

## **2021: Uganda Registers yet Another Historic Election!**

### **Introduction**

The 2021 General Elections were the fourth to be successfully organised by the Electoral Commission (EC), under a multi-party dispensation in Uganda. The elections are remarkable as they were held amidst peculiar challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The peaceful conclusion of these elections, in which voters elected leaders from diverse political backgrounds, at Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Council levels, is testimony to the strong and determined spirit of Ugandans to pursue peaceful and democratic means of determining leaders.

Since 2018, the EC undertook various activities under the Roadmap for 2020-2021 General Elections, leading to the polls conducted on various dates in January and February 2021.

As the Commission, we are grateful to the Almighty God for the smooth conclusion of this important electoral exercise.

We congratulate the Government of Uganda, which facilitated this electoral process through an enabling electoral environment and provision of required funds.

We also wish to congratulate all Ugandans who were able to exercise their constitutional right and elect leaders of their choice through the ballot box.

I applaud all those who participated in the elections as candidates at various levels, and specially salute those who were elected into office.

Lastly, I extend our appreciation to the various Ministries, departments and agencies, as well as private institutions and civil society organisations, security and the media for the support provided to the Electoral Commission during the organisation and conduct of the above electoral activities. Our success, as the Commission, and as the People of Uganda in general, was due, in no small part, to the support provided by you our esteemed stakeholders.

Finally, I congratulate the members, management and staff of the Electoral Commission on the successful completion of this historic electoral process.

### **The 2021 General Elections Roadmap at a Glance**

The successful completion of the Roadmap for 2021 General Elections can be attributed to the Commission’s well-timed adoption of a Strategic Plan in 2018 for the period 2018–2021. Under this Roadmap, we undertook effort to build and strengthen linkages with various stakeholders in the electoral process, to achieve a peaceful and successful exercise.

The Roadmap was implemented in a phased manner during which we undertook administrative and logistical activities to professionally and efficiently organise and conduct the elections.

Some of these activities include the procurement of specialised equipment, materials software and motor vehicles, the re-organisation of polling stations, the general update of the National Voters’ Register using new biometric technology, display of the National Voters’ Register, and printing of the final Register, bearing 18,103,603 registered voters of whom 9,504,391 (52.5%) were female and 8,599,212 (47.5%) were male.

<b>No</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status of 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
1.	No. of Cities/Districts in Uganda	146
2.	No. of Counties	312
3.	No. of Constituencies	353
4.	No. of Sub Counties/Towns/Municipal Divisions	2,190
5.	Number of Parishes	10,594
6.	Number of Villages	69,970
7.	Number of Polling Stations	34,684
8.	Number of Registered Voters	18,103,603

The Commission also conducted the nomination of candidates to contest for elective positions at Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Council levels, including Special Interest Groups.

The EC harmonized and oversaw the campaign programme for each elective category. Finally, the EC conducted and supervised polling day activities at 34,684 polling stations countrywide, tallied the elections results and declared winning candidates at various levels.

The Commission further convened delegates conferences for election of Representatives of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to Parliament, that is, the Youth, Workers, Persons with Disability (PWDs), Older Persons and the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (UPDF).

<b>Composition of the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament by Political Party</b>	
<b>Party</b>	<b>Number</b>
Democratic Party (DP)	9
Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)	32
Independent	73
JEEMA	1
National Resistance Movement (NRM)	337
National Unity Platform (NUP)	57
Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP)	1
Uganda People's Congress (UPC)	9
UPDF Representatives	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>529</b>

### **Challenges in the 2021 Electoral Process**

The corona virus pandemic had an effect on the conduct of electoral activities under the Roadmap for the 2020/2021 General Elections.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March, 2020, when Government declared a nationwide lockdown, the Commission was already implementing preliminary activities under the Roadmap for the 2020/2021 General Elections, namely; update and display of the National Voters Register and Registers of Special Interest Groups.

The Commission was particularly carrying out activities for the conduct of elections for the Special Interest Groups (Persons with Disability, Older Persons, Youth) Committees from Village to National Levels. This was to be followed by other preparatory activities for elections of Local Government Councils, Members of Parliament and the President.

The Electoral Commission postponed the above activities under the Roadmap, in response to measures introduced by Government to prevent the spread of the deadly Coronavirus. This was because electoral activities involve public gatherings and hence pose high COVID-19 risk of person-to-person and object-to-person transmissions.

As a result of the postponement, the Commission lost three months of critical Roadmap activities. The postponement of Roadmap activities also caused inconvenience to various stakeholders in the electoral process. This includes political parties and organisations, which were preparing internal primaries to identify persons to contest as candidates at various elective levels, as well as individuals who were aspiring to contest as independent candidates at various levels. As we all know, the postponement was inevitable.

The Commission recognises the constitutional right of citizens to vote and choose their leaders, as well as our duty to facilitate the exercise of those rights. The Commission was further mindful of the need to ensure a healthy and safe environment for all stakeholders during the electoral process. Accordingly, after consultations with, and expert guidance from the Ministry of Health, the Commission considered, approved and issued a revised Roadmap for the 2020/2021 General Elections on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

The revisions to the Roadmap were made with consideration of the operational requirements for the electoral activities and the legal framework governing the conduct of elections, however, under reduced timeframes.

The Commission further issued Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the various election activities (pre-nomination, nomination, campaigns and polling day) to address the unique health and safety challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SOPs incorporated measures and guidelines put in place by the Ministry of Health and the outcome of consultations made by the Commission with various stakeholders in the electoral process to prevent and combat person-to-person, person-to-object and object-to-person spread of the COVID -19 during the conduct of election activities.

Hence political parties and candidates, and other stakeholders in the electoral process were encouraged to largely use non-contact means of communication, that is, broadcasting, publishing, cell and web-based platforms, to interact with the electorate during the campaign period. Candidates were further guided to hold meetings in a regulated manner, with limited attendance of a maximum of two hundred (200) persons, preferably in open and spacious setting, where there is observation of standard operating procedures (social distancing, washing of hands, use of sanitizers, and wearing of face masks).

Elections are one of the biggest logistical exercises Uganda undertakes every five years. They involve recruiting, training, deploying and supervising a large and complex human resource base, comprising persons of diverse professions and backgrounds, whose expertise is critical to achieving a credible election. They further involve the acquisition and installation of machinery and equipment to manage various processes, perform a range of complex tasks and deliver timely results.

The huge volume of work undertaken in this election can best be comprehended if one considers that the Commission organises, conducts and supervises the polling for

Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government (District, Municipality and Sub County) elections on different dates, but within a period of thirty (30) days.

But perhaps the most complex factor is the management and supervision of a delicate politically-charged environment. Elections are competitive and this means candidates and their agents will enthusiastically mobilize to win majority support. It is no easy task to ensure that the candidates who are in thousands contesting for thousands of elective positions, comply with electoral guidelines.

A combination of a dynamic public and media relations strategy and a vigorous voter education campaign, as well as the relentless support by civil society, media, Police, political parties, candidates, supporters, agents and election observer groups, enabled Uganda to witness peaceful processes and polling.

### **2021 General Elections and the Growth of Democracy in Uganda**

The EC introduced a number of projects, programmes and systems, aimed at improving the overall management of elections, and ensuring a brighter future for our democratization process.

To enhance transparency during this election, the EC invited and accredited a total of 2,817 observers, of whom 2,540 were national while 277 were international observers, to observe various programmes and activities under the Roadmap. They included individuals, civil society organisations, political parties and organisations, institutions and the media.

During the update of the National Voters' Register, the EC adopted modern biometric technology to improve voter registration. The text version of the Voter's Register was uploaded on the EC website ([www.ec.or.ug](http://www.ec.or.ug)) during the display exercise, to ease access for voters who have access to the internet. An SMS service was also provided to enable registered voters confirm the details of their polling stations from a mobile phone.

The EC enhanced the level of transparency further by issuing a soft copy and hard copy of the photo-bearing National Voters' Register to the Presidential candidates, to enable them (through their agents) ensure that only eligible persons are allowed to vote during the elections and only at the polling station where they are registered (as voters).

It is important to note that the Commission introduced, for the first time, a full colour photo-bearing Voters' Register for use on polling day. The use of full colour printing improved the

print quality of the Voters' Register and enhanced the identification of voters on polling day.

Furthermore, in order to improve accuracy, security, efficiency and credibility in the delivery of electoral services, the Electoral Commission embarked on deliberate actions to integrate technology in its operations and systems. Accordingly, the Commission acquired biometric voter verification machines which were used to verify voters who presented themselves at polling stations on polling day. The Biometric Voter Verification (BVV) machines were deployed at all the 34,684 (thirty-four thousand six hundred and eighty-four) polling stations in Uganda during the elections.

The BVV System remains one of the measures aimed at improving the management and conduct of elections in Uganda through authentication of voter identity. The BVVS System enabled the Commission to ensure that only registered persons are allowed to vote during the elections and that such persons (voters) do not vote more than once for the same election. Hence, the BVV System was helpful in improving the identification of voters and also addressing the challenge of voter impersonation during elections.

The Commission designed and installed the Electronic Results Transmission and Dissemination System (ERTDS), at the National Tally Center (Kyambogo University Sports Ground), to enhance transparency and capacity to receive and tally results from all cities and districts and declare final results of the Presidential Elections within 48 hours from closure of polls,

The Commission provided web-based computer terminals at the National Tally Center from which all accredited candidates' agents, election observers and media, were able to view results as they came in from all levels up to the polling stations. And surely, the EC was able to declare final results ahead of the constitutional deadline!

Our regular consultation with local leaders, civil society, the Police, political parties and candidates, and the media, helped to create a peaceful electoral environment. The EC particularly worked closely with the media, who in turn, updated the public on the progress of the electoral process. Media debates and feedback brought critical issues to the attention of the electorate and candidates, hence promoted citizen participation in elections and helping to raise the level of socio-political maturity among Ugandans.

The Commission accredited civil society organisations to conduct awareness campaigns on citizen rights, duties and responsibilities, before, during and after elections. Religious

leaders extended a lot of support to the electoral process; the leadership of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) was always available to counsel the Commission and other stakeholders to pursue harmony and reconciliation, and they also offered to mediate on occasions when discontent broke out among various stakeholders. The Commission remains grateful for this support.

### **Conclusion**

The vision of the EC is “*to be a model institution and centre of excellence in election management*”. We pledge to remain committed to developing our electoral system through continuous improvement. We will review successes and challenges in previous elections, including the most recent one, conduct research, consult and adopt best practices from sister election management bodies, and pursue any amendments necessary to advance our electoral democracy.

Finally, a successful electoral process is a product of the effort of all stakeholders; the Commission acknowledges and appreciates you for supporting the electoral process. Your invaluable contribution enabled us to successfully organize, conduct and conclude the elections on schedule. Let us continue working together to consolidate what we have achieved, and build an even better electoral system for an even stronger democracy.

For God and my country,

Justice Byabakama Mugenyi Simon  
**Chairperson, Electoral Commission**