

PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT 1

Release Date: March 31st 2022 at Metzzy Residence Hotel

A Pre-Election Period Signposted by Low Women Participation & Abuse of State Resources

Key Findings of Reporting Periods One, Two & Three

March 01 – March 30, 2022

BACKGROUND

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of The Gambia on March 2, 2022 declared the nomination of candidates for the April 9 Parliamentary elections open from March 5th to March 13th, 2022. 427 nomination forms were collected from the IEC offices of which 259 filed for nomination, 251 candidates' nominations were accepted and 8 nominations were rejected by the IEC. Out of the 251 nominated candidates, 19 are women and 232 are males. 12 political parties sponsoring 167 candidates and 85 candidates under independent ticket will be running for 53 constituencies ahead of the April 9 Parliamentary elections. The UDP has the highest number of party candidates (46), followed by NPP (40), GDC (27,) PDOIS (19) CA (10), APRC (7) with the remaining parties APP (1) GFA (3) GMC (3), NRP (5), PPP (1), NUP (4) sponsoring not more than 5 candidates.

Political parties have not done much sponsoring female candidates. None of the 12 political parties have sponsored more than 10 female candidates. The UDP came close by sponsoring 6 female candidates with NPP, PDOIS having 3 female candidates, 3 as independent female candidates and the remaining parties 1 each.

Female participation will be generally low for the 2022 Parliamentary elections with only 7.5% of the total participating candidates. There are still a lot of gaps within the internal party set up to put women in the forefront to run for elective offices.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During these reporting periods (March 01 to March 31), Gambia Participates focused on six emerging trends that are likely to affect the electoral process which are; the general pre-election environment, voter education activities, IEC's preparatory activities, campaign activities, use/non-use of state resources and critical incidents.

Specifically, GP recommends that IECs and other election stakeholders intensify Get-Out-The-Vote Campaigns to mobilize participation in the electioneering process. GP observed that voter education campaigns are occurring unevenly across the regions and would encourage stakeholders to intensify efforts in areas that are relatively uninformed. GP found that political party rallies are occurring throughout the country, primarily organized by the APRC, Citizen Alliance, GDC, NPP, PDOIS, UDP and independent candidates. GP recommends that candidates and parties adhere to the electoral codes, discourage violence among their supporters, and desist from all illegal practices such as the abuse of state resources for campaigns. GP urges all relevant security agencies to respond timely and appropriately to emerging conflicts

Gambia Participates also urge political parties to encourage and increase women's participation in elective positions.

General Impressions

Observers' general impression of the first observation period from March 01 to March 07 was that it substantially aligned with the AU/ECOWAS standards for democratic elections. Most observers affirm the electoral environment and engagements by stakeholders were somewhat aligned to the AU/ECOWAS standards for democratic elections in the second and third reporting periods.

METHODOLOGY

Gambia Participates deployed sixty-five (65) Long-term observers stationed in all the 53 constituencies to monitor the nomination and political campaigns ahead of the April 9, Parliamentary elections. Each LTO observes the political activities in their constituency and reports back to GP while the 12 Regional Focal Points supervise GP's observation mission in the 7 regions of the Gambia

Prior to their deployment, refresher training was conducted for the observers on GP's election observation mission methodology, observation reporting tools and code of conduct. The LTO Checklist is divided into 7 parts, each part of the checklist was individually completed weekly and reported to the GP's database. LTOs reports are based on data collected on the general (political) environment, IEC preparatory activities, voter education, political campaigns, use/non-use of state resources, critical incidents and observer evaluation.

MAIN FINDINGS

General Environment Calm and Orderly

As the electioneering activities intensified, observers witnessed a relatively charged political environment in the second reporting period – March 08 – March 14. While 91% of LTOs reported that the pre-election environment was mostly calm, 6% in Serrekunda, Kantora and Brikama North reported disorder at the IEC office. At the IEC regional office in the West Coast Region, fracas ensued on candidates’ nominations. For example, on March 10, 2022, the on-the-spot rejection of UDP’s Busumbala constituency candidate (Momodou Sabally) propelled unrest between UDP followers and Police personnel. Our observer reported the use of excessive force by police personnel and the throwing of harmful debris on police personnel by UDP supporters. 6% of LTOs in Banjul Central, Banjul North and Busumbala reported a build-up of political tension. The pre-election environment was relatively calmer at 96% in the third reporting period when compared to 91% that was reported in the second reporting period, although just like the second reporting period, disorder at the IEC and civil unrest were reported. These incidents were reported in Foni Bondali, Kantora and Tallinding Kunjang constituencies.

In addition, our observer for Foni Kansala in the West Coast region reported a state of panic and internal migration of citizens due to the exchange of heavy gunfire between Senegalese troops and MFDC rebels on March 13, 2022.

According to our observer in Foni Bondali, chaos erupted between a fraction of NPP and APRC supporters in the constituency. The chaos was as a result of NPP sponsoring a candidate against APRC’s Kaddy Camara (incumbent). The APRC followers in the constituency protested the sponsoring of Ousman Nyassi by the NPP because they alleged that the NPP violates the coalition agreement between APRC and NPP. As a result of this tension, Ousman Nyassi resulted in running as an “independent candidate”.

For Graphs/Charts

Calm and Orderly General Pre-Election Environment:

Week	Reporting Period	%age
One	March 01 – March 07	98%
Two	March 08 – March 14	91%
Three	March 15 – March 21	96%

Presence of Observer Groups:

The civil society is critical for conducting voter and civic education and engendering participation. During the first reporting period between March 01 and March 07, Gambia Participates LTOs reported the presence of the National Youth Parliament, Peace Ambassadors and other observer groups in 4%, 9% and 8% % of the regions, respectively. African Union Observers were also seen in Latrikunda Sabiji during the reporting period.

CSOs continued their pre-election engagements as witnessed and reported during the second reporting period (March 08 – March 14). 25% of LTOs witnessed the presence of Peace Ambassadors, 4% were exposed to pre-election engagements by National Youth Parliament, CSO Coalition on Election and other groups, while 2% of observers reported the presence of MaJAC. European Union observers were seen in Brikama South, Latrikunda Sabiji and Serrekunda West constituencies during the second reporting period.

Peace Ambassador, National Youth Parliament and CSO Coalition on Elections at 27%, 2% and 1%, respectively, have continued to engage in the pre-election period as reported in the third reported period (March 15 – 21). ECOWAS observers and the European Union observers were also seen in Brikama South, Latrikunda Sabiji and Illiasa.

Presence of Security officials:

A calm electoral environment and presence of security officials help to boost citizens' confidence and increase participation in the process. 47% of Gambia Participates LTOs reported having seen Gambia Police Force during week one of reporting. Of these, 23% saw between 1-10 security officials, 13% saw between 11-20 security officials, 6 % saw between 21 and 30 officials and 4% saw between 31 and 50 security officials.

More security agencies and officials were seen during the second reporting period (March 08 - 15). 55% of Gambia Participates LTOs were exposed to the presence of security personnel during the reporting report, a marginal increase of 8% from the first reporting period. ECOWAS Soldiers and Gambia Military Officers were also seen in this reporting period.

Security presence was noticed across most locations nationwide. 52% of observers witnessed the presence of security officials in the third reporting period (March 15-21). Of these, 38% of LTOs witnessed the presence of the Gambia Police Force, 4% witnessed the presence of ECOWAS soldiers and 10% witnessed the presence of Gambia military officers.

While the conduct of security officials were professional in most of the constituencies, however, our observer for Busumbala constituency witnessed the unprofessional conduct of PIU officials against UDP supporters.

IEC's Preparatory Activities:

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is mandated to oversee the electoral process in the Gambia, including all logistical and operational preparations. During each reporting period, GP asked observers to indicate whether they observed evidence of electoral preparations by IEC taking place in their respective constituencies. GP defined electoral preparations as the training of election

officials, accreditation of political parties and observers, briefing meetings with stakeholders (civil society, religious groups, observers, political parties or candidates) and the availability and distribution of IEC election materials, ahead of the elections.

According to GP's LTO report for week one (March 01 - 07), the IEC has begun preparations for the upcoming elections but preparations are proceeding unevenly across the country. Nationwide, some 6% of the LTOs reported that the regional offices have received the voter register, 11% reported the presence of ballot drums and 8% reported the presence of bags containing marbles.

The commission continued its election preparatory activities through the dispatch of election materials to its offices. In the second reporting period (March 08 -14), 2% of LTOs confirmed that IEC has received the register of voters in their constituencies, 8% confirmed the receipt of ballot drums in their constituencies, while 4% confirmed that the commissions' offices in their constituencies have received the Marble Trays and Bag containing marbles.

The distribution of election materials continued through the third reporting period (March 15-21). 12% of LTOs further confirmed that the regional offices have received ballot drums, 2% of LTOs reported that the IEC regional offices have received the voter register and the COVID-health kits.

Accessibility of IEC Regional Offices

For the period March 01 – March 07, 32% of GP's LTOs reported that the IEC's regional offices were open to observers of these, 23% reported that the offices are not situated in locations that are accessible to persons with disability.

34% of LTOs reported that the IEC regional officers were open to the public during the second reporting period (March 08-14). Although accessibility has remained the challenge as observed by 15% of LTOs who reported that the IEC officers are not in locations that can easily be accessible by PWDs.

In the third reporting period (March 15-21), 23 % of observers reported that the IEC regional officers were open to the public during the reporting period. Only 4 % of LTOs reported that the IEC offices are not in locations that can easily be accessible by PWDs.

Engagement of the IEC by Political Parties:

Political parties are also showing interest in wholesome engagement of the election process. The presence of party agents at the regional offices was observed and reported by LTOs during the first reporting period (March 01-07). 4% of LTOs reported that these agents were accredited by the IEC to engage in the pre-election period.

Political parties have continued their engagements with the IEC regional offices as observed in the second reporting period (March 08 – March 15). 6% of LTOs saw UDP party agents at the IEC

regional offices, 4% saw NPP agents at the regional offices, 2% saw GDC agents and agents of other parties at the regional IEC offices.

Only UDP agents were seen in some regional IEC offices in the third reporting period (March 15-21) as reported by 2% of LTOs.

Voter Education/Information Campaigns

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) have a mandate to inform Gambian citizens about the electoral process and is assisted by independent efforts undertaken by civil society organizations and political parties. For purposes of pre-election observation, GP defined voter information campaigns as sensitization or awareness programmes on radio or television; distribution of materials such as handbills; voter education/information via WhatsApp broadcast, posters, twitter, billboards, roadshows conducted by IEC or civil society organizations; or town hall meetings about the elections. GP's observers found that citizen exposure to voter information campaigns remained generally low during the first reporting period (March 01-07) as only 33% of LTOs heard or witnessed voter education campaigns.

Of the 33% of LTOs that reported voter education campaigns in week one, 2% reported that they heard or witnessed voter education conducted by the IEC, 15% of the observers were exposed to voter education campaigns by CSOs, 6% of LTOs were exposed to voter education by political parties, and 7% were exposed to voter education by other stakeholders. The methods used for voter education varied, 83% were exposed to voter education via town hall meetings, 13% were exposed to voter education through television, 4% were exposed to voter education through the WhatsApp platform while 10% of LTOs were exposed to voter education through posters and billboards, respectively.

LTOs reported a marginal nationwide increase of 7% in voter education activities in the second reporting period (March 8-15), from the 33 % that was observed in reporting period one to 40% in reporting period two. Of these 40%, 19% of LTOs were exposed to voter education by other stakeholders, 11% were exposed to voter education by the IEC, 9% were exposed to voter education by political parties, 8% were exposed to voter education campaigns by CSOs. For the voter education methods, 83% were exposed to voter education via town hall meetings, 8% were exposed to voter education through television, 2% were exposed to voter education through the WhatsApp platform while 6% of LTOs were exposed to voter education through posters and billboards.

In the third reporting period (March 15-21), more stakeholders engaged in voter education activities as witnessed and reported by 53 % of LTOs who said they were exposed to these voter education initiatives. This is a 13% marginal increase from the second reporting period and is

highly commendable. 15% reported that they heard or witnessed voter education conducted by the IEC, 8% were exposed to voter education campaigns by CSOs, 12% of LTOs were exposed to voter education by political parties, and 19% were exposed to voter education by others.

No Exposure to Voter Education (VE) Campaigns

Region	Week One (March 01-07)	Week 2 (March 08 – 14)	Week 3 (March 15 – 21)
	% No VE	% No VE	% No VE
Banjul	100%	100%	100%
CRR North	80%	80%	0%
CRR South	50%	17%	0%
Kanifing	67%	57%	57%
LRR	83%	67%	67%
NBR	71%	57%	71%
URR	57%	57%	43%
WCR	58%	67%	42%

According to GP’s observer reports, exposure to voter education campaigns varied significantly across regions in the reporting period one. No voter education was reported in week one in Banjul, 80% of observers indicated no exposure to voter education in CRR North, 50% of observers had no exposure to voter education in CRR South. 83% of LTOs in LRR said they had no exposure/witnessed voter education. 71% of observers had no exposure/ have witnessed voter

education campaigns in NBR, 67% also said they had no exposure to voter education in Kanifing and 58% and 57% of observers also reported that they had no exposure to voter education campaigns in WCR and URR, respectively.

LTOs reported a marginal nationwide increase of 7% in voter education activities in the second reporting period from 33% that was observed in reporting period one to 40% in reporting period two. However, while regions such as Banjul and CRR North remained consistent as regions with the lowest levels of voter education, there was a decline in voter education engagements for CRR South from 50% in reporting one to 17% in reporting period two.

It is worrisome that with barely three weeks to the elections, voter education campaign is abysmally low in some regions. As of the third reporting period (March 15 – 21), no voter education campaigns were reported by 54 % of LTOs. If the trend continues, the April 9 Parliamentary elections will see a low voter turnout compared to the 89% voter turnout registered during the 2021 Presidential Elections.

Targeted Voter Education Campaigns:

As part of promoting inclusion and mainstreaming participation of the marginalized groups, Gambia Participates also observed how voter education campaigns were tailored for the interest of the marginalized communities. In Week One (March 01-07), 8% of LTOs reported voter education campaigns targeted at Women, 10% witnessed or were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at Youth while 2% were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at persons with disability.

In Week Two (March 08-14), 8% of LTOs reported voter education campaigns targeted at Women, 8% witnessed or were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at Youth while 9% were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at persons with disability.

Targeted voter education campaigns increased significantly in the third week (March 15-21), 13% of LTOs reported voter education campaigns targeted at Women, 17 % witnessed or were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at Youth while 8 % were exposed to voter education campaigns targeted at persons with disability.

Campaigns Targeted at the Marginalized Communities

Marginalized Communities	Week One (March 01-07)	Week 2 (March 08 – 14)	Week 3 (March 15 – 21)
Women	8%	8%	13%
Youth	10%	8%	17%
PWDs	2%	9%	8%

Political Party Rallies and Activities

With the campaign period underway, GP observers found that political parties are organizing in-person physical rallies across the country. Most activities are being carried out by the **APRC, Citizen Alliance, GDC, NPP, PDOIS, UDP** and **Independent Candidates**. For the purposes of the observation effort, GP observers used a broad definition of rallies to include both party or candidate rallies and congresses organized within electoral districts. For the reporting period one (March 01-07), Nationwide, 17 % of observers reported witnessing or hearing of NPP rallies in their constituencies, 12 % of observers reported witnessing or hearing of rallies for the UDP, 6 % reported witnessing or hearing of rallies for the APRC, Citizens Alliance and GDC, and 2 % of observers witnessed or heard of PDOIS rallies in their Constituencies. These political campaigns took place before the start of the National Assembly elections campaign period (March 17th – April 7th) as announced by the IEC.

Charts of the geographical concentration of party rallies by state based on the %age of observers reporting rallies in their regions can be seen below.

For Graph: Political Campaign Rallies by Region (**Week One - March 01- 07**)

Region	NPP	UDP	APRC	GDC	PDOIS	CA
BANJUL	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

CRR NORTH	20%	20%	0%	20%	0%	0%
CRR SOUTH	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%
KANIFING	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%	33%
LOWER RIVER REGION	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%
NORTH BANK REGION	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
UPPER RIVER REGION	14%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
WEST COAST REGION	25%	8%	17%	8%	0%	8%

The observers noted an increase in the number of rallies associated with political parties across the country during the second reporting period (March 08 – March 14), with the campaign period for the parliamentary elections underway as of March 14, GP found that political parties are organizing rallies across the country. However, there are subtle geographical trends in the organization. The chart highlight where observers have witnessed the highest %ages of rallies associated with the six big parties;

For Graph: Political Campaign Rallies by Region (Week Two - March 08- 14)

Region	NPP	UDP	APRC	GDC	PDOIS	CA
BANJUL	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
CRR NORTH	20%	20%	0%	20%	0%	0%

CRR SOUTH	50%	50%	0%	33%	0%	17%
KANIFING	43%	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%
LOWER RIVER REGION	17%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%
NORTH BANK REGION	29%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%
UPPER RIVER REGION	43%	29%	0%	0%	0%	0%
WEST COAST REGION	33%	25%	25%	8%	0%	8%

Political parties have intensified their in-person physical campaigns as observed and reported in the third reporting period (March 15 – 21). The NPP at 55% followed closely by UDP at 44% dominated the political campaign space during the reporting period.

For Graph: Political Campaign Rallies by Region (**Week Three - March 15- 21**)

Region	NPP	UDP	APRC	GDC	PDOIS	CA
BANJUL	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
CRR NORTH	75%	50%	0%	50%	0%	25%
CRR SOUTH	67%	50%	33%	50%	17%	83%
KANIFING	43%	43%	43%	14%	29%	14%

LOWER RIVER REGION	67%	50%	0%	33%	0%	17%
NORTH BANK REGION	57%	57%	14%	29%	29%	29%
UPPER RIVER REGION	71%	29%	0%	14%	29%	29%
WEST COAST REGION	58%	50%	33%	25%	8%	42%

Methods of In-Person Campaigns:

For the reports received in week one (March 01-07), 19 % of LTOs witnessed or were exposed to political parties engaging in door-to-door campaigns, 8% reported that public campaigns by political parties were mostly done via vehicle caravan, 4% of LTOs were exposed to political party campaigns via town hall meetings while 6% were witnessed party campaigns via rallies and other appropriate methods of public outreaches.

Door-to-door campaigns increased in the second reporting period (March 08-14), as 30% of LTOs were exposed to this method of campaigns by political parties. 11% of LTOs were exposed to political rallies/campaigns using motor vehicles, 9% witnessed voter education campaigns at community town halls, 8% reported that they were exposed to in-person political campaigns in open rallies while 6% were exposed to other avenues of campaigns by political parties and independent candidates.

Political parties have continued to utilize door-to-door campaigns, moving vehicles and town halls for voter mobilization as observed in the third reporting period (March 15-21). 48% of LTOs were exposed to public rallies by political parties, 40% of LTOs were exposed to door-to-door campaigns by political parties, 37% of LTOs were exposed to party campaigns via moving vehicles while 27% of LTOs were exposed to public campaigns during town hall meetings

Abuse of State Resources

GP observers also reported instances of the misuse of government property to organize political rallies or candidate rallies or a political party dominating the state-owned media outfit.

During the second reporting period (March 08-14), GP observers were instructed to indicate whether government vehicles had been used to organize rallies, including to transport materials to or from a rally site or for candidates to travel and make campaign speeches, nomination or if a party is dominating the scene using the state-owned media. Positive responses indicate a violation of the electoral code and abuse of elected office. Nationwide, 6% of GP observers reported witnessing or hearing of such misuse of government vehicles. The reports were received from Banjul Central, Banjul North and Banjul South Constituencies. From the Greater Banjul, observers reported the use of state-owned vehicles by the NPP delegates at the nominations of Sammy Njie, Mohammed Ndow and Ousman Wada on March 10 2022. The Minister of Fisheries, Mr. James Gomez was also seen attending the nominations, during official working hours using state-owned vehicles.

Abuse of state resources was also reported in the third reporting period (March 15-21). 8% of observers witnessed the use of public resources during political campaigns, mostly state-owned vehicles. These were most frequent in Foni Bondali, Illiasa, Kombo South and Old Yundum.

We observed that the constitutionally mandated meet the people tour was sometimes used by the President to campaign for his party candidates. The electoral cycle was the perfect timing for the president to use state resources to conduct what was fully supposed to be apolitical. This has created power inequalities and provided unfair political advantages to the incumbent's party and candidates. The meet the people tour is a state-funded activity whose objectives were partly defeated for political propaganda thus violating section 91(b) of the Elections act and section 222(15) of the 1997 constitution.

Critical Incident Reports

During the reporting periods, GP observers also texted in verified critical incident reports to identify crises necessitating a response in real-time. Most confirmed reports related to intimidation or harassment of voters, citizens, IEC, election observers and political parties.

In the first reporting period (March 01-07), 4% of GP observers reported incidents of intimidation or harassment; most of these reports were received from Lower and Upper Saloum in CRR North.

In the second reporting period (March 08-14), civil unrest as a result of clashes among citizens, IEC and or/security officials was reported. Critical incidents were severe in Busumbala constituency when both UDP and PIU officials sustained injuries during clashes between PIU and UDP followers.

6% of LTOs also witnessed and reported incidents targeted at citizens, IEC, election observers and political parties. These reports were more frequent in Brikama North, Foni Bondali and Nianija constituencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on GP's analysis of trends in the three reporting periods, we make the following recommendations:

To the IEC

1. We encourage the IEC to increase voter education efforts, particularly in underserved communities.
2. The IEC to regularize the use of state resources during elections.
3. While we observe some communication improvements from IEC, we recommend the IEC to frequently utilize its social media platforms for communication and the use of infographics.

To Political Parties and Candidates

3. We call on candidates and parties to refrain from using incendiary language and to maintain a respectful campaign environment, particularly with regard to religious beliefs and gender;
4. Candidates should adhere to all provisions of the electoral code, including restrictions on the use of government property to carry out a political campaign
5. Political parties should increase women participation in elective positions

To citizens of the Gambia

5. Should engage the electioneering process in a non-violent manner and work with the security agencies in reporting incidents and threats of violence as well as perpetrators of violence.
6. Should abstain from selling their votes to political candidates and must take evidences of political bribes and report to the relevant authorities including the IEC

The Security

6. We call upon security agencies with a mandate for maintaining order in the campaign environment to equitably and independently allow candidates and parties to campaign freely in all areas of the country;
7. Security agencies should be more intentional in addressing early warning signs of violence.
8. Security officials must not use excessive force on citizens

To CSOs

9. Should intensify the get-out-the-vote campaigns to mobilize more citizens to participate in the process. Specifically, they should engage more in targeted campaigns to increase the participation of women, youth and persons with disability.
10. Increase voter education for a higher voter turnout

To the Media

10. Media organizations should ensure fair coverage and reporting of all candidates/parties contesting in the election and avoid bias or prejudice in their reporting.