



**Peace Ambassadors -  
The Gambia**

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

### **PAG Voter Registration Update #4 (15 July, 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), between May 29 and July 11, 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 third phase of the voter registration observation exercise from Wednesday, 7th July 2021 to Sunday, 11th July, 2021. PAG will also release a comprehensive report covering all three phases of its observation.

Generally, reports from PAG observers from all constituencies show that the registration exercise continued to progress across the entire country through 11th July 2021 with the exception of Janjanbureh Constituency which concluded its exercise on the 28th June 2021. The reports show that registration officials continued to follow most of the registration procedures. However, PAG observers indicated an increase in registration officials arriving late and closing registration centers early. As well, during this phase observers reported an increase in equipment malfunctions including those that prevented some voters from collecting their cards. PAG observers report that security personnel and political parties agents were deployed across the country to observe the process. Nevertheless, as was noted in PAG's findings during the first and second phase of observation, registration staff appear to be inconsistently applying some of the registration procedures in some centers and COVID-19 safety protocols were not widely followed.

#### **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.

During the last phase of the voter registration exercise, 52 of the 53 constituency observers were instructed to observe at a single registration center throughout the day on three specific days – Wednesday, 7 July, Friday, 9 July, and Sunday, 11 July in their assigned constituencies. One observer did not observe during this phase as voter registration had already been completed in that constituency. 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. All 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 third phase of the voter registration observation (7 July to 11 July). PAG's 52 observers submitted 155 reports during the third phase reflecting their observation at 115 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 155 reports received by observers during Phase 3, 125 reports (80%) indicated that their observed center opened on time, that is between 8:00 to 8:30. Most of the remaining centers had opened by 9:30am. This is a slight decline from the first two phases when 89% of registration centers opened on time. As in the last phase, PAG's observers noted that registration officials arrived late at many centers. Only 114 of the 155 observer reports indicated that centers had four registration officials present when the centers opened. Nine of the 155 observer reports indicated that the center only had one registration official at the time of opening. Of the 155 reports, 115 indicated that the observed center had at least two female registration staff.

## **Setup**

Generally, during Phase 2, PAG observers reported that most centers had the materials required and were set-up appropriately, although accessibility remains a challenge in some registration centers. For example,

- ▶ 151 of 155 observer reports show that registration centers were identifiable and clearly marked by signs;
- ▶ 148 of 155 observer reports indicate that registration centers had all the critical registration materials present.

- ▶ 134 of 155 observer reports show that centers were accessible by all registrants while 21 reports show that centers were not accessible, for example, applicants were required to go up stairs 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. As in the previous phase, observers noted a decline in the adherence to these guidelines compared to the first phase of its observation

Only 91 of the 155 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 50 of 155 observer reports indicated that IEC officials wore face masks during the implementation of their duties. Similarly, only 24 of 155 observers reported that security officials always enforced the COVID-19 regulations at the observed registration centers.

	<b>Phase 1 (29 May-2 June)</b>	<b>Phase 2 (June 15- 19)</b>	<b>Phase 3 (July 7 - 11)</b>
Centers had all COVID-19 materials	98 of 159 reports (62%)	100 of 158 reports (63%)	91 of 155 reports (59%)
IEC officials wore face masks	124 of 159 reports (78%)	82 of 158 reports (52%)	50 of 155 reports (32%)
Security officials always enforced COVID 19 regulations	84 of 159 reports (53%)	29 of 158 reports (18%)	24 of 155 reports (15%)

## **Registration Procedures**

Similar to earlier phases of PAGs observation, in Phase 3, PAG’s observer reports indicated that registration officials followed most of the registration procedures:

- ▶ 154 of 155 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.
- ▶ 149 of 155 reports show that no applicant who presented a valid national identification document was denied registration.
- ▶ 152 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.
- ▶ 154 of 155 observer reports show that the operator input the data of all applicants into the laptop and their photos were taken.

- ▶ 145 of 155 PAG observer reports show that applicants requiring assistance such as pregnant women and persons with disabilities were given priority to register.
- ▶ 106 of 155 reports indicate that all successful registrants were issued their voter cards before leaving the center. Several observers reported that malfunctions of or a shortage of supplies for the card printers resulted in applicants having to come back later or go to another center to collect their registration cards.

However, as in the first two phases, PAG observers also noted that some procedures were applied inconsistently across registration centers. For example:

- ▶ 113 of 155 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.
- ▶ 13 of 155 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 the previous phases, PAG observers report a number of registration centers where many applicants (70 of 155) used an attestestation 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:

- ▶ 137 of 155 reports show that there were uniformed security personnel present at registration centers;
- ▶ 146 of 155 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. However, PAG observers noted an increase in equipment malfunctions that caused either minor or serious delays to the registration process. As previously noted, many of these instances included issues with the voter card printer.

	<b>Phase 1 (29 May - 2 June)</b>	<b>Phase 2 (June 15- 19)</b>	<b>Phase 3 (July 7-11)</b>
No equipment malfunctions	63 of 159 reports (40%)	132 of 158 reports (84%)	102 of 155 reports (66%)
Minor equipment issues quickly resolved	53 of 159 reports (33%)	24 of 158 reports (15%)	33 of 155 reports (21%)

Equipment issues that caused serious delay to registration	43 of 159 reports (27%)	2 of 158 reports (1%)	20 off 155 reports (13%)
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In previous phases, PAG observers noted that some registration officials instructed those in the queue at 5:00 pm 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. While PAG observers only recorded four instances of applicants being sent home, 14 of 155 reports indicated that officials closed the registration early (before 5:00 pm).

During this Phase, PAG observers witnessed a slight increase in the number of instances of disruption, intimidation and harassment at some registration centers. Ten of 155 observer reports indicated some level of disruption or attempt to disrupt the registration throughout the observation days while three of 155 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 third phase of the observation, PAG received and confirmed 45 Critical Incidents and confirmed 13 (an increase from the 18 Critical Incidents confirmed during Phase 2). Most of the critical incidents received were centered on early closure of registration centers or IEC officials reporting to their assigned registration centers late as opposed to the dictates of the IEC training manual.

Other critical incidents reported by PAG observers include:

- ▶ Registration without issuance of voter’s cards;
- ▶ Center closure before stipulated time - 5:00PM; and
- ▶ Malfunctioning of IEC electronic gadgets like laptops and printers.

### **Interim Recommendations**

Again, reports from PAG observers from all 52 constituencies showed that registration progressed across the entire country and that registration officials followed 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. Observers reported that security personnel and political parties 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 immediate recommendations. PAG plans to release a comprehensive voter registration report that will include medium and long-term recommendations:

### **To the IEC**

- PAG encourages the IEC to employ concrete measures to ensure effective and respective distribution of voters' cards of registrants that were not given their cards on the spot.
- PAG encourages the IEC to ensure registered voters, political parties, CSO's and other stakeholders are duly informed about the display of the Voter Register period.
- PAG recommends that the IEC further disaggregate the provisional number of registrants on the basis of Constituency, Registration Centers and age bracket to ensure transparency.

### **To Political Parties**

- ▶ Admonish all political parties to monitor the IEC Voter Register display and the appeal process.
- ▶ Encourage party supporters to stop spreading false information, hate speech and violent actions.

### **To All Stakeholders**

- ▶ Upon completion of registration, PAG encourages all to safeguard their voter's cards ahead of the forthcoming elections.
- ▶ Remember that PAG is committed to continuing to observe the entire 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!!!***