

DEMOCRACY VOLUNTEERS

ENGLISH MAYORAL ELECTIONS 2022

Final Report



Democracy
Volunteers

the election observers



Our mission is to improve the quality of democratic elections, by advising those who legislate for, administer and oversee elections, to enhance them for the benefit of voters.

We aim to do this by attending elections and empirically reporting our findings in an accessible way through statistical analysis and interlocutor meetings to support this objective. We do this through a strong methodology, based on the international standards for election observation as set out by OSCE/ODIHR and others.

We maintain strict impartiality and require our observers to abide by international standards, as well as the relevant local legal framework, when acting as our observers.

We aim to report on our observations in a constructive and encouraging way to benefit the delivery of democracy and to benefit the electorate as a whole.



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democracyvolunteers.org

English Mayoral Elections

5th May 2022

Final Report on Election Observation

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the election process in the various local mayoral contests.
2. To advise election officials on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice.
3. To support these election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

Executive Summary

Democracy Volunteers deployed 40 observers across all the mayoral elections on 5th May 2022. They were:

- Croydon 6 Observers
- Hackney 4 Observers
- Lewisham 6 Observers
- Newham 6 Observers
- South Yorkshire 4 Observers
- Tower Hamlets 10 Observers
- Watford 4 Observers

These observers formed teams of two and attended 390 polling places. These observers spent between 30 minutes and 60 minutes at each polling venue observing the process and then completed one or more surveys for each polling station, dependant on the number of ballot boxes.

Our team of observers saw several challenges to the electoral process, once again these focused around the challenge of family voting, where more than one person attempts to vote together in a polling booth. Our team saw family voting in 28% of all the polling stations and in each area in the following percentage of polling stations:

- Croydon 35% of 63 ballot boxes
- Hackney 26% of 50 ballot boxes
- Lewisham 35% of 57 ballot boxes
- Newham 36% of 50 ballot boxes
- South Yorkshire 13% of 24 ballot boxes
- Tower Hamlets 32% of 96 ballot boxes
- Watford 14% of 42 ballot boxes

As can be seen 'family voting' is a widespread activity across different parts of London and other parts of England as well.

Democracy Volunteers

Democracy Volunteers is a non-partisan, domestic election observation organisation, committed to improving the security and accessibility of elections in the UK and abroad. Our mission is to improve the quality of democratic elections, by advising those who legislate for, administer, and oversee elections, to enhance them for the benefit of voters.

We aim to do this by attending elections and empirically reporting our findings in an accessible way through statistical analysis and the undertaking of interlocutor meetings to support this objective. We do this through a strong methodology, based on the international standards for election observation as set out by OSCE/ODIHR¹ and others. We are a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM) and abide by GNDEM's Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organisations and the accompanying Code of Conduct².

We maintain strict impartiality and require our observers to abide by UK and international standards, as well as the relevant local legal framework, when acting as our observers. All of our observers, who observe in the UK, are officially accredited with the UK's Electoral Commission and undergo a thorough interview and training process to ensure they are able to accurately and impartially record and report data from polling stations and counting venues. None of our observers are members of political parties and are not politically active.

We aim to report on our observations in a constructive and encouraging way to benefit the delivery of democracy and to benefit the electorate, as a whole. Since we were formed in 2016, we have observed dozens of elections across the UK and internationally, including General Elections, referenda, by-elections, council elections and devolved parliamentary/assembly elections. Our reports have been used as the basis for trials of various methodologies and equipment at various elections and our data is regularly cited in The Houses of Parliament and used in debates nationally, as well as informing local council training for election officials, whilst informing the public on the conduct of electoral events.

Funding

Democracy Volunteers observers deployed for the observations during the English Mayoral Elections with the support of a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd. This was arranged by Democracy Volunteers, and this funding covered travel expenses, some accommodation, and subsistence for our volunteer observers.

¹ OSCE (2003) Handbook for Domestic Election Observers

² GNDEM (2022) Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation & Monitoring by Citizen Organisations Available at: <https://gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles/>

Observer Team



Dr John Ault FRSA FRGS (United Kingdom) was the Head of Mission for the English Mayoral Election Observation Mission and is the Executive Director of Democracy Volunteers.

John has worked in elections throughout the UK, Europe, and the United States since the 1980s. He has observed on behalf of the OSCE/ODIHR and the UK Parliament's CPA in parliamentary elections as wide-ranging as Kazakhstan and the Isle of Man. He is also a former chair of the UK's Electoral Reform Society and has been elected to local government in the UK and the UK's South-West Regional Assembly.

He has observed numerous elections for Democracy Volunteers, including Swedish and Norwegian parliamentary elections, the UK general elections in 2017 and 2019, the Finnish presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018 and 2019 as well as Dutch elections in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022. He has also been an academic consultant about electoral and parliamentary reform in Moldova. He is also an electoral expert for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter and has previously lectured at Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Manchester. He specialises in elections and campaigns and has published several books on the subject, including his doctoral thesis on electoral campaigning.



Harry Busz FRSA (United Kingdom) is Democracy Volunteers' fulltime Head of Operations. He was Deputy Head of Mission for the deployment for the English Mayoral Elections.

Harry is a graduate in Human Geography at Cardiff University and an MA in International Relations from Exeter University and is currently researching for his PhD in Politics at Newcastle University. His research focuses on electoral integrity and the role of international, regional, and domestic observer groups in improving electoral practices across the OSCE region.

He has participated in multiple domestic and international observations such as the 2019 local elections in Northern Ireland, the provincial and Water Board elections in The Netherlands, national elections in Austria, as well as being election coordinator for the 2020 USA general election and 2019 UK general election, and Ireland's 2020 general election.

In addition to the Head of Mission and Head of Operations, 40 additional observers acted as Short-Term Observers (STOs) for the duration of polling day. The observers selected for this deployment include many of the organisation's most experienced observers, all of which were fully trained and briefed on data collection and the observation role prior to May 5th.

Credits

We would like to thank elections staff who welcomed our observers and held meetings with our team. In addition, we would like to thank the interlocutors who engaged with our observation and the information they supplied us with. We would also like to thank the UK's Electoral Commission for their assistance in accrediting our observers.

Methodology

Democracy Volunteers observations follow internationally accepted practices and standards for election observation across the OCSE region^{3,4}, taking into account issues before and after polling day, in addition to our findings in polling stations and count venues.

Prior to polling day, all observers had been fully trained in how to act as a Short-Term Observer at these elections. This training included an online training course, produced by our Head of Operations and Head of Training, and included several lessons on the different types of data they would need to collect, how to act impartially, the purpose of observation and many more topics⁵. Each observer who did not have extensive experience with observing UK elections with Democracy Volunteers then attended a training seminar with our Head of Training, Max Wheeler, where he fielded any questions that observers had about the course and presented walkthroughs of how to observe inside polling stations and how to work logistically on polling day. A pre-deployment briefing was held a few days before the deployment, where local factors were discussed, and final preparations were made.

Each observation was conducted with two observers to allow for objective observation, and the observers agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team (This is generally called the four eyes method and the internationally accepted standard for election observation). All data recorded was verified by these two individuals. In total, our observer teams observed in 390 polling stations across the various mayoral elections. Each team spent around 30-60 minutes in each polling station to observe the whole process of voting inside polling stations. In some circumstances, observer teams remained in a polling station for longer than 60 minutes if there were unusual practices taking place.

Observers did not interfere with the operation of polling stations or impede any voters or staff from fulfilling their jobs throughout the day. Following observations, an online survey was used to report findings back to the core team. These surveys were filled in collaboratively, outside the polling station, to ensure both observers agreed on the observations made.

Finally, the team convened following polling day to discuss the observations they had made and their overall impressions of the conduct of the election. This meeting lasted for around an hour and a half and observers were encouraged to share any issues they had observed,

³ OSCE (2003) Handbook for Domestic Election Observers

⁴ GNDEM (2022) Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation & Monitoring by Citizen Organisations Available at: <https://gndem.org/declaration-of-global-principles/>

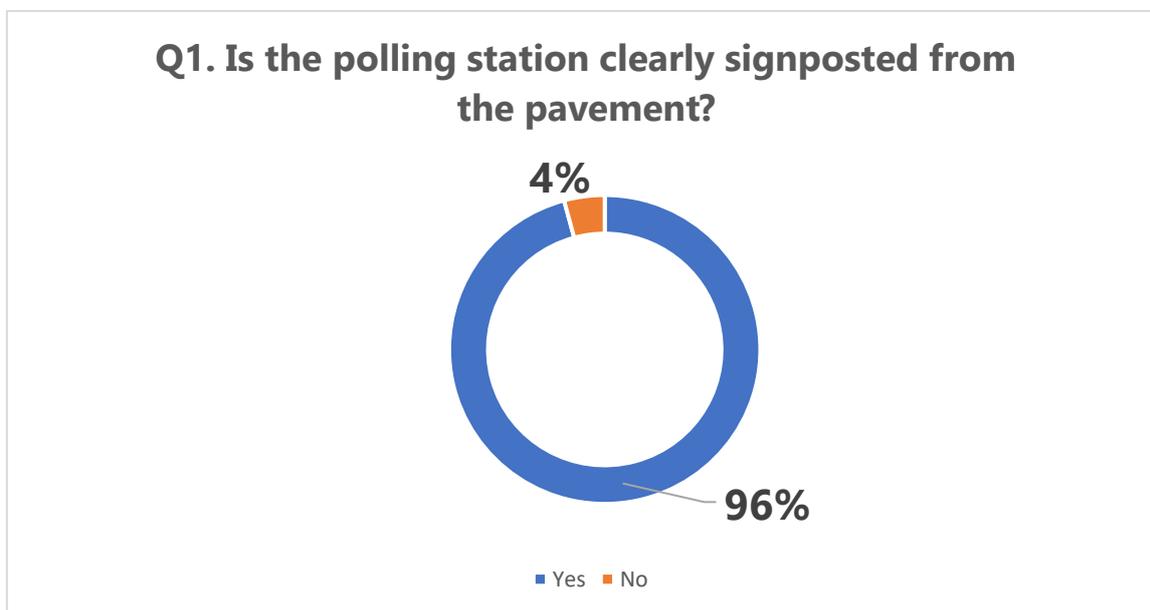
⁵ For those observers who attended counting, an additional online course was given.

whilst referring to their notes from the day. This meeting allowed the team to discuss a number of issues, which cannot always be fully outlined in the online survey on polling day.

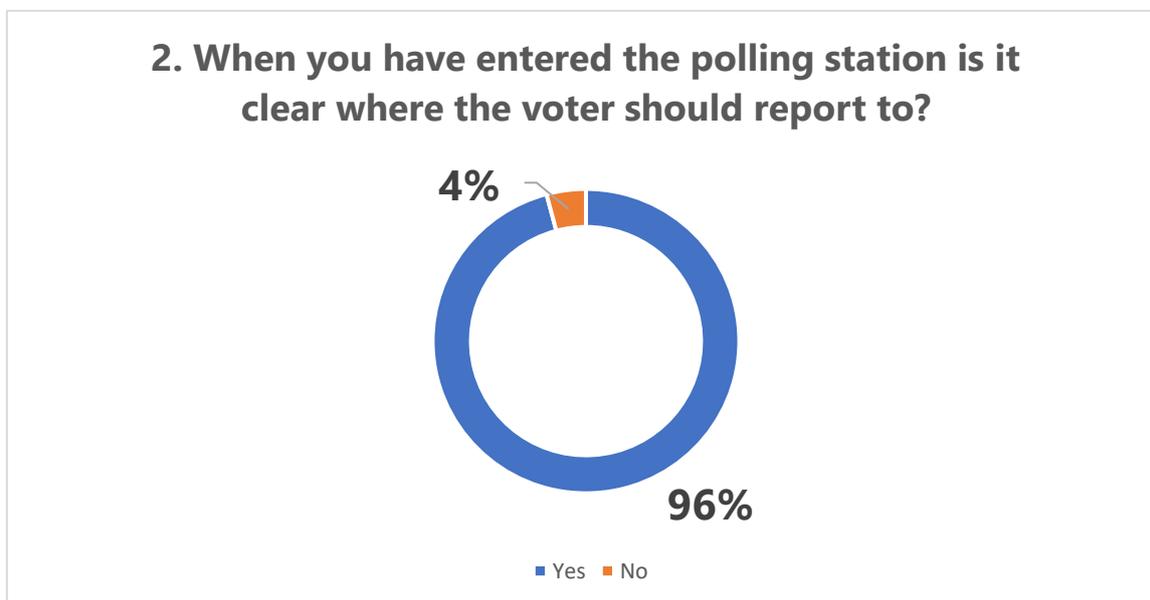
Elections staff working in the various mayoralities have been sent a copy of this report, and Democracy Volunteers will offer to conduct follow up meetings, if requested, to discuss individual challenges to help improve the electoral process.

Results of the Observation

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

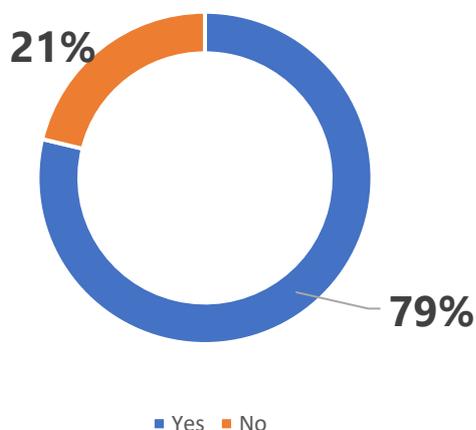


QUESTION 1: Signposting of the polling stations was generally very good with 16 stations observed not being clearly signposted. In addition to signage, some polling stations had other members of the public, tellers, and campaigners outside which made the stations identifiable. In some circumstances, small queues were formed outside of stations. (N.380)



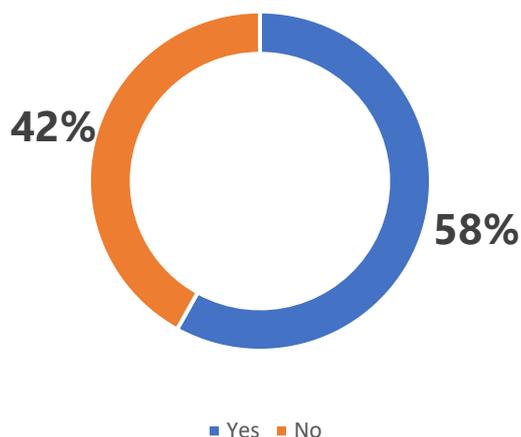
QUESTION 2: Observers identified only 14 polling stations where it was not completely clear where the voter should report to. For most polling stations, clearly visible desks and signage was used to direct voters, including in venues with two ballot boxes present. In these cases, there was some confusion of which side of the building to enter but when this did occur it was handled swiftly by polling staff who were very active in ensuring voters reported to the correct polling clerk's desk. (N.386)

3. Having entered the polling station was it clear how disabled voters would access the station?



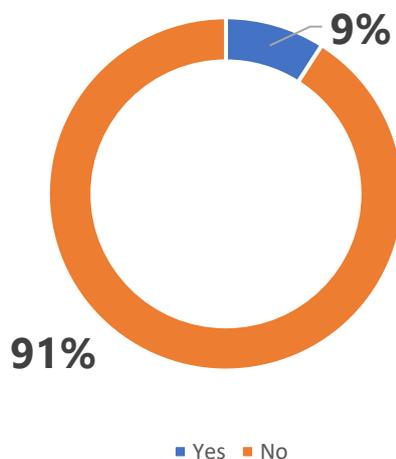
QUESTION 3: Disabled access was good in 304 of the 386 polling stations observed. Some observers did note that step-free access was not always available, or easy to use, at a very small number of polling stations. Some identified doors that would be too heavy for wheelchair users to open independently and sometimes equipment being placed poorly to limit access. (N.386)

4. Did the polling staff ask you who you are on arrival?



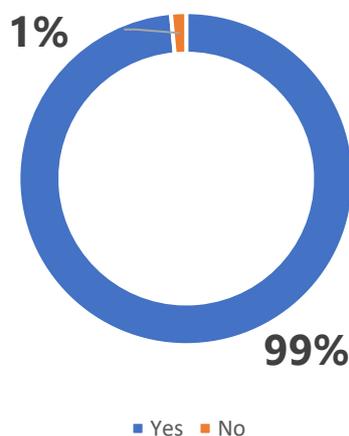
QUESTION 4: Polling staff were generally unaware that the observation team would be operating across the mayoralties on polling day, apart from Tower Hamlets. Some teams had discussions with presiding officers concerning their rights of access. In just under half of the polling stations observed, staff asked to see observers official Electoral Commission issued ID badges. These credentials were recorded by staff about 25% of the time. (N.386)

5. Was there any queuing at the polling station whilst you were in attendance?



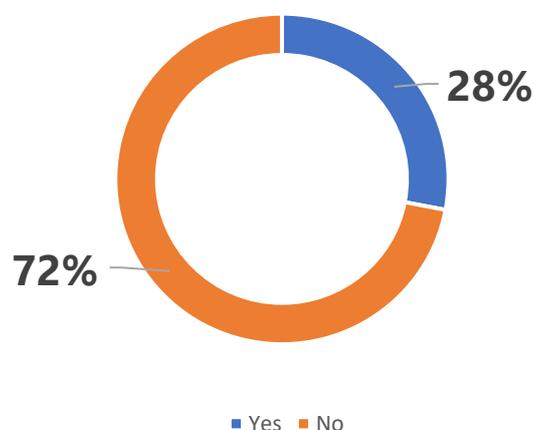
Question 5: We saw voters queuing at 9% of the polling stations we observed. These queues were often short (under 10 electors) and were generally well managed. (N.386)

6. Is the Ballot Box properly sealed with numbered cable ties?



QUESTION 6: Five ballot boxes were completely unsealed out of the 382 recorded. (N.382)

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



QUESTION 7: Family voting was observed in 108 of the 390 polling stations. When compared with other elections our organisation has observed this is a relatively high percentage. The OSCE/ODIHR, the international body which monitors elections in the UK, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'⁶. It is a breach of the long-standing concept and practice of a secret ballot. However, although many cases of Family Voting did occur, staff at most polling stations were not active in attempting to prevent it. At busy times, two polling staff were often unable to issue ballot papers and prevent Family Voting at the same time. Our observers were very impressed with the efforts made by staff in Tower Hamlets, especially during difficult periods. Most cases were not prevented.

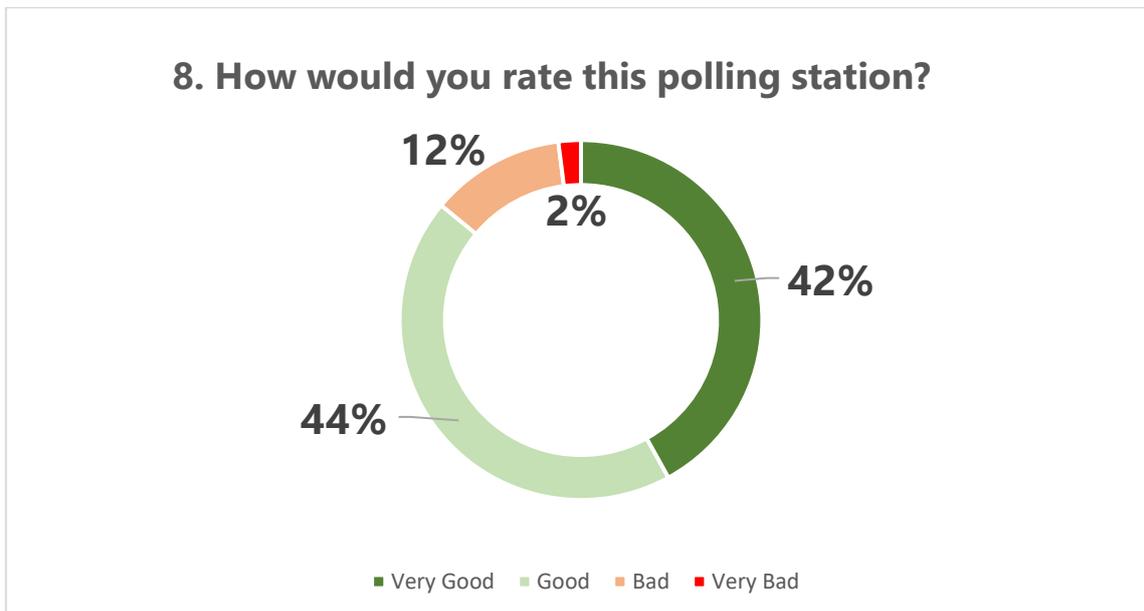
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Democracy Volunteers now ranks the types of family voting that takes place by three types: 'clear direction', 'collusion' or 'general oversight'. The largest category of Family Voting at these elections was 'Clear Direction'. This is unusual, based on our previous experiences of observing in the UK and abroad, and this tends to be the most egregious form of Family Voting, as it robs a voter of their independence when casting their vote. Across the mayoral elections the spread was:

- General Oversight 32.1%
- Clear direction 25.6%
- Collusion 24.7%
- Other 17.7%

⁶ <http://www.osce.org/>

In total, 12.7%⁷, of all the voters we observed voting at this election were either causing, or were affected by, Family Voting. Over 72% of those being affected by Family Voting were women. 52% of those causing family voting were men. (N.390)



QUESTION 8: Observers were asked to give an overall rating for each polling station they attended. 42% of polling stations were reported as being 'Very Good', 44% were 'Good' and 12% of polling stations were reported as being 'Bad' with 2% being 'Very Bad'. (N.95)

⁷ Accurate to 1 decimal place.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Family Voting

Family voting, where one voter directs, guides, or oversees the vote of another person, continues to be a challenge, despite the many actions taken by polling staff to attempt to prevent it at these elections. In some councils, such as Tower Hamlets, staff had been comprehensively trained on how to identify and try to prevent family voting.

We would encourage all councils to use training, Electoral Commission posters (from the 'Your Vote is Yours Alone' campaign) being in place, and privacy screens placed between polling booths as these have been seen to have prevented a far higher number of cases of Family Voting, as was the case in Tower Hamlets.



Figure 1 Privacy screens should be used in polling stations to prevent more than one person using a polling booth.

Recommendation 2 – More Information about Voting Methodologies

Our observers identified several voters not being able to cast their ballot correctly because they did not appear to have a complete understanding of the voting system of supplementary vote. This led to an unnecessary number of accidentally spoilt ballots. This could also have led some voters to seek assistance from a family member on how to complete their ballot.

Whilst we are aware that the system of voting has been repealed for the next mayoral elections, we would recommend that voters receive clearer and more visible instructions on how to complete their ballot correctly, to avoid unnecessary spoilt ballots.

Appendix – List of Interlocutors

CANDIDATES

Various candidates from parties standing in the election.

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Tom Hawthorn (Head of Electoral Policy)

Melanie Davidson (Head of Support & Improvement)

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