



Elections Watch Committee (EWC) 2022 Pre-Elections Observation (PREO)

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE – #2 (17th March 2022)

The Election Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. The EWC’s observation of the 2022 parliamentary elections will build on the EWC’s observation of the 2021 Presidential election including the Voter Registration process, the display of provisional list of voters, the candidate nomination and campaign period, and the 2021 presidential election day. Ahead of the April 9 parliamentary elections, the EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and is now observing the campaign period.

Summary

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has trained and deployed a total of 71 long-term observers including 14 nomination observers, 7 regional coordinators and 53 constituency observers to observe the nomination process, pre-campaign and campaign environment in all constituencies and regions within The Gambia. This update contains observation findings covering the period prior to the start of the Independent Electoral Commission’s (IEC) official campaign period from 7th March - 15th March 2022 and covers findings from the candidate nomination process and 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 IEC preparedness, the conduct of civic education and voter information campaigns for the elections, COVID-19 prevention measures as well as recommendations. The EWC will continue to observe and will submit a final campaign update at the close of the process.

Overall, Election Watch Observers’ reports indicate the nomination process conducted at the IEC’s seven regional offices went smoothly in most instances and most candidates were able to successfully navigate the nomination process. While the campaign period had not officially started, Election Watch Observers’ noted that some political parties and candidates already commenced campaign activities and voter sensitization has started in some parts of the country.

Methodology

The Election Watch Committee deployed 71 campaign observers which include 14 nomination observers, 7 regional coordinators – each for a region and 53 constituency observers, one representing each constituency, to monitor the conduct of the parliamentary candidate nomination and campaign in their respective regions. All Election Watch observers were carefully selected and thoroughly trained, and accredited by the 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 three designated days during the campaign period, 15th March, 26th March



and 7th April, 2022 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).

REGIONAL COORDINATORS AND CONSTITUENCY OBSERVERS’ DEPLOYMENT BREAKDOWN:

Region	# of Constituencies	# of EWC Nomination Observers	# of EWC Regional Coordinators	# of EWC Constituency Observers
Banjul	3	2	1	3
Kanifing	7	2	1	7
West Coast Region	13	2	1*	13
North Bank Region	7	2	1	7
Lower River Region	6	2	1	6
Central River Region	11	2	1*	11
Upper River Region	6	2	1*	6
TOTAL	53	14	7	53

*Regional coordinator also served as a nomination observer

Findings

The Election Watch Committee's parliamentary nomination and pre-campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Election Watch observers deployed across the country during the nomination process and the period prior to the start of the official campaign period from 5th March to 17th March, 2022. 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. These findings are based on the 59 reports received from the EWC’s nomination observers and reports from 52 of the 53 EWC’s constituency observers.

Nominations:

The IEC conducted the candidate nomination process from Saturday, March 5 through Sunday, March 13 in each of its seven regional offices. Political parties were assigned specific days on which their candidates were to submit their nomination packages. On Tuesday, March 15, the IEC released a list of 251 candidates that have been cleared to contest the April 9 parliamentary polls. The IEC announced that they rejected five candidates.

Based on the IEC’s list of candidates, the highest number of candidates are in Lower Saloum in Janjanbureh and in Old Yundum in Brikama with eight candidates running in each contest. In two constituencies – Bakau in Kanifing and in Tumana in Basse – there are only two candidates contesting. The UDP has fielded the largest number of candidates at 46 followed by the NPP at 40 candidates. As well, 85 independent candidates are running in these elections.

Political Party	# of Approved Candidates
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All People's Party (APP)	1
Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC)	7
Citizens' Alliance (CA)	10
Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC)	27
Gambia For All (GFA)	3
Gambia Moral Congress (GMC)	3
Independent	85
National People's Party (NPP)	40
National Reconciliation Party (NRP)	5
National Unity Party (NUP)	4
People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS)	19
People's Progressive Party (PPP)	1
United Democratic Party (UDP)	46
Grand Total	251

Elections Watch Observers deployed to the 7 regional offices submitted 59 reports over the 9 day candidate nomination period. 20 of the 59 reports indicated that the regional offices opened on time (around 8:00am), while another 22 reports indicated that the offices had opened by 10:00am. 8 of 59 Elections Watch Observers' reports indicated that the offices opened after 10:00am. In the remaining instances, the regional offices did not open to accept nominations as no aspirants from the political parties assigned to that day had previously collected the nomination form. Security agents were present at the regional offices on nearly all days of the nomination process (58 of 59 EWC observer reports).

Elections Watch Observers were asked to observe whether aspirants submitted a complete nomination package and that the IEC followed procedures in either accepting or rejecting their nominations. However, in many instances, the IEC confirmed receipt of the nomination package and later called the candidate to return to collect their acceptance of nomination. Due to this, Elections Watch Observers were not able to fully observe how the IEC reviewed these packages or if candidates were asked to make corrections to their nomination packages. However, the low number of rejected candidates indicates that mistakes within the nomination paperwork was not a significant barrier to candidacy in this process.

Elections Watch Observers noted that the nomination process was disrupted in three instances, most notably in the West Coast Region when the IEC rejected the UDP candidate in Busumbala. Protestors engaged in violence and videos have circulated on social media showing police using excessive force. The EWC condemns any violence within the electoral process and urges aggrieved aspirants to utilize the proscribed legal mechanisms to pursue their grievances.

Elections Watch Observers noted that most regional offices closed the nomination process on time (by 4:00pm), with 28 reports indicating that the process closed before 4:00pm and an additional 21 reports indicating that the offices closed by 4:30pm. Observers noted 10 instances where the candidate nomination process closed after 4:30pm.



Political Party Campaigns

EWC observers reported on campaign activities from 7th March - 15th March, 2022, the period prior to the start of the official campaign period that starts on March 17th. Even though the official campaign period has not started, Elections Watch Observers noted that many political parties and candidates have already started to conduct campaign activities such as events/rallies in some of the constituencies across the country. 24 of 52 constituency observers reported witnessing at least one campaign activity in their constituency during the reporting period. Observers noted that the NPP held campaign activities in 17 constituencies, the UDP in 16 constituencies, GDC in 9 constituencies and independent candidates in 12 constituencies before the start of the official campaign period.

While the official campaigns have not started yet, Elections Watch Observers reported witnessing or hearing of some violations of the Code of Campaign Ethics for Parties. For instance, observers in 4 constituencies heard of instances where voters were offered money for their voters cards. As well, in five constituencies observers witnessed political parties or candidates distributing cash or other gifts to voters. Observers in an additional five constituencies heard of such instances occurring in their areas. Observers noted a variety of political parties participating in this violation.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

The EWC is encouraged to see election preparation and voter sensitization messages starting in advance of the start of the official campaign period. 22 of 52 observers reported witnessing or hearing that the IEC had begun preparations for the 9th April parliamentary election in their area. 28 of 52 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, 24 of the 52 constituency observers reported that they are yet to witness or hear any voter information campaigns in their areas.

COVID-19 Prevention:

Elections Watch observers during the period of observation did not report high levels of sensitization on COVID-19, with 39 of 52 constituency observers reporting that they had not heard any COVID-19 sensitization messages.

Electoral Violence

The pre-campaign period has been largely peaceful. However, 4 of the 52 constituency observers reported hearing the use of hate speech or inflammatory language during campaign activities or events. They reported seeing or hearing such language both at rallies and social media. The only notable instance of violence, as previously mentioned, occurred in the West Coast Region involving the rejection of the UDP candidate in Busumbala and the subsequent response by security agents. Outside of these instances, the Elections Watch Committee notes that the lead up to 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:

- 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. The Elections Watch Committee reminds political parties to refrain from vote buying.
- The IEC should give detailed reasons for the rejection of candidates' nomination.
- In future elections, the IEC should allocate more time for public scrutiny of the nomination papers of aspiring candidates and ensure greater transparency throughout the process of reviewing candidate nominations.
- Political parties and their supporters should refrain from the use of hate speech and inflammatory language during their campaigns. Parties and their supporters should also refrain from any violent reaction and call for peaceful participation in the elections.
- 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 campaign period.
- Security forces should ensure they have sufficient presence particularly in hotspot areas as the elections approach and properly investigate instances of electoral violence.
- Security forces should fully investigate the incident in Brikama and sanction the officers who used excessive force. Further, they should ensure all officers are fully trained on proper crowd control and de-escalation tactics.

The Elections Watch Committee encourages all citizens to continue to peacefully engage during the campaign. The rejected candidates are equally urged to utilize the courts to pursue their grievances. The Elections Watch Committee also reminds voters to bring their voter card and cast their vote on 9th April at the polling station where they registered.

About the EWC Elections Observation

The Election Watch Committee is a partnership of 3 organizations and other network members with different expertise and background collaborating to observe 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

Ndegen Jobe, Deputy Speaker, NYP – 31776689

Omar Danso, National Coordinator, Activista - 3732892

Website: www.peaceambassadors.gm

Facebook: Election Watch Committee-The Gambia

Twitter- Election Watch Committee-The Gambia