



GUYANA NEWS

Local gov't voter turnout plunges to 36.3%

-over 30,000 fewer voters than in 2016



By Thandeka Percival November 17, 2018



The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) yesterday confirmed that a mere 36.3% or 208,534 of the 573,923 registered electors turned up to cast their ballots when the 2018 Local Government Elections (LGE) were held across the country on Monday.



The figure represents a more than 10% decline from the 47.1% recorded for the 2016 LGE. At the time of those elections, 239,070 of the 507,584 persons eligible to vote cast their ballots. Based on these figures, this year's polls saw over 30,000 fewer voters.

While Chairman of the Guyana Elections Com-mission (GECOM) James Patterson yesterday said the low turnout was disturbing, he was quick to point out that "GECOM cannot be blamed for voter apathy."

"We have done our best," he told reporters at a news conference at the GECOM headquarters, before adding that the "apparent apostasy of the electorate is not the norm."

Chief Election Officer (CEO) Keith Lowenfield sought to lay the responsibility at the door of the Ministry of Communities, whom he pointed out has a year-round responsibility to help persons understand local governance and its importance.



"In Guyana, there is a ministry which has direct responsibility for the LAA [Local Authority Areas], so there must be some programme that speaks to their efficacy. They have a mandate... it has to be a year-round arrangement that speaks to what is required... this is the benefits [that] accrue; this is how you participate in local government. Go into the Pomeroon and speak to the residents...there is a lot of work to do," Lowenfield said.

Pressed as to whether GECOM should accept some of the blame for the low turnout, especially since it has not employed a Civic and Voter Education (CVE) Manager, Patterson noted that the hiring is a decision



"GECOM consists of a commission which must make this decision... It is not for me to tell you the ins and outs of decisions being made. When we make them you will be informed," he said.

Deputy CEO Roxanne Myers added that GECOM's CVE covers only the technical and procedural aspects of the elections, rather than the inspirational aspect.

"When it comes to inspiration of the electorate or to treat with any sort of apathy, I don't believe that that is in our remit. There are two components of voter education—one is that technical, procedural aspect that GECOM bears full responsibility for, advising the electorate

(X)

According to the data released by GECOM, the lowest turnout was once again recorded in the municipality of Linden, where a mere 5,221 or 19.9% voted from among 26,184 electors. In 2016, 8,279 or 35.15 % of the 23,880 registered voters in this municipality took part in the elections.

Further, the capital city of Georgetown again saw the second lowest voter turnout at 24%. GECOM had previously announced that 28% of voters in this LAA exercised their franchise but data released yesterday showed that 28,976 ballots were cast from a pool of 119,374 eligible electors.

Mabaruma once again recorded the highest turnout among



An increase was also seen in Lethem, which recorded 50.4% voter participation in 2016. This year, 51.9% or 1,356 of the 2,612 voters cast their ballots.

Meanwhile, Bartica, which saw 49.2% of its eligible voters casting their ballots in 2016, recorded a decrease as only 40% of voters turned out.

Additionally, the highest turnout overall was recorded in the new Neighbourhood Democratic Council of Aranuputa/Upper Burro Burro, where 261 or 73.9% of the 353 registered voters exercised their franchise. This was followed by another new LAA, Plegtanker/Koorberaad, which saw a 61.8% turnout when 320 of its 517



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