



## **PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT, NO. 2**

Period of Assessment: 6<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021



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## PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT 2

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE CANDIDATE'S CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES  
IN THE GAMBIA. *Period of Assessment:* 9th - 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2021

### INTRODUCTION

Following the nomination of six presidential candidates on November 6th 2021 by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to contest for the December 4th elections, the nominated candidates were each provided a campaign schedule by the IEC to campaign from November 9th to December 2nd, 2021. While candidates were embarking on a countrywide political campaign to influence voters, Gambia Participates were in all the 53 constituencies observing the political activities.

This report contains findings from observers monitoring campaign activities of political parties, general political environment, the preparedness of the IEC, voter education initiatives, adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols, the participation of marginalised groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities, use/non-use of state resources, and critical incidents such as violence and hate speech. The purpose of Gambia Participates' observation mission is to ensure there is peace, credibility and transparency in the electoral process, to provide impartial citizen observation reports and to offer recommendations where necessary for good governance and promotion of democratic elections in The Gambia.

### METHODOLOGY

Gambia Participates deployed 53 long-term observers (LTOs) to all the 53 constituencies in the seven regions of The Gambia. The LTOs are supervised by 12 Regional Focal Points (RFPs) in all the 7 regions. Each LTO is given a standard checklist to observe, document and report on a weekly basis to the Gambia Participates secretariat using a programmed software.

The reports received at the secretariat are then reviewed for quality assurance, after this process, the data is further reviewed by the statement drafting committee to analyse and report on the data received.

### MAIN FINDINGS

#### GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

96.96% of Gambia Participates' observers noted that the general environment was calm and orderly. However, 3.21% of the LTOs noted tensions between party supporters, verbal attacks on candidates and hate speech during the campaign period. 49.36% of the observers witnessed the

presence of other domestic observers mainly from civil society and 31.41% noted the presence of international observers (mainly the European Union, African Union and ECOWAS) monitoring political activities.

71.52% of Gambia Participates' LTOs witnessed the presence of security forces during the observation period, mainly officials from the Police Intervention Unit (PIU). 27.81% of observers noted the presence of ECOMIG soldiers. ECOMIG soldiers were not observed in three constituencies of Banjul, six constituencies of Central River Region, seven constituencies of Kanifing Municipality, five constituencies of Lower River Region, two constituencies of Upper River Region, 11 constituencies of West Coast Region, and seven constituencies of North Bank Region. Most of the observers noted that the security forces present were not more than 100 in most of the areas during the observation period. With regards to conduct, the majority of LTOs noted professionalism on the side of the security personnel. Observers also noted that each presidential candidate was assigned a security team (mainly PIU personnels) by the state to provide protection and security to the candidates. This is an unprecedented initiative from the Ministry of Interior and the Office of the Inspector General of Police.

#### IEC PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

The IEC has seven regional offices across the country, all of which were accessible to Gambia Participates' RFPs to observe the preparation of the IEC in the regions. 4.49% of the 12 RFPs noted that the IEC regional offices have received all the necessary materials for the December 4th election.

Observers reported the training of polling officials by the IEC as part of their preparatory activities ahead of the election. Observers noted the IEC's professionalism in terms of respecting COVID safety protocols: most IEC officials and trainees wore facemasks and utilized sanitizers during the trainings. Areas covered during the training included an overview of election procedures, code of conduct for IEC officials and the terms of responsibilities for each officer during the election.

#### VOTER EDUCATION

44.87% of Gambia Participates' observers witnessed voter participation sensitization in their constituencies during the observation period. The most used platform for voter education is social media (10.26%) followed by TV (8.3%). The most active actors providing voter education are civil society, IEC, NCCE and political parties/candidates. However, 10.9% of the observers reported that the voter education did not target marginalized groups and persons with disabilities.

#### POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

The political campaigns started from November 9th and will end on December 2nd, 2021. The IEC prepared the campaign timetable for all candidates to avoid two parties converging in one place which could lead to chaos and instability. 72.44% of Gambia Participates' observers witnessed physical political campaigns in their areas of observation. The most used physical campaign



methods were rallies (41.03%), vehicle rallies/caravan (36.45%) and door-to-door campaigns (21.15%). Campaigns were juxtaposed with both issue-based campaigns and some derogatory comments from speakers, including some candidates during the political campaigns. 88.46% of the observers saw or heard political campaigns on social media influencing voters to vote for their party/candidate.

73.72% of the observers heard or saw political campaigns on state-owned radio or television media giving coverage to all candidates during news hour and an exclusive coverage for each candidate.

### USE/NON-USE OF STATE RESOURCES

The incumbent continues to use a private vehicle (per the car identity code) for political campaigns. Despite being prohibited by law, 25.64% of the observers witnessed the use of state resources during political campaigns by ministers and local government authorities. The most frequently used state resources are vehicles and personnel. 30.13% of observers witnessed active participation of civil servants (including local government authorities) on political campaigns during working hours.

### CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Although the general environment was calm and orderly, however, a major critical incident was reported in Lower Saloum (CRR) where a woman and a motorcyclist were assaulted and beaten by a group of party supporters. The only crime committed by the victims was wearing the shirt of their chosen candidate/party. One of the victims was later taken to a hospital.

Our observers also witnessed the utterances of derogatory comments in from candidates and key party affiliates during political campaigns which has the potential of inciting violence. One instance occurred in North Bank Region during a GDC campaign event. The two other instances occurred during NPP and UDP campaign events where the candidates launched insults at their opponent.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO THE INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

- The IEC must ensure political parties strictly adhere to the campaign code of ethics.
- The IEC should consider establishing a compliance unit that will censor hate speech and other forms of inciting violence during political campaigns and hold parties/candidates accountable for their actions.
- The IEC should publish key electoral information early on their website including the list of all the polling stations and their polling streams alongside their polling codes in each constituency disaggregated by registered voters and gender to aid observers that are doing proportional deployment.
- The IEC must avoid errors in the reporting of election results. Inconsistent results could destabilize the country given the sensitivity of elections.

- The IEC should remain vigilant and independent in the announcement of election results without external influence.

#### TO POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

- Candidates should focus on issue-based campaigning and refrain from the utterances of hate speech and derogatory comments.
- Candidates and political parties should pursue judicial means to challenge the election results and not through the streets.
- Vote buying is illegal and punishable under the laws of The Gambia, thus, political parties/candidates must abstain from such illegal practices.

#### TO CITIZENS OF THE GAMBIA

- Citizens must accept the verdict of Gambians should their candidate lose the elections.
- Citizens should refrain from physical attack on their political opponents and respect the rights of every Gambian to support a candidate of their choice.
- Citizens at all times should wear face masks and respect the Covid-19 protocols on election day.
- On social media, citizens must refrain from publishing content that could jeopardize the stability of the country.
- Citizens should report election misconduct to the relevant authorities and not to take the laws into their own hands.

#### TO SECURITY PERSONNEL/INSTITUTIONS

- State security personnel or institutions must be apolitical in discharging their responsibilities.
- Security personnel must conduct their operations with adherence to the highest standards at all times.
- Security forces must not be allowed to be used as agents by any organized groups or individuals to influence the outcome of the elections.

#### TO GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

- Government offices (local and central) are not campaign fields, thus, political activities including campaign planning must be held in a neutral ground by all candidates.
- The government of The Gambia must regularize the use of state resources (personnel, finance, property, etc.) during political campaigns as mandated by Section 91 of the Elections Act.
- Access to the internet and the right to communicate is a human right. In this regard, the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure and Gamtel must not shut down the internet gateway on election day to curtail the rights of citizens.



- For subsequent elections, we highly recommend that the government of The Gambia to support the IEC with sophisticated but reliable technology tools that could be used to collect results directly from polls once certified.

#### TO THE MEDIA

- Media houses, both private and public, should provide impartial coverage and slots to all candidates.
- Media houses should label paid political ads when they are on their platforms.
- Journalists or media houses must not be quick to report unconfirmed election results.

