

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

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE – #4 (8th April 2022)

The Elections 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 National Assembly elections builds on the EWC’s observation of the 2021 Presidential election processes such as the Voter Registration, the display of provisional list of voters, the candidate nomination, the campaign period and the 2021 presidential election day. Ahead of the 9th April National Assembly elections, the EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign period. The EWC will deploy observers to observe the election day processes.

Summary

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has trained and deployed 71 long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within the Gambia for the 2022 National Assembly elections. This update contains observation findings covering the Independent Electoral Commission’s (IEC) official campaign period from 27th March - 6th April 2022. It contains findings from the observation to the final stage of campaigns conducted by political parties and independent candidates within the different constituencies during this period. The update further reflects observers’ reports on the IEC preparedness, the conduct of civic education and voter information campaigns, COVID-19 prevention measures, as well as recommendations for various stakeholders. Finally, the update includes the EWC election day observation deployment and communication strategies for the 9th April, 2022 National Assembly elections.

Campaign Observation Summary

Overall, the Elections Watch observers’ reports during the final stage of the campaign show that political parties and candidates intensified their campaign activities within all constituencies with no restrictions. Observers’ reports also showed that the final half of the campaign had been peaceful. However, throughout the campaign period, observers reported violations of the code of campaign ethics and Code of Conduct such as the use of government vehicles during campaigns, instances of voter card buying as well as the distribution of gifts or money during campaigns. Observers further noted the low presence of security personnel during campaigns and low sensitization of COVID-19 prevention messages. Nevertheless, Elections Watch observers reported an increase in the visibility of civic and voter education efforts by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs, and others ahead of the April 9th polls.

Campaign Observation Methodology

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) deployed 71 long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within The Gambia for the 2022 National Assembly elections. These include 14 nomination observers (comprising 3 regional coordinators & 11 observers) and 60 campaign observers (comprising 7 regional coordinators – each for a region and 53 constituency observers, one representing each constituency), to monitor the conduct of the National Assembly candidate nomination and campaign processes in their respective regions and constituencies. All Elections Watch observers were carefully selected, 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 an observation report using a comprehensive observer checklist via coded text message using their mobile phones to the Elections Watch National Information Center (EWC-NIC). A Am

Findings

The Elections Watch Committee's National Assembly campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Elections Watch observers deployed across the country during the campaign period from the 26th March to 6th April 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.

Political Party Campaigns

For the final stage of the campaign period, political parties and independent candidates intensified their campaign activities in all constituencies with no restrictions. EWC's observers in all the 53 constituencies reported either witnessing or hearing of at least one campaign event; 16 of 53 observers reported witnessing or hearing of 6 or more events. Observers further reported the postings and distribution of campaign flyers by political parties and independent candidates. However, EWC observers throughout the campaign period reported violations of the Code of Campaign Ethics and Code of Conduct. For this reporting period, EWC Observers reported similar levels of campaign violations compared to the first half of the campaign. For example, for the first reporting period, 8 of 53 observers reported witnessing or hearing of the use of government resources such as vehicles during campaigns while 7 of 53 observers reported the same for this reporting period. In the same manner, 7 of 53 observers reported candidates providing money or gifts during the first half of the campaign while 6 of 53 observers reported the same during this period. Equally so, 5 of 53 observers reported witnessing/hearing of instances of the buying of voter cards during this reporting period.

Campaign violations such as the use of state resources during campaigns, buying of voters' cards or the distribution of gifts or money create an unlevelled playing field during any electoral process, thereby diluting the premise that political campaigns should be contested based on a candidates' skills, ideas, and ability to lead the country, and not based on their ability to purchase the most votes or the exploitation of public resources.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

As the campaign period advanced towards election day, EWC observers in 33 of 53 constituencies witnessed or heard about IEC preparations in their constituencies. This is an improvement from the first half of the campaign period when only 26 of 53 observers reported witnessing or hearing IEC preparations. The IEC further confirmed at a briefing session of both international and domestic observers' groups that the training of election officials had been completed and election materials distribution had been finalized for all regions and constituencies. The IEC during this time also noted that they were at the stage of distributing materials to polling stations or streams as of 7th April for the National Assembly elections. The level of communication and information sharing by the IEC is a commendable initiative that should be encouraged during future electoral engagements.

Additionally, in the previous campaign period update, the EWC noted that the civic and voter education campaigns had not yet reached all constituencies across the country. However, during the second half of the campaign, EWC observers in 41 of the 53 constituencies reported being exposed to civic education or voter information campaigns, by the IEC, the NCCE, and CSOs targeted at women, youth and persons with disabilities. This shows an increase from the first half of the campaign period, when only 35 of 53 reports showed the same.

COVID-19 Prevention:

During the second half of the campaign period, EWC observers continued to report low levels of adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocols during campaign activities. 33 of 53 observers still reported not witnessing or hearing of COVID-19 prevention messaging in their area, similar to reports received during the first half of the campaign indicating 38 of 53 constituencies. 51 of 53 EWC observers further reported that political parties and candidates never or only sometimes followed COVID-19 prevention measures including wearing facemasks, washing hands, or social distancing. The IEC had confirmed that all eligible voters will be allowed to vote regardless of adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocol, The EWC however, encourages citizens and all electoral actors to adhere to the COVID-19 preventive measures during the 9th April National Assembly elections.

Electoral Violence and Security

While EWC observers had reported isolated instances of campaign violence during the first half of the campaign, observers did not report any violent incidents during the second half of the campaign. . The EWC commends electoral actors for peacefully conducting themselves during the campaign and encourages the same on election day. The EWC observers however, continue to report the low presence of security forces during the campaign. Observers in 38 of 53 constituencies reported not seeing or hearing of the presence of security officials during political campaigns. However, the Deputy Inspector General of Police at the IEC briefing of observers on 6th April committed to deploying security officials in all regions and constituencies for the election day.

The Elections Watch Committee commends all citizens and political actors of The Gambia for their continuing commitment to a peaceful election process.

EWC's Election Day Observation & Deployment Strategy

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) - composed of PAG, Activista, and NYP alongside other partners - plans to deploy 410 election day observers for the 9th April National Assembly elections. The EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign, and will monitor the collation process and immediate post-election period. The EWC's observations of all of these processes will factor into the overall assessment of the 2022 National Assembly elections..

The EWC has trained and deployed 410 accredited election day observers for the 9th April 2022 National Assembly elections. This includes 300 stationary polling stream observers, 50 mobile observers, 53 constituency supervisors, and 7 regional coordinators. The 300 polling stream observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the IEC polling streams in each constituency and administrative area. For example, 34% of polling streams where Elections Watch observers are deployed are in Brikama and 34% of

overall polling streams are in Brikama. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. Additionally, the EWC will deploy its seven regional coordinators to observe the collation process at the IEC's seven regional collation centers.

The EWC will release updates based on observation findings. These will include a mid-day election day update, containing findings from the opening and set-up of polling stations and a preliminary update the day after which will include findings from the voting, closing and counting processes.

The EWC is proud to be among and coordinating with a large and diverse group of international and domestic groups accredited by the IEC to observe this process. The interest in observing this electoral process further highlights the global interest in The Gambia's democratic progress and the importance of this election for the people of The Gambia.

Post-election Observation:

The EWC will further observe the post-electoral environment after the 9th April election for an additional period of one month prior to the National Assembly sitting. Observers will closely monitor and report on any tensions, disputes, or legal challenges that might arise following the announcement of the election results. The EWC believes that the systematic observation and reporting during this period will help electoral actors to provide redress and respond in a timely manner. This will also help inform electoral actors' preparedness in tackling such issues during future elections.

Recommendations:

The Elections Watch Committee makes the following recommendations to election stakeholders ahead of and during the immediate period of the election:

- Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should adhere to the IEC's mandated "cooling off period" and refrain from all campaign activities on Friday, 8th April.
- The media and any other group should avoid publicizing unofficial results and candidates should refrain from declaring victory until the IEC releases the final results.
- In addition to announcing the final results at constituency level, the IEC should make public a disaggregated list of polling station-level results in an analyzable format and in a timely manner.
- All election officials, party agents, security officials, and voters are encouraged to follow COVID-19 prevention measures including wearing facemasks, washing hands, and maintaining social distance at polling stations on 9th April.
- Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should continue to adhere to the IEC regulations, the code of conduct, and the peace pledge during and after the National Assembly elections and follow the prescribed legal channels to pursue any objections or grievances in a peaceful manner.

The Elections Watch Committee reminds all voters to bring their voter card and cast their vote on 9th April at the polling station where they previously voted during the 2021 Presidential elections.

About the Elections Watch Committee

The Elections 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 Elections 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 Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections 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).

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Appendix A: Distribution of Elections Watch Observers

Administrative Area	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Banjul	36	2.3%	7	2.3%
Basse	198	12.7%	37	12.3%
Brikama	533	34.3%	103	34.3%
Janjanbureh	212	13.6%	43	14.3%
Kanifing	276	17.7%	53	17.7%
Kerewan	196	12.6%	38	12.7%
Mansakonko	103	6.6%	19	6.3%
Total	1554	100%	300	100%