

INTERIM REPORT

Tooting – Westminster Parliamentary By-election
16th June 2016



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Westminster Parliamentary By-election – June 16th 2016

Report on Election Observation – Tooting (Wandsworth)

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Tooting parliamentary constituency (Westminster) on 16th June 2016.
2. To advise the local council (Wandsworth) and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support local councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

A team of 8 observers, registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 103 separate observations in 58 different polling stations across the Tooting Parliamentary constituency.

Each team was split into pairs to allow for objective observation and they then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

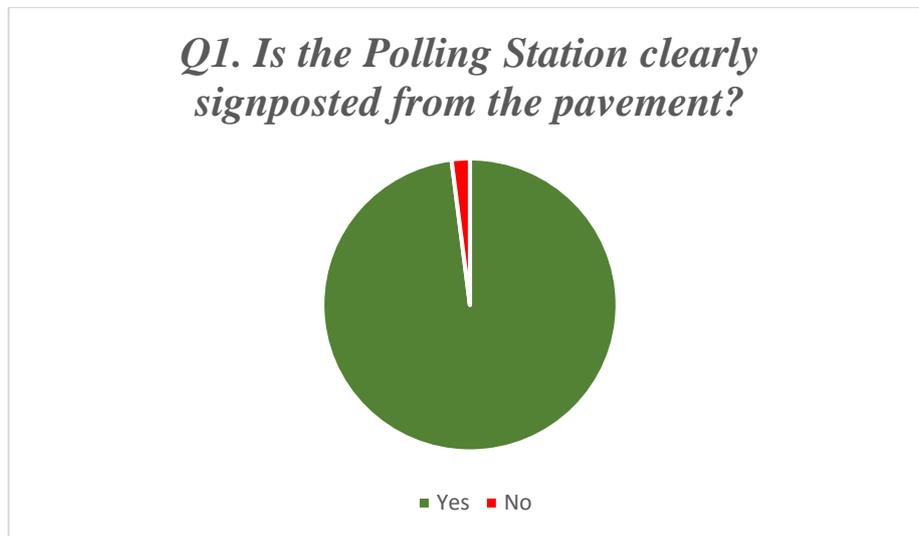
The observations generally took between thirty and forty-five minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible.

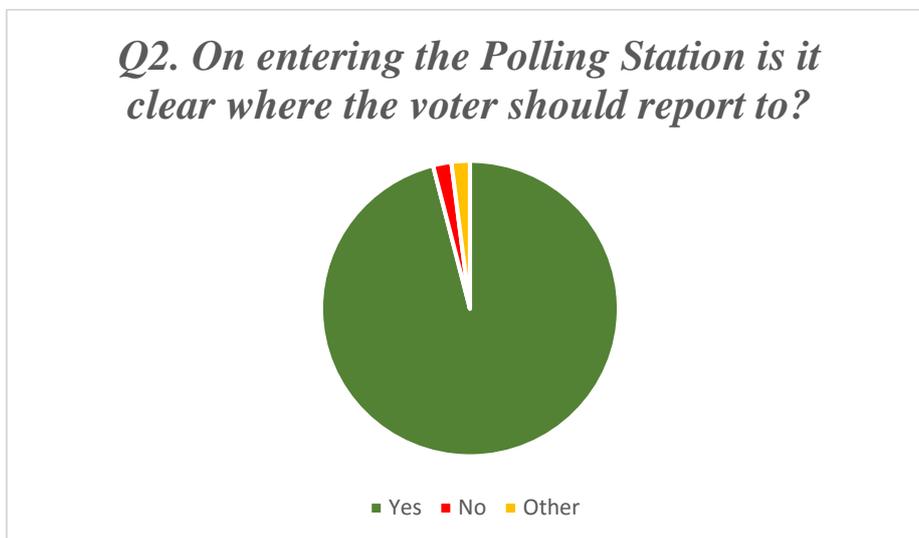
This means the observation attended all the polling stations across the constituency – in some cases more than once.

Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

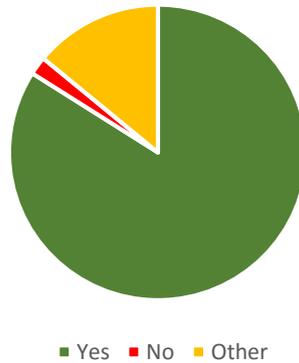


QUESTION 1: 2% of observations indicated that the polling station was not clearly identifiable from the main road, 98% identified that the polling station was highly visible. However, there were some issues over visibility that seemed to stem from lack of equipment to affix notices and also, due to weather conditions, some simply disappeared during the day.



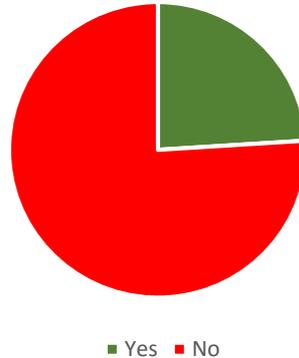
QUESTION 2: The main problems with reporting at polling stations centred around clarity in polling stations which had more than one ballot box covering separate polling districts.

Q3. Was it clear how disabled voters would access the Polling Station?



QUESTION 3: 84% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear, whilst 2% indicated that access was not. These problems focused on step-free access which was not always available. Some polling stations' disabled access polling booths were situated in such a way that made it difficult for disabled voters to access.

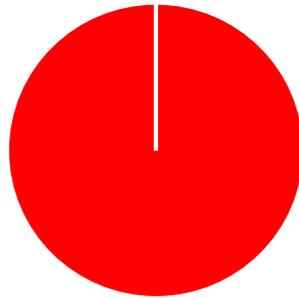
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Although staff had clearly been informed that an observation team would be operating across the constituency, the formal procedure for identifying and then recording that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in the vast majority of cases.

76% of observers did not have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. 24% checked the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

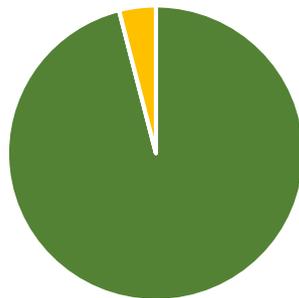
Q5. Did the staff record your ID number on a form?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

QUESTION 5: Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. No polling stations recorded the ID details of the observers.

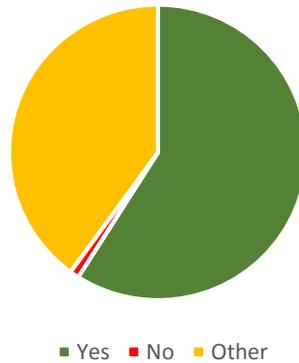
Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

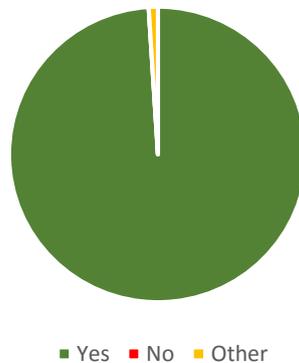
QUESTION 6: 4% of polling stations did not have two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station. In some cases, this was because they were briefly occupied elsewhere, sometimes on the telephone.

Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?



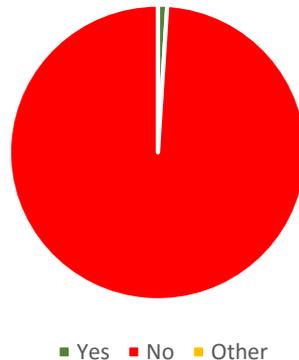
QUESTION 7: An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at 10pm should be extremely clear but in 1% this was not the case, in 40% this was somewhat the case or sometimes the case. 59% of ballot boxes were sealed correctly.

Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



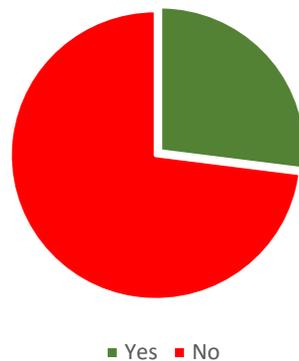
QUESTION 8: More information will be available in due course about this question but the vast majority of information was clear.

Q9. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to illicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹ In only 1 case did observers identify literature within the polling station that could arguably have been biased towards one candidate.

Q10. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?



QUESTION 10: In 27% of cases, our observer team identified so-called ‘family voting’. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes ‘family voting’ as an ‘unacceptable practice’.² It occurs where husband and wife voting together is normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely. In several cases this was more than just husband and wife and included younger female family members. In all cases there was little attempt to hide this practice and only on a handful of occasions did polling staff intercede to prevent it. Only a few were successful in preventing it. 27% constitutes the largest percentage in family voting the observer group has seen when observing.

¹ This question did not just relate to literature specific to this election but observers were also asked to identify if other literature, such as MP or councillors’ surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

² <http://www.osce.org/>

INTERIM CONCLUSION

The initial interim report would indicate that, on the whole, the organisation of polling stations was well run across the constituency, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

However, the large number of observations of so-called 'family voting', which is considered an 'unacceptable practice' in elections should be considered a matter of statistical significance as this constitutes 1 in 4 polling stations across the constituency.

This data has been available immediately but a final report will be issued on Monday the 4th of July 2016.