



Joint Statement by Gambia Participates and the Elections Watch Committee (EWC)

Preliminary Findings on the 2025 Massembleh Councillorship By-Election

1. About Gambia Participates and the Elections Watch Committee (EWC)

Gambia Participates is a civil society organization focused on promoting fiscal transparency, combating corruption, enhancing electoral processes and the rule of law to strengthen democracy in The Gambia. GP has been working on improving the electoral process through citizen election observation, electoral education, participation, and reform process. Since 2020, Gambia Participates have observed eight (8) elections in The Gambia and sub-region.

The **Elections Watch Committee (EWC)** is a non-partisan citizen observation platform created through a partnership of seven organizations with expertise in governance, youth participation, and gender inclusion. The EWC includes Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA, National Youth Parliament (NYP), Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang, Peace Hub – The Gambia (PHTG), and The Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD). Since November 2020, the EWC has monitored elections across The Gambia, providing recommendations for improving electoral integrity. Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia serves as the secretariat of the committee.

This joint statement reflects the commitment of civil society organizations to strengthening collaboration in advancing democratic principles, electoral integrity, and civic engagement in The Gambia. Through strategic partnerships and unified efforts, Gambia Participates and the EWC seek to safeguard the integrity of The Gambia's electoral processes, as free and fair elections are the foundation of all democratic governments.

2. Introduction

On February 22, 2025, voters of Massembleh Ward in the Lower River Region (LRR) participated in a **by-election** to elect a new ward councilor following the passing of **Councilor Bakary Korita on November 12, 2024**. The late councilor, elected under the United Democratic Party (UDP) ticket in the 2023 Councilor Elections, secured 550 votes (31 percent) against Lamin Jarju (National People's Party - NPP) with 433 votes (25 percent).

As per **Section 23 of the Local Government Act, 2002**, a by-election is required within **two months** when an elected member of a Council ceases to hold office.

Between February 5 and February 8, 2025, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) conducted the candidate nomination process at the IEC Mansakonko Election Office. Only two candidates filed their nominations with the IEC, which were subsequently accepted. The candidates are:

- **Mr. Lamin Jarju (NPP)**
- **Mr. Bakary Jarju (UDP)**

In Massembleh ward, there are **1,753 registered voters**, a small voter population with **4 polling stations** (Massembleh, Kolor, Jomari, and Toranka Bantang).

This by-election was not merely a local electoral exercise but a test of political strength, grassroots mobilization, and party structures in the region. With heightened political engagement and competition, the by-election in Massembleh is important to political actors as the country prepares for the 2026 Presidential elections, the second election since The Gambia returned to democracy in 2017.

3. Election Observation Deployment

The joint election observation mission by **Gambia Participates** and the **Elections Watch Committee (EWC)** deployed a total of **15 trained and accredited observers** including:

- Eight (8) stationary observers assigned to polling stations, monitoring the full voting and counting process.
- Seven (7) mobile observers monitoring multiple polling locations throughout the day.

- Observers stationed at the collation center in Kolior to monitor the aggregation of results.
- An observer deployed to the IEC Regional Office to oversee the official announcement of results.

This Election Observation Preliminary Statement is based on the reports received from our trained election observers deployed in all the polling stations.

4. Summary of Key Election Day Findings

Opening of the Polls

- All 4 polling stations (100%), **opened on time** with all voting essential materials provided.
- Party agents were present in 100% of polling stations and witnessed the pre-voting demonstrations by an IEC polling officer. There was no objection from party agents.
- **IEC polling officials adhered to standard procedures** during the opening of the polls, demonstrating the required standard for ballot drum opening and sealing, taking note of each security seal code, counting of total marbles before voting commenced, and placing the ballot drum in the voting room, all in the presence of party agents and observers.
- On average, four (4) IEC polling officers were present in all the polling stations with 18.7% of the polling officers being women
- **Security personnel were present** at all polling stations with 12.5% of the security personnel being women
- No reports of **missing names from the voter list** were recorded, and no voter was allowed to cast a ballot without a valid voter's card.

Voting Process

- Voter verification was **strictly enforced**, with all voters required to present a **valid voter's card** before casting their ballot. Each party agent was given a copy of the voter roll to cross-check the name of each voter before casting their votes

- **Indelible ink was applied to all voters' fingers**, ensuring no multiple voting. There was no incident where a voter attempted to vote twice.
- **Secret ballot procedures** were adhered to, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process.
- **Priority voting was provided for elderly voters and persons with disabilities** in all observed polling stations.
- Only one polling station (25%) was accessible to persons with disabilities

Critical Incidents During the Voting Process

- At Kolor polling station, there were two separate incidents in which IEC Polling Officials were assaulted by two male voters. Each incident caused the voting process to be temporarily halted as the polling officials were crowded by voters. Voting ensued smoothly thereafter
- There was frequent transportation of voters to and from the polling stations by both the UDP and NPP representatives. There is a high possibility of voter inducement while transporting voters.
- All the above cases are categorized as **isolated incidents**

Closing and Counting Process

- At 5pm, the voting process was closed in 100% of the polling stations.
- Party agents accompanied the Presiding Officer when the ballot drums were being removed from the voting room for counting
- **Presiding officers properly sealed the ballot drums** and accounted for unused ballot tokens, returning them to the designated ballot sack.
- **Ballot counting was conducted in accordance with IEC guidelines**, with results transparently shared.
- **Sensitive election materials**, including the Close of Poll Report and Counting Form, were sealed in envelopes and **signed by presiding officers and party agents** present.
- **A copy of the official Count Form, which was signed by party agents, was publicly posted** at each polling station for transparency.

Critical Incident During the Counting Process

- A **critical incident** occurred during the counting process at **Massembeh polling station**, leading to a **temporary disruption of the process**. The counting process was subsequently **moved to a classroom for security reasons**, and additional **security personnel were deployed** to stabilize the situation. Despite the incident, party agents were present throughout the counting process

5. Collation Process

- The transportation of ballots from the Massembeh polling station to the collation center in Kolior was slightly delayed due to the **disruption that occurred during the counting process**.
- The collation process was conducted without further postponements or interruptions after the delayed results arrived.
- **All polling station results were included** in the final collation form, ensuring a comprehensive aggregation of votes.
- **Party agents signed the final collated results form**, with copies provided to all party stakeholders.

6. Election Results

Out of the **1,753 registered voters** in Massembeh, a total of **1,213 votes were cast** representing a voter turnout of **69.1%**. The UDP candidate received **57.7% of the total votes cast** while the **NPP candidate received 42.3%**. There were a total of 2 invalid votes. The UDP candidate **Mr. Bakary Jarju** was subsequently declared the winner of the Massembeh 2025 by-election by the IEC. Below is a detailed breakdown of all results received at polling station level.

| Polling Station | Total Votes Cast | UDP | NPP |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------|------------|
| Massembeh | 421 | 245 | 175 |
| Jomari | 227 | 181 | 46 |

| | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Kolior | 349 | 269 | 80 |
| Toranka Bantang | 215 | 5 | 211 |
| Total | 1,213 | 700 | 513 |

7. Preliminary Recommendations

To the IEC:

- Ensure polling locations are accessible to all voters, particularly the elderly and persons with disabilities. In addition, take additional measures to make the process more accessible such as written material for the hearing impaired and listing the candidates' names in braille on the ballot drums.
- It is of paramount urgency that the IEC regulates campaign financing in accordance with the laws of The Gambia.
- Publication of results on the IEC website is still pending. The IEC should immediately publish results on their website as soon as the official results are announced.
- The IEC should ensure that voting instructions at polling units are visible and readable
- The IEC should consider developing regulations on hidden campaigns by political parties and/or candidates on election day.

To Political Parties and Candidates:

- Utilize the prescribed legal process to pursue any complaint or grievances arising from the elections.
- Should abstain from vote buying and voter inducement as both are punishable under the laws of The Gambia
- Should abstain from making hate speech during and after the electoral cycle

To the National Assembly:

- As the 2026-2028 electoral cycle approaches, the National Assembly must prioritize legislative and constitutional reform. The Elections Bill, 2020 should be prioritized without further delay
- Through consultation, Parliament should develop a Campaign Financing law that will explicitly regulate campaign financing to ensure credibility and accountability of the electoral process. The law should consider giving the Anti-Corruption Commission the jurisdiction to regulate, ensure compliance and accountability in Campaign Financing. The expansion of the scope of vote buying and community developments that are election-

centric (close to election day) and the auditing and publication of party/candidate campaign financial statements, should be included in the Campaign Financing law.

To the Media:

- Continue to demonstrate professionalism in its reportage and ensure citizens continue to receive accurate information about the election process.
- Journalists and media organizations should be politically neutral and adhere to the GPU Cherno Jallow Code of Ethics

To the Security Forces:

- While we commend the professionalism and neutrality of security personnel in dealing with electoral-related matters, we urge them to be on extra alert to minimize the occurrence of electoral violence.

8. Conclusion

Having observed the by-elections in Massembeh, both Gambia Participates and EWC concluded that the outcome of the election reflected the will of voters in Massembeh. The process was transparent, free, and fair. Although there were critical incidents, however, these incidents were isolated and did not thwart the will of the voters.

This election observation mission highlights the importance of civil society collaboration in ensuring transparency, accountability, and credibility in electoral processes in The Gambia. By working together, **Gambia Participates and the EWC** reinforce their **devotion to making** sure that elections are conducted according to the laws of The Gambia and ensure credibility in the entire electoral process.

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