

FINAL REPORT

Finnish Presidential Election
28th January 2018



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12th February 2018



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Final Report on Election Observation

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process in Finland.
2. To advise the local councils and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within Finland.
3. Support local councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Methodology

The mission deployed 6 observers in three teams of two. These were registered with Finland's Ministry of Justice, and accredited to observe across Finland. They made 41 separate observations in 40 polling stations across the greater Helsinki area, including both Helsinki and Espoo.

Each observation was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation and the observers then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. Each team was accompanied by a local member of staff who acted as both translator and driver.

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. This happened on every occasion.

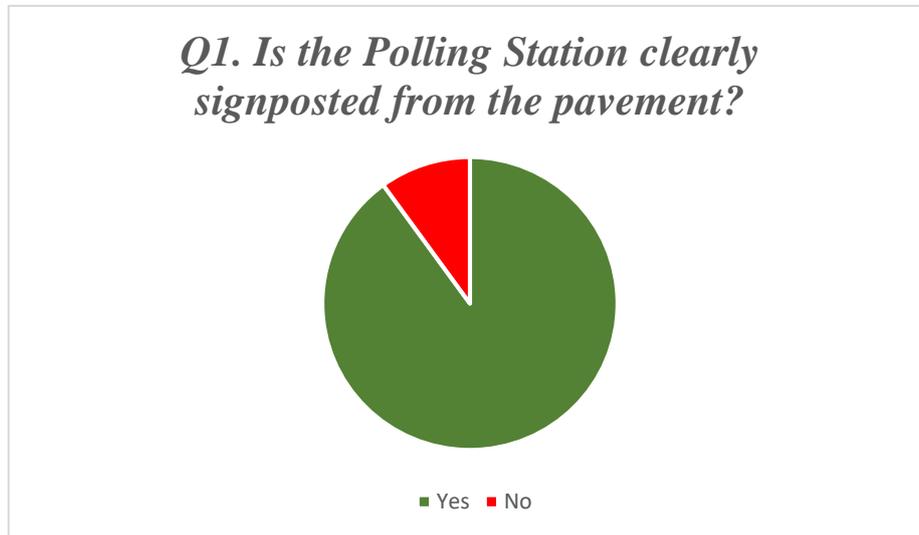
The organisation of polling stations was well run across the area of observation, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

Polls were open from 9am to 8pm and the teams were asked to observe an opening as well as a closing of a polling station and tour polling stations throughout the day.

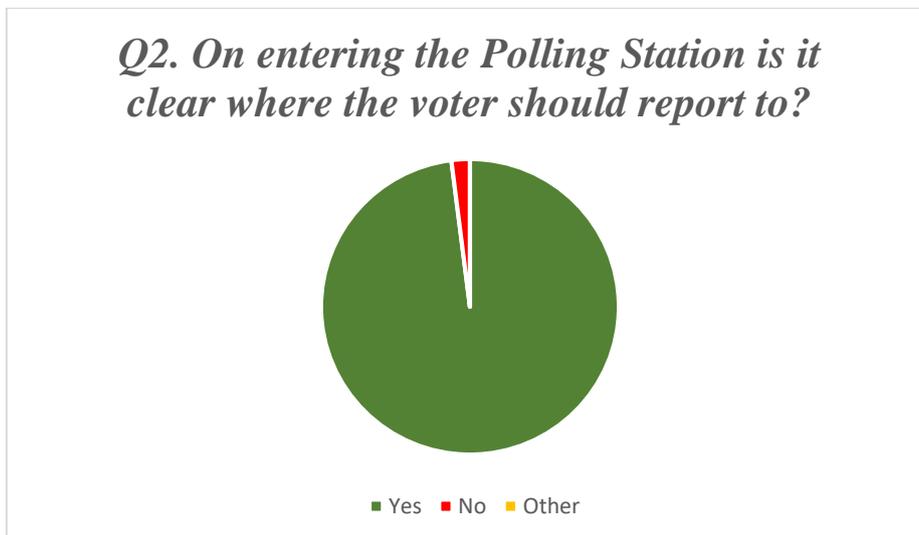
Counting began almost immediately, based in the polling stations before results were transmitted to the central count for checking.

Results of the Observation

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

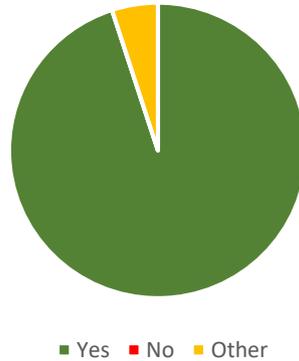


QUESTION 1: In 90% of cases polling stations were properly signposted from the pavement. Some had difficult access and were not easily found from available parking. Where signposting was not clear this generally referred to different routes to access which were less clearly signposted.



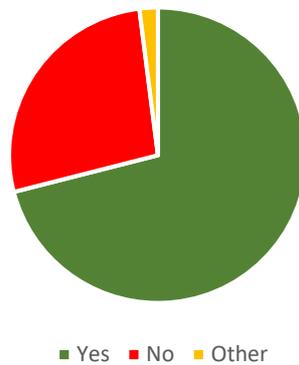
QUESTION 2: In 98% of cases, observers did not identify problems with where voters should report. Indeed, some polling stations generally had staff dedicated to welcoming voters and indicating where they should report to.

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



QUESTION 3: 95% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear. Another 5% suggested that the disabled access was available however this was not clearly signposted.

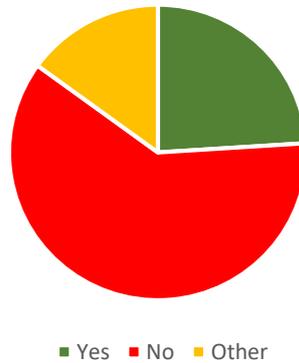
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Polling staff were aware that observation teams might be operating across the area. The formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was generally followed by polling station staff.

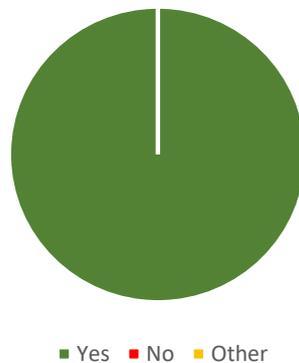
In 71% of cases observers have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, 27% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

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



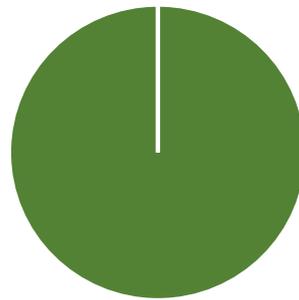
QUESTION 5: Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was a Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation badge which was numbered. On only 24% of occasions did the polling staff record this immediately and another 15% did eventually. 61% of stations made no record of our visits at all.

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



QUESTION 6: 100% of polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station. Indeed, most polling stations had numerous staff able to help and guide voters through the process.

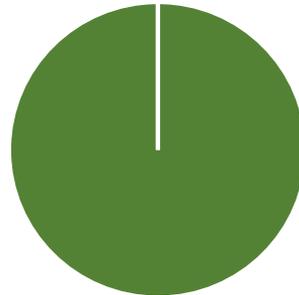
Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with padlocks?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

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 9am and closing at 8pm. All ballot boxes observed were correctly sealed.

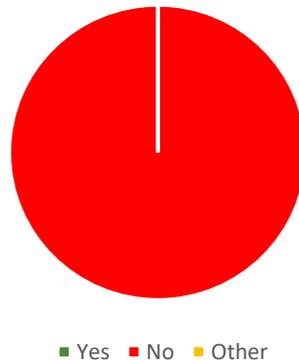
Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Other

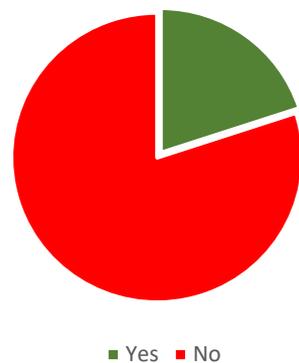
QUESTION 8: 100% of polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

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



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to elicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.¹ 100% of polling stations did not have political literature in the booth.

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



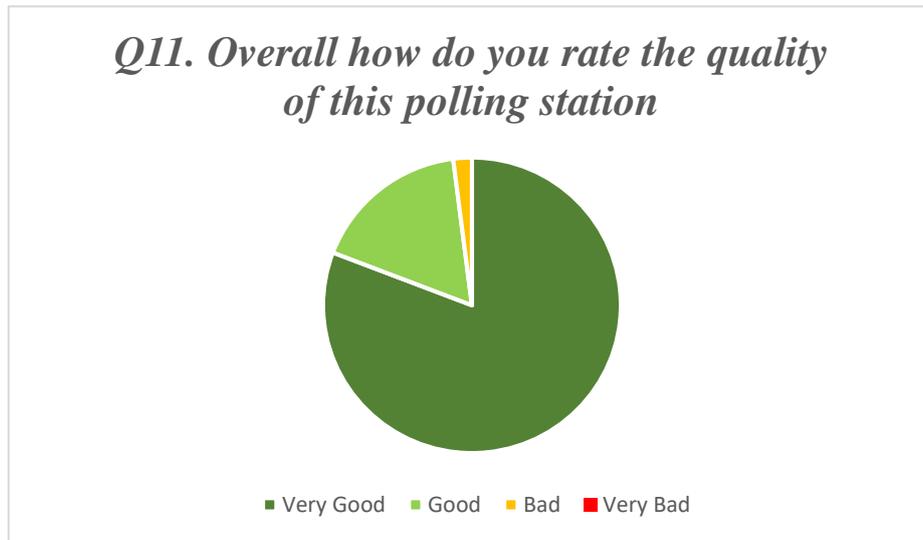
QUESTION 10: In 20% of polling stations our observer team identified so-called 'family voting'. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections in Finland, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'.² It occurs where, generally, husband and wife vote together. It can be normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely. We identified this in 20% of polling stations (8 separate occasions). However, because of the large turnout this constituted just 1.2% of those voters observed.

In these cases 'family voting' constituted discussing which party to vote for and couples entering a booth together. Importantly, on half of these occasions family voting was stopped

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 were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

² <http://www.osce.org/>

by polling staff and, either the voters were separated into different booths, or given assistance by the polling staff on how to complete the voting process correctly.



QUESTION 11: Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 19% of polling stations were reported to be ‘Very Good’- 80%, ‘Good’- 17%, ‘Bad’ - 2%, and none were ‘Very Bad’.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall the election was extremely well run. There are, however, some issues that the observer teams identified which are specific to the Finnish which will be discussed here.

On some occasions the secrecy of the voters ballot could not be entirely maintained because of the nature of the polling station. In some school buildings, booths had been placed against glass partitions as the back wall, which would normally assist secrecy. However, because these glass walls were reflective it was possible, if intended, to assess whom voters were supporting by looking at the wall which effectively acted as a mirror.

The other major issue which affected a significant number of voters, we estimate 5% of those observed by our teams, attended the wrong polling station in the first instance. This seemed to be because the polling station they assumed was their station was one which had been used for early voting. A number of polling staff had also identified that this was an issue and reported it to our observers.

However, this did constitute an inconvenience for a number of voters and all our teams reported this problem during the day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that local election authorities remind polling station staff about the placing of polling booths. These are normally sited so that the opening faces away from the public and towards a blank wall. When siting we recommend consideration of the nature of some buildings and how suited they are to the maintenance of the secrecy of voting.
2. Although we are aware that the polling cards do generally give information about the voters' respective polling station the level of confusion was surprising to the observer group. This appeared to be caused by the use of central polling stations (and for that matter any polling station) for early voting. Clarity in the documentation sent to the electorate might assist in the levels of confusion that observers identified.

We would like to thank the officials at the Ministry of Justice as well as polling staff for their helpful and prompt assistance in facilitating the election observation as the system was both clear and simple to navigate.

The briefing offered on Friday 26th January which explained the electoral system and voting process to observers was especially helpful and we would like to thank those staff at the Ministry of Justice who facilitated this meeting especially for their help.