.

In addition to the twenty-one days, the Commission enjoined to allow a period of ten days (a period of Natural Justice) during which any objections or complaints in relation to the names recommended by the parish tribunals to be included or deleted from the voters roll may be raised or filed.

6. Nomination of Candidates

Nomination is the process by which aspiring candidates for each elective office, present their duly filled nomination papers to the Returning Officer for verification.

Aspiring candidates, who meet the nomination requirements, are declared duly nominated to contest for an elective office.

The Electoral Commission shall publish in the Gazette and local media nomination days, place and time when persons who wish to stand for elections for any elective office shall be nominated.

Roles of stakeholders: Voters

The voters play the following role:

- i) Propose and second an aspiring candidate
- ii) Support the nomination of an aspiring candidate
- iii) Inspection of nomination papers and lodging complaints

Roles of stakeholders: Observers

Election observers play the following role:

- i) Enhance credibility of the exercise
- ii) Their presence deters malpractices
- iii) They make constructive criticism and recommendations

7. Campaigns

Campaign is the period immediately following nominations, during which candidates meet voters and solicit for votes.

By law, the Electoral Commission designates dates and gazettes the campaign period. Campaigning must end 24 hours before polling, this applies to all categories of elections conducted under universal adult suffrage.

Candidates or political parties or their agents normally organize their campaigns.

During campaigns, candidates and political parties/organizations present their manifestos outlining their political priorities.

Campaign Methods

Different methods are used by candidates while campaigning for various positions. These may include the following:

- i) Political rallies;
- ii) Face to face canvassing;
- iii) Media (both electronic and print);
- iv) Posters - Visual presentations;
- v) Public debates and
- vi) Road shows.
- vii) Currently social media platforms

8. The Polling Process

Polling is a critical milestone in the electoral process, during which voters exercise their right to choose their leaders. It encompasses accessibility of a polling station, procedures for voting, counting of votes and declaration of results. Polling is the climax of all activities in the electoral process.

The Returning Officer, appointed by the Electoral Commission, is mandated

Under Section 34(1) EC Act to appoint Polling day Officials, to manage the polling exercise at all polling stations; Presiding Officers, Polling Assistants, BVVK Operator, Orderly Officers and Election Constables.

What is voting?

Voting is the expression of choice of a candidate/political party/referendum side by a voter on the ballot paper using the authorised (*allowed by law*) mark of choice (tick or thumbprint). This applies to voting by secret ballot.

Voting is a constitutional right that enables voters to:

- Choose and change leadership according to their preference;
- Approve or disapprove a referendum question;
- Hold the leaders accountable and
- Promote democracy and good governance

Roles of polling officials

- Prepare the Polling Station at least 2 days before polling day
- Collect the polling kit from designated centres
- Ensure that polls open at 7:00 a.m. and to declare polling closed at 4:00 p.m and record the votes cast in favour of each candidate
- Conduct elections at polling stations for which they are responsible and to supervise other polling officials at the polling station
- Ensure that voters form one orderly line at least 20 meters away from the Presiding Officer's table

Roles of polling officials continued

- Mark with an asterisk (*) the names of the five (5) voters who were present during the opening of the polling kit
- Inspect the fingers of voters before issuing the ballot paper to ensure that they have not voted already
- Keep peace at the polling station because all Presiding Officers have the power of a justice of the peace during the polls
- Empty the ballot box and count the votes in the full view of all present. The box should be shown to those around to confirm that it is empty
- Ensure that the ballot box is transferred for safe custody when counting is adjourned
- Fill copies of the relevant forms and the report book

Roles of polling officials continued

- Ensure that Declaration of Results Forms are signed by the agents present who wish to do so
- Announce the results of the voting at the polling station and leave a copy of results at the station
- Issue the ballot papers according to the serial numbers;
- Ensure that those who have cast their votes and other persons in the vicinity other than election officials, agents, observers stand/sit at least 100 meters from the polling station;
- Deliver the 2 evident tamper envelope one containing the DR form, ORB,ABP and the second containing the DR form only of the voting at the polling station, to the Returning Officer to allow for declaration of results within the time stipulated by law
- Accounts for all polling materials at the polling station

Polling Station Setup (Layout)

The voting process at a Polling Station can be single or multiple depending on the type of election. The voting is said to be single if the election is for one elective position.

In this case only one ballot box is provided for casting votes.

In multiple voting, the election is for two or more elective positions. The number of ballot boxes for casting the votes corresponds to the number of elective positions.

Casting a Vote for One Elective Office

This includes the following steps:

i) At Table One, a voter mentions his/her name loudly and clearly for everyone to hear and hand in his/her voter locator slip (VLS).

The Presiding Officer checks for the name and photograph in the register and examines the right hand thumb to verify that the voter has not yet voted.

ii) The BVVK Operator scans the QR code on the Voter Locator Slip (VLS) and verifies the finger print(s) of the voter to ascertain whether the information corresponds with that on the register,

it is only then that the voter will be given a ballot paper and his/her voter locator slip will be returned

Casting a Vote for One Elective Office continued

The Presiding Officer will then show the voter how to fold the ballot paper lengthwise before giving it to the voter and remind him/ her not to drop the VLS in the ballot box.

Carry the ballot paper to Table Two, use the basin provided for secrecy to tick or place a thumbprint in the box next to the photograph/symbol of the Candidate/Party of choice/Referendum Side. Fold the ballot paper lengthwise, as shown by the Presiding Officer and move on to Table Three with the ballot paper.

At Table Three, insert the marked folded ballot paper through the slit on top of the transparent ballot box.

At Table Four, the Polling Assistant marks the cuticle of the voter's right hand thumb with the indelible ink Marker

Then the voter exits the polling station.

Stages in the Polling Process

There are various stages in the polling process. They are opening of polls, voting, closure of polls, counting of votes, filling of forms, announcement of results and transmission of results to the Returning Officer.

Opening of polls:

This is the first stage in the polling process before the actual casting of the vote starts. At the opening of polls, the Presiding Officer should do the following:

- i) Open the Ballot Box in the presence of candidates' agents and at least five registered voters,
- ii) Pour out the contents for verifying against the official report book

Opening of the polls continued

- iii) Confirm the total number of ballot papers issued indicating to all present that they have not been tampered with,
- iv) Fill the first part of the Official Report Book (ORB),
- v) Seal the transparent ballot box and take it to Table 3 for voting,
- vi) Assign duties and administer the Oath to the Constables and Polling Assistants,
- vii) Conduct some basic voter education i.e. authorised mark of choice,
- viii) Place an asterisk (*) against the names of the first five voters in the voters register who witnessed the opening of polls,

Actual Voting

Requisites before one is issued with a ballot paper, include:

- i) audibly pronounce your name for identification purposes,
- ii) present your finger for biometric verification
- iii) the BVVK operator will Confirm the particulars of the voter on the register,
- iv) crosscheck the fingers to ensure that the voter has not already voted,
- v) Issue the voter with a ballot paper,
- vi) Ensuring that the voter's cuticle of the right hand thumb has been inked before leaving the polling station.

Actual Voting

At 4:00pm prompt, no one is allowed to join the queue. The constable stands behind the last person in the line.

Voting continues until the last person in the line casts his/her vote.

After the last person has voted the Presiding Officer;

- i) Closes the election round using the BVVK machine
- ii) Gather voting materials at the table of the Presiding Officer.
- iii) Ensure that all materials are secure
- iv) Takes account of the unused ballot papers
- v) Opens the ballot box in the presence of Agents and all present to start the counting process.

Procedure for Counting of Votes

At this stage Presiding Officer assisted by the Polling Assistants will:

- i. Arrange the station for counting;
- ii. Open the ballot box;
- iii. Empty the contents carefully on the plastic sheet provided;
- iv. Unfold and arrange the ballot papers into piles;
- v. Sort the votes per candidate in full view of the candidates agents and voters present by determining the valid and invalid votes;
- vi. Put aside invalid votes;
- vii. Count the votes for each candidate;
- viii. Count the spoilt, invalid and unused ballot papers;
- ix. Fill the Declaration of Results form and other relevant forms

Announcement and Transmission of Election Results

After filling the forms, the Presiding Officer will announce the results of the poll to everyone present.

The Presiding Officer will secure a copy of the duly filled DR form for the Returning Officer in the Tamper proof envelop, place a copy in the black ballot box, issue a copy to agents of each candidate and display **a copy at the polling station.**

A copy of the Declaration of Results Form, Official Report Book and Accountability of Ballot papers Forms are sealed by the Presiding Officer in a tamper proof envelope from the Electoral Commission and delivered to the nearest collection centre for onward transmission to the Returning Officer.

9. Election Offences by Stakeholders

All stakeholders should note the following:

- i) Pretending to have a disability is an offence and any person who commits this offence is liable to a fine not exceeding 100,000/= (One hundred thousand shillings) or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both.
- ii) Assisting a voter without authority is an offence and the offender will on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding 200,000/= (Two hundred thousand shillings) or two years imprisonment or both.
- iii) Voting more than once is an offence and on conviction a person is liable to a fine not exceeding 500,000/= (Five hundred thousand shillings) or to imprisonment not exceeding five years or both

9. Election Offences by Stakeholders continued

iv) Voting on behalf of another person (living or dead) is an offence and on conviction one is liable to imprisonment of five years (without option of a fine).

v) Selling alcohol within four hundred metres of any polling station is an offence and any person who commits this offence is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding 200,000/= (Two hundred thousand shillings) or imprisonment not exceeding twelve months or both.

9. Election Offences by Stakeholders continued

vi) Any person who arms himself or herself during any part of polling day with any arms or ammunition without lawful authority commits an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding 200,000/= (Two hundred thousand shillings) or imprisonment not exceeding two years or both.

vii) Preventing a person from voting is an offence and anyone who commits the offence of obstruction is liable to a fine of 200,000/= (Two hundred thousand shillings) or imprisonment for two years

Mark the dates: Voting beyond 15th January

Elective Position	Polling Date
Elections of the President and Members of Parliament (Directly-elected MP and District Woman Representative to Parliament)	15 th January 2026
National Conference for Election of Workers Representatives to Parliament	19 th January 2026
Election of Councillors representing Special Interest Groups (Youths; Older Persons and PWDs) at Municipality/City Division	20 th January 2026
Elections of District Local Government Councils: District/City Chairpersons, Lord Mayor, Mayors, and Councillors	22 nd January 2026
Elections of Municipality/City Division Chairpersons and Councillors	27 th January 2026
Regional Conferences for Election of Regional Youths Representatives to Parliament	28 th January 2026
National Conference for Election of National Female Older Persons Representative to Parliament	28 th January 2026
Army Council Meeting for Election of UPDF Representatives to Parliament	28 th January 2026
Election of Councillors representing Special Interest Groups (Youths; Older Persons; Workers and PWDs) at District/City	29 th January 2026
Election of Councillors representing Special Interest Groups (Youths; Older Persons and PWDs) at Sub County/Town/Municipal Division	30 th January 2026
Regional Conference for Election of Older Persons Representatives to Parliament	2 nd February 2026
National Conference for Election of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) Representatives to Parliament	3 rd February 2026
Elections of Sub County/Town/Municipal Division Chairpersons and Councillors	4 th February 2026
National Conference for Election of National Female Youth Representative to Parliament	6 th February 2026

Thank you for listening
