



Elections Watch Committee (EWC) 2021 Pre-Elections Observation (PREO)

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE – #2 (19th November 2021)

The Election Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The Election Watch Committee (EWC) includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Election Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee.

Summary

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has trained and deployed a total of 59 campaign observers to observe the conduct of the campaign in all constituencies and regions within The Gambia. This update contains observation findings from the initial period of the campaign beginning from 9th November-17th November 2021 and covers the conduct of campaigns by political parties within the different constituencies during this period. The update also contains information as reported by observers on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) preparedness, the conduct of civic education and voter information campaigns for the elections, COVID-19 prevention measures as well as recommendations. PAG will continue to observe and will submit a final campaign update at the close of the process.

Overall, the Election Watch observers' reports during the initial period of the campaign show that political parties and candidates have launched their campaigns and continue to campaign with no major restrictions. However, observers witnessed and heard of several instances of the abuse of state resources such as use of vehicles and vote buying by candidates and political parties. Observers noted national security personnel deployed in most of their areas. With the exception of a small number of incidents, such as reports of hate speech, the campaign period has been largely peaceful in the vast majority of the country. Elections Watch observers also reported the conduct of civic and voter education efforts by the IEC, CSOs and the media taking place in some constituencies but they have yet to reach a large portion of the country.

Methodology

The Election Watch Committee deployed 59 campaign observers which include 6 regional coordinators – each for a region with Banjul and Kanfing combined – and 53 constituency observers, one representing each constituency, to monitor the conduct of the presidential campaign in their respective regions and constituencies. All Election Watch observers were carefully selected and thoroughly trained, as well as accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

All Elections Watch observers were instructed to observe campaign activities and rallies of political parties and independent candidates in their respective areas covering the total of 53 constituencies within The Gambia. Observers were trained to observe campaign activities and send in reports on two designated days during the campaign period, 17th November and 1st December, 2021 as well as critical incidents whenever they occur. For this reporting period, every observer sent in their observation report using a comprehensive checklist via coded text message using their mobile phones to the Election Watch National Information Center (EWC-IC).



Region/Administrative Area	# of constituencies	# of regional coordinators	# of constituency observers
Banjul	3	1	3
Kanifing	7		7
West Coast Region - Brikama	13	1	13
North Bank Region - Kerewan	7	1	7
Lower River Region - Mansakonko	6	1	6
Central River Region - Janjanbureh	11	1	11
Upper River Region - Basse	6	1	6
TOTAL	53	6	59

Findings

The Election Watch Committee's presidential campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Election Watch observers deployed across the country during the campaign period from 9th November to 17th November, 2021. This update also includes findings from the conduct of civic and voter education on the elections, the IEC preparedness as well as COVID-19 prevention measures.

Political Party Campaigns

Since the start of the campaign period on 9th November, 2021, Elections Watch Observers noted that all contesting political parties have launched their campaigns, and have started to conduct campaign activities such as events/rallies in some of the constituencies across the country. 34 of 53 constituency observers reported witnessing at least one campaign activity or rally or the posting of posters, billboards, or fliers in their constituency during the observation period.

Observers' reports mostly showed that the parties and candidates are freely conducting their campaigns with no restrictions and generally in compliance with the Code of Campaign Ethics for Parties. However, observers reported witnessing or hearing of some violations. For instance, 22 of 53 constituency observers witnessed or heard reports of the use of state resources, such as government vehicles during campaigns. As well, 13 of 53 constituency observers witnessed or heard reports of candidates providing money or gifts to supporters. A few observers also reported hearing of instances of buying voters' cards.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

30 of 53 observers reported witnessing or hearing that the IEC had begun preparations for the 4th December election in their area. 35 of 53 constituency observers also reported the conduct



of civic education and voter information campaigns by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs including campaigns directed at women, youth and persons with disabilities. However, 18 of the 53 constituency observers reported that they are yet to witness or hear any voter information campaigns in their areas. Notably, this included all of the Elections Watch Observer observers in Mansakonko and more than half of observers in Brikama.

COVID-19 Prevention:

Elections Watch observers during the period of observation reported hearing of or being exposed to COVID-19 prevention messages within their constituencies. 23 of 53 observers witnessed or heard COVID-19 prevention campaigns being conducted in their assigned constituencies, most of which are carried out by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs and other institutions by means of television or radio. However, in places where observers saw campaign events, very few observers (4 of 34) noted that political parties always or mostly followed COVID-19 safety protocols such as wearing facemasks during the conduct of their campaign. A larger number of observers (22 of 34) reported that the parties only sometimes followed these protocols.

Presence of Security Forces

Most Elections Watch observers (39 of 53) have noted the presence of security forces in their areas or at campaign events. However, a few observers also noted the use of unofficial security by political parties or candidates during campaign events.

Electoral Violence

The first half of the campaign period has been largely peaceful. Throughout the reporting period, Elections Watch observers witnessed only a few incidents of violence. 10 of the 53 constituency observers reported the use of hate speech or inflammatory language during campaign activities or events. They reported seeing or hearing such language on radio, television and social media. Of the total of 10 PAG observers who reported the use of hate/inflammatory speech, 6 reported that it was spread through social media. In addition, it was reported by an Elections Watch observer that 3 campaign supporters were violently attacked during a campaign event. In another instance, an observer reported that a female supporter has been threatened for supporting another party.

The Elections Watch Committee strongly condemns the propagation of hate speech by candidates of political parties, and their supporters as well as all forms of violence, intimidation or harassment during the campaign period.

Outside of these instances, the Elections Watch Committee notes that the campaign period has thus far been largely peaceful. The Elections Watch Committee commends the citizens and political actors of The Gambia for their continuing commitment to a peaceful election process.

Recommendations

The Elections Watch Committee hereby recommends the following:

- Political parties and their supporters should refrain from the use of hate speech and inflammatory language during their campaigns.



- Political parties should abide by the Code of Conduct and Code on Election Campaign Ethics including not using government resources such as vehicles.
- Candidates and political parties should focus on winning votes through their programs and policies rather than purchasing votes with money and gifts.
- The IEC and the IPC should closely monitor the actions of political parties to ensure they comply with the Code of Conduct and Code on Election Campaign Ethics.
- Political parties and their supporters should adhere to COVID-19 prevention measures by wearing facemasks, washing hands, and use of sanitizers.
- IEC, NCCE, and CSOs should redouble civic education and voter information efforts to reach voters in all parts of the country during the remainder ahead of the election.
- Security forces should ensure they have sufficient presence particularly in hotspot areas as the elections approach and properly investigate instances of electoral violence.

The Elections Watch Committee encourages all citizens to continue to peacefully engage during the campaign. The Elections Watch Committee also reminds voters to bring their voter card and cast their vote on 4th December at the polling station where they registered.

About the PAG and Observation of the 2017 Presidential Elections

The Election Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe the 2021 Presidential Elections in the Gambia. The Election Watch Committee includes the Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP). This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the 2021 Election Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Election Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

For More Information Contact the PAG Secretariat @:

Yankuba Manjang, Executive Secretary – 3914415 / 7175382

Momodou Juju Jallow, Program Manager – 3438623 / 6429925

Mbaye Mballow, Communication Officer – 3053752 / 2309948

Website: www.peaceambassadors.gm

Facebook: Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia

Twitter- Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia