



**Peace Ambassadors -
The Gambia**

PEACE AMBASSADORS-THE GAMBIA (PAG) ELECTIONS WATCH PROJECT 2021

PAG Voter Registration Update #3 (24 June, 2021)

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization operating in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. PAG non-partisan citizen observation effort for the 2021 voter registration to make the process more inclusive, transparent and accountable by enhancing participation, providing independent information on the quality of the process, and deterring potential problems.

Summary

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), beginning 29 May 2021, deployed 59 trained observers across the 7 Administrative Regions and 53 Constituencies of The Gambia to observe the voter registration process. This report serves as our third update and it covers the second phase of the voter registration exercise from Tuesday, 15th June 2021 to Saturday, 19th June, 2021.

Overall, reports from PAG observers from all 53 constituencies show that the registration process continues to progress across the entire country and that registration officials are following most of the registration procedures. PAG's observer reports indicate that the IEC has improved in some aspects of its operations resulting in fewer instances of malfunctioning equipment as compared to the first week of the registration exercise. While most registration centers are opening on time, PAG observers noted that some registration officials are reporting to registration centers late and closing earlier than the stipulated time. PAG observers reported that security personnel and political parties agents continue to be deployed across the country to observe the process. Nevertheless, as was noted in PAG's findings during the first week of observation, registration staff appear to be inconsistently applying some of the registration procedures in some centers and enforcement of COVID-19 safety protocols remain lax.

Methodology

PAG has deployed 59 total trained observers across the country including 6 regional coordinators – one per region with Banjul and Kanifing combined having one coordinator - and 53 constituency observers - one per constituency. PAG has deployed its observers in every constituency using two deployment methodologies: stationary and mobile observation. All 53 constituency observers were deployed as stationary observers for a total of nine (9) assigned days throughout the registration period from 29 May to 11 July, 2021 while all six (6) regional coordinators were deployed to observe on every day, throughout the registration period within their assigned regions where they are mobile, observing the general environment of the registration process and reporting critical incidents as they occur.

All 53 constituency observers were instructed to observe at a single registration center throughout the day on three specific days – Tuesday, 15 June, Thursday, 17 June and Saturday, 19 June in their assigned constituencies. On each observation day, every observer sent in four observation reports based on a comprehensive checklist via coded text messages using their mobile phones to the PAG’s reporting database. These 53 constituency observers have been assigned based on the IEC 2021 Movement Plan according to the availability of IEC officials at registration centers within the constituencies. All PAG observers were accredited by the IEC and permitted to observe.

Findings

This PAG report provides comprehensive information on reports from all PAG observers during the second phase of the voter registration observation (15 June to 19 June). PAGs 53 observers submitted 158 reports during the second reporting phase reflecting their observation at 127 unique registration centers. Due to the small number of registration centers in some constituencies, some observers reported from the same center on multiple days.

Opening

Of the 158 reports received by observers during Phase 2, 141 reports (89%) indicated that their observed center opened on time, that is, between 8:00 to 8:30 am. Most of the remaining centers had opened by 9:30am. This is on par with PAGs observation of the opening times during the first observation phase (May 29 - June 2) when 89% of observed centers opened on time.

Setup

Generally, during Phase 2, PAG observers reported that most centers that opened had the staff and materials required and remained open throughout the day. For example,

- ▶ 154 of 158 observer reports show that registration centers were identifiable and clearly marked by signs.
- ▶ 156 of 158 observer reports indicate that registration centers had all the critical registration materials present.

114 of 158 observer reports show that IEC registration centers had at least four registration staff present when the center was opened. This is a decline from the first phase of PAG’s observation when 129 of 159 reports indicated that centers had at least four staff. Several PAG observers noted that some staff arrived late after the center had opened. Of the 158 observer reports, 119 indicated that the observed center had at least 2 female registration staff.

140 of 158 observer reports show that centers were accessible by all registrants while 18 of 158 reports show that centers were not accessible, for example, applicants were required to go upstairs to register – which potentially poses a problem for some persons with disabilities.

COVID 19 Safety Measures

The IEC in its 2021 voters registration training manual included the implementation of the COVID 19 safety guidelines as provided by the Ministry of Health of The Gambia and World Health Organization (WHO) at all registration centers. PAG observers noted a decline in the adherence to these guidelines compared to the first phase of its observation.

Only 100 of 158 observer reports indicated that assigned registration centers had all of the required COVID-19 prevention materials such as hand wash buckets, soap, sanitizers and thermometer for registration of applicants, staff and observers. Additionally, only 82 of 158 observer reports indicated that IEC officials wore face masks during the implementation of their duties. Similarly, only 29 of 158 observers reported that security officials always enforced the COVID-19 regulations at the observed registration centers.

	Phase 1 (May 29 - June 2)	Phase 2 (June 15- 19)
Centers had all COVID-19 materials	98 of 159 reports (62%)	100 of 158 reports (63%)
IEC officials wore face masks	124 of 159 reports (78%)	82 of 158 reports (52%)
Security officials always enforced COVID 19 regulations	84 of 159 reports (53%)	29 of 158 reports (18%)

Registration Procedures

Similar to Phase 1 of PAGs observation, in Phase 2, PAG's observer reports indicated that registration officials followed most of the registration procedures:

- ▶ All (158 of 158) reports show that all or many registrants were asked to present a valid identification document (such as national ID card, birth certificate, Gambian Passport or an attestation) before being registered.
- ▶ 151 of 158 reports show that no applicant who presented a valid national identification document was denied registration.
- ▶ 156 of 158 reports show that applicants were asked to affix their thumbprint to the registration form to certify that their information was correct before being sent to the operator.
- ▶ 155 of 158 observer reports show that the operator input the data of all applicants into the laptop and their photos were taken.
- ▶ 146 of 158 PAG observer reports show that applicants requiring assistance such as pregnant women and persons with disabilities were given priority to register.

- ▶ 147 of 158 reports indicate that all successful registrants were issued their voter cards before leaving the center. This is an improvement from Phase 1 when only 122 of 159 reports indicated such as a result of malfunctioning of the card printers. This problem seems to have reduced as the observation exercise progresses.

However, as in Phase 1, PAG observers also noted that some procedures were applied inconsistently across registration centers. For example:

- ▶ 95 of 158 reports reflect that IEC officials did not always ask registrants whether they had registered somewhere else. The above-mentioned question was a major emphasis in the IEC training manual which is geared toward reducing the incident of multiple registration.
- ▶ 15 of 158 reports show that if the applicant was found to be ineligible, registration officials did not fill out the rejection form and the rejected applicant was not served a copy. Several observers noted that registration officials turned away minors without filling out the rejection form.

As in Phase 1, PAG observers report a number of registration centers where many applicants (83 of 158) used an attestation by the District Sefyo or Alkalo.

Security and Party Agents

PAG observers reported many centers having uniformed security personnel and political party agents present to observe the process:

- ▶ 144 of 158 reports show that there were uniformed security personnel present at registration centers.
- ▶ 151 of 158 reports indicated one or more party agents present at the registration center.

Closing

Generally, observers reported that registration centers remained open throughout the day for the required time which is 5:00 pm. During Phase 1, PAG observers reported that the malfunction of some critical registration equipment such as printers and laptops did require some observed centers to close down early. However, Phase 2 saw fewer issues with malfunctioning of equipment.

	Phase 1 (May 29 - June 2)	Phase 2 (June 15- 19)
No equipment malfunctions	63 of 159 reports (40%)	132 of 158 reports (84%)
Minor equipment issues quickly resolved	53 of 159 reports (33%)	24 of 158 reports (15%)
Equipment issues that caused serious delay to registration	43 of 159 reports (27%)	2 of 158 reports (1%)

During Phase 1, PAG observers reported that 26 of 158 PAG observers reports show that applicants who were already in the queue before 5:00 pm were sent home by the IEC officials and informed to come back the next day even though the IEC's training manual indicates that applicants in the queue at 5:00pm should be allowed to register that day. In Phase 2, PAG observers saw an improvement, with only 5 of 158 reports indicating that applicants in the queue at 5:00 pm were turned away.

During this Phase, PAG observers also witnessed fewer instances of disruption, intimidation and harassment at some registration centers. Only 5 of 158 observer reports indicated some level of disruption or attempt to disrupt the registration throughout the observation days and only 2 of 158 observer reports included instances of intimidation and harassment at registration centers.

Critical Incidents

PAG observers were instructed to immediately report any serious problems that could compromise the conduct of the voter registration exercise. During the second phase of the observation PAG received and confirmed only 18 Critical Incidents (a decrease from the 59 Critical Incidents confirmed during Phase 1). Most of the critical incidents received were centered on early closure of registration centers or IEC officials refusing to register people on the queue by 5pm as opposed to the dictates of the IEC training manual.

Other critical incidents of note reported by PAG observers include:

- ▶ Turning away of registrants by IEC officials even when they were in the queue before 5:00 pm.
- ▶ IEC registration officials reporting to registration centers late, that is after 8:30 am.
- ▶ The unsuccessful attempts of underaged registrants to register using the Sayfo and Alkalo attestation.

Interim Recommendations

Again, Overall, reports from PAG observers from all 53 constituencies show that registration is progressing across the entire country and that registration officials are following most of the registration procedures. There have been challenges with the IEC officials reporting to registration centers late and closing earlier than the stipulated time. It has been observed that security personnel and political party agents are being deployed across the country to observe the process. Nevertheless, it was noted by PAG observers that registration staff appear to be inconsistently applying the registration procedures in some centers and security officials are likewise inconsistent in enforcing the COVID-19 regulations.

PAG in this regard, offers the following recommendations to help enhance the quality of the registration process:

To the IEC

- ▶ PAG extends commendation to the IEC for the timely opening of the registration centers but encourages the IEC to implore all of its officials to arrive on time.
- ▶ PAG encourages the IEC to employ concrete measures to address the issues of registration centers closing by 5pm or earlier when there are people still in the queue. An alternative to that, is for the IEC to look at the possibility of extending the registration period to accommodate more eligible voters to be able to register.
- ▶ Cautions the IEC registration staff to evenly apply the procedures and guidelines stipulated for the registration process that is in conformity with the electoral legal framework.

To Security Services

- ▶ PAG encourages security personnel to consistently enforce the COVID-19 regulations at various registration centers assigned in order to ensure that the general public is protected during the conduct of this voter registration exercise.
- ▶ Security services such as immigration and police should remain vigilant in the conduct of their services so as to keep an eye on illegal registration as well as speedily intervene during instances of violence and disruption.

To Political Parties

- ▶ Admonish all political parties to adhere to the IEC regulation stipulated in its recent public statement to have only one political party agent per center and that all parties should adhere to guidelines employed by IEC officials at registration centers.
- ▶ Encourage party supporters to stop spreading false information, hate speech and violent actions during this period.

To All Stakeholders

- ▶ Expand efforts to inform the public that if they want to vote in 2021 they must register in 2021; and
- ▶ Remember that PAG is committed to continuing to observe the registration process. As such, a more comprehensive report with detailed observation findings and recommendations will be issued at the end of the exercise.

About the PAG and Observation of the 2021 Voter Registration Process

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization operating in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. Since its inception in 2001, Peace Education and Conflict Resolution has served as the basis of the organization's existence. We incorporate other core issues such as youth empowerment, civic education and election

observation. These core issues are made possible through capacity building and awareness creation.

Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia has since 2006 monitored every election held in The Gambia including presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. The organization also conducts voter education to ensure the public is educated on the conduct of the elections in all aspects. This is the organization's commitment to ensure peace and stability in the country.

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) non-partisan citizen observation effort for the 2021 voter registration to make the process more inclusive, transparent and accountable by enhancing participation, providing independent information on the quality of the process, and deterring potential problems. PAG 2021 observation efforts are conducted in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), providing technical support and financed by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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Thank you for your kind consideration as we all work to advance the democracy of The Gambia!!!