

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE – #3 and PRE-ELECTION STATEMENT

2nd December 2021

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 3 organizations with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The EWC includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee.

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has trained and deployed a total of 59 campaign observers to observe the conduct of the campaign in all constituencies and regions within The Gambia. This update contains observation findings from the second half of the campaign beginning from 18th November to 1st December 2021 and covers the conduct of campaigns by political parties within the different constituencies during this period. The update also contains information as reported by observers on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) preparedness, the conduct of civic education and voter information campaigns for the elections, COVID-19 prevention measures as well as recommendations for Election Day. Finally, this update also provides information about EWC's plans to observe the December 4th election.

Campaign Observation Summary

Overall, the Elections Watch observers' reports during the latter half of the campaign show that political parties and candidates ramped up their campaigns and continue to campaign with no major restrictions in all constituencies across the country. However, observers continued to witness and hear reports of instances of the abuse of state resources such as use of vehicles and vote buying by candidates and political parties. The campaign period continued to be peaceful in the vast majority of the country; however, some observers noted the use of hate speech or inflammatory language during campaign events and on social media. Observers noted national security personnel deployed in most of their areas and should be commended for their role in maintaining peace during this period. Elections Watch observers also reported an increase in the visibility of civic and voter education efforts by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs, and others ahead of the December 4th polls.

Campaign Observation Methodology

The Elections Watch Committee deployed 59 campaign observers which include 6 regional coordinators – each for a region with Banjul and Kanfing combined – and 53 constituency observers, one representing each constituency, to monitor the conduct of the presidential campaign in their respective regions and constituencies. All Elections Watch observers were carefully selected and thoroughly trained, as well as accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). All Elections Watch observers were instructed to observe campaign activities and rallies of political parties and independent candidates in their respective areas covering the total of 53 constituencies within The Gambia. Observers were trained to observe campaign activities and send in reports on two designated days during the campaign period, 17th November and 1st December, 2021 as well as critical incidents whenever they occur. For this reporting period, every observer sent in their observation report using a comprehensive checklist via coded text message using their mobile phones to the Elections Watch National Information Center (EWC-NIC).

Findings

The Elections Watch Committee's presidential campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Elections Watch observers deployed across the country during the campaign period from 18th November to 1st December 2021. This update also includes findings from the conduct

of civic and voter education on the elections, the IEC preparedness as well as COVID-19 prevention measures.

Political Party Campaigns

In the last half of the campaign period, political parties were out in force holding campaign activities. EWC’s observers in all 53 constituencies reported either witnessing or hearing of campaign events or rallies in their assigned constituencies. Observers’ reports mostly showed that the parties and candidates are freely conducting their campaigns with no restrictions. However, EW observers again reported witnessing or hearing of campaign ethics violations including the use of state resources such as government vehicles or distribution of cash or items by government officials during the campaign, candidates providing money or gifts to supporters, or buying voters cards, a slight increase compared to the first half of the campaign.

Violation Type	1st half of campaign period (9 November - 17 November)	2nd half of campaign period (18 November - 9 December)
Use of government resources during campaign	22 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard	29 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard
Candidates providing money or gifts to supporters	13 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard	26 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard
Buying voters’ cards	5 of 53 EW constituency observers heard reports	13 of 53 EW constituency observers heard reports
Distribution of items or cash by government officials	6 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard	11 of 53 EW constituency observers witnessed or heard

These violations create an unlevel playing field during the election campaign and dilute the premise that political campaigns should be contested based on a candidates’ skills, ideas, and ability to lead the country, and not based on their ability to purchase the most votes.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

As the campaign period advanced towards election day, EWC observers in 42 of 53 constituencies witnessed or heard about IEC preparations in their constituencies. This is an improvement from the first half of the campaign period when only 30 of 53 observers reported witnessing or hearing IEC preparations. Even while the EWC was training its own observers, the IEC was in the same venue training its own officials. On Wednesday, December 1st, the IEC also held a briefing with domestic and international observers and the media to update them on their preparations and readiness for Saturday’s poll. The level of communication and information sharing by the IEC is an improvement from past elections and should be commended.

Additionally, in its previous campaign period update, the EWC noted that the civic and voter education campaigns had not yet reached all constituencies across the country. However, during the second half of the campaign, EWC observers in 49 of the 53 constituencies reported being exposed to civic education or voter information campaigns, by the IEC, the NCCE, and CSOs. This is a significant increase from the first half of the campaign period, when only 30 of 53 reports showed the same.

COVID-19 Prevention:

During the second half of the campaign period, EW observers continued to report low levels of adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocols during campaign activities. Just 29 of 53

observers reported either witnessing or hearing COVID-19 prevention sensitization campaigns in their area, a slight increase from 23 of 53 constituencies during the first half of the campaign period. 47 of 53 EW observers reported that political parties and candidates never or only sometimes followed COVID-19 prevention measures including wearing facemasks, washing hands, or social distancing. The Elections Watch Committee notes that the December 4th election will take place during a period when the world has been alerted to a new COVID-19 variant of concern. This requires that everyone remain vigilant and follow COVID-19 preventive measures.

Presence of Security Forces

Most Elections Watch observers (50 of 53) have noted the presence of security forces in their areas or at campaign events. The EWC commends the Inspector General of Police and other security agencies for their efforts to ensure the maintenance of peace throughout the campaign period including providing a security detail for the contesting candidates. However, 9 of the 53 Elections Watch observers noted that political parties and candidates utilized unofficial security during campaign events.

Electoral Violence

As was the case during the EWC's first reporting period, the second half of the campaign period remained largely peaceful with no serious incidents of violence. However, 10 of the 53 constituency observers reported the use of hate speech or inflammatory language by candidates and their supporters. This includes remarks made by high-level party members including in the presence of candidates who did not condemn and in some cases supported the sentiment of the remarks. The Elections Watch Committee strongly condemns the use of hate speech, tribal sentiments, and inflammatory language. The EWC reiterates the statement made by the Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia on Wednesday, 1 December, calling on political parties and candidates to desist from such remarks that threaten The Gambia's hard-won peace and unity. These actions also constitute violations of the IPC and IEC Code of conduct and Election Campaign Ethics, and the Janjanbureh Peace Accord to which all parties and candidates have subscribed.

In addition, the Elections Watch Committee received reports from observers of attempts to disrupt political activities or arguments between party supporters, but they did not result in violence. In one instance, an observer witnessed a candidate distributing money to a crowd, which resulted in a tussle between supporters over the cash.

Outside of these instances, the Elections Watch Committee notes that the entire campaign period was largely peaceful. The Elections Watch Committee commends the citizens and political actors of The Gambia for their continuing commitment to a peaceful election process.

Collation Process

The IEC has confirmed to the EWC that the collation process will first take place at the constituency level before moving to the regional level. The EWC requested the IEC to share the location of the collation centres at the constituency level, however, they have yet to share the list or post it publicly on their website.

Pending Legal Issues Over Candidacies

The EWC notes that there are still cases with the courts related to the IEC's disqualification of some candidates during the nomination process. The EWC applauds all parties for utilizing the legal process to address this issue and for following due process. This demonstrates an important maturity in The Gambia's democratic process.

EWC's Election Day Observation

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) - composed of PAG, Activista, and NYP alongside other partners - plans to deploy 460 election day observers. The EWC notes that the electoral process consists of more than just one day. To this point, members of the EWC have observed every stage of the electoral process from the political party congresses and voter registration to nominations and the campaign period. The EWC's observations of all of these processes will factor into the overall assessment of the electoral process.

On December 4th, the EWC plans to deploy 460 trained and accredited observers. This includes 160 mobile observers and 300 polling station observers. The 300 polling station observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the polling streams in each constituency and administrative area. For example, 34% of polling streams where Elections Watch observers are deployed are in Brikama and 34% of overall polling streams are in Brikama. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. In addition, the EWC will deploy 53 observers to the constituency-level collation centres and 7 observers to the regional-level collation centres to observe these processes.

The EWC is proud to be among and coordinating with a large and diverse group of international and domestic groups accredited by the IEC to observe this process. The interest in observing this electoral process further highlights the global interest in The Gambia's democratic progress and the importance of this election for the people of The Gambia.

Recommendations:

The Elections Watch Committee makes the following recommendations to election stakeholders ahead of and during the immediate period of the election:

- Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should adhere to the IEC's mandated "cooling off period" and refrain from all campaign activities on Friday, 3 December.
- Ahead of the election, the IEC should publicize the collation procedures and the location of collation centres to ensure accredited international and domestic observer groups are able to fully observe the process.
- The media and any other group should avoid publicizing results and candidates should refrain from declaring victory until the IEC releases the final results.
- In addition to announcing the final results at the regional and constituency levels, the IEC should make public an aggregated list of polling station-level results.
- All election officials, party agents, security officials, and voters should follow COVID-19 prevention measures including wearing facemasks, washing hands, and maintaining social distancing at polling stations on 4 December.
- Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should continue to adhere to the IEC regulations, the code of conduct, and the peace pledge during and after the December 4 election, and follow the prescribed legal channels to pursue any objections or grievances in a peaceful manner.

The Elections Watch Committee reminds all registered voters to bring their voter's card to their assigned polling station on Saturday, 4th December to exercise their right to cast their vote for president of The Gambia.

About the Elections Watch Committee

The Elections Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The Elections Watch Committee includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

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Appendix A: Distribution of Elections Watch Observers

Administrative Area	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Banjul	36	2.3%	7	2.3%
Basse	198	12.7%	37	12.3%
Brikama	533	34.3%	103	34.3%
Janjanbureh	212	13.6%	43	14.3%
Kanifing	276	17.7%	53	17.7%
Kerewan	196	12.6%	38	12.7%
Mansakonko	103	6.6%	19	6.3%
Total	1554	100%	300	100%