

For Immediate Release

2022 National Assembly Election Preliminary Statement

10th 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. The EWC has observed the pre-election period which include candidate nomination and campaign as well as the 9th April election day processes at polling streams and within all constituencies.

Introduction

This preliminary statement is based on reports that the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has received from all 300 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally nationwide by the end of the day on 9th April 2022. The statement also covers reports received from collation observers deployed at constituency and regional collation centers.

On 9th April, the EWC deployed 410 trained and accredited election day observers. 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. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. Appendix A provides a breakdown of the distribution of observed polling streams by administrative area. The EWC further deployed observers to the IEC collation centers to observe these processes.

The EWC has observed all key aspects of the electoral process beginning with the political party candidate nomination and the campaign period. At each stage of this observation, the EWC released its findings about the respective processes and issued recommendations to election stakeholders. On 17th March, 2022 the EWC released its update on the candidate nomination process. On 28th March and 8th April, the EWC released its updates on its findings on the campaign period reflecting the observation by its 53 constituency and 7 regional observers. Overall, observers reported that the campaign period was peaceful, political parties and candidates mobilized across the country with no restrictions, and civic and voter education efforts ramped up as the period progressed. However, the EWC also noted violations of the Campaign Code of Ethics including the use of government resources (such as government vehicles) and vote buying. Use of state resources and vote buying create an unlevel playing field between candidates and dilute the premise that political campaigns should be contested based on candidates’ programs.

On election day, the EWC released a mid-day update on the set-up and opening process. EWC observers noted that polling stations mostly opened on time, had all essential materials, and party agents as well as security forces were present. However, the EWC noted a relatively high number of polling streams not accessible to people with disabilities. As well,

in three instances political party agents demanded the count of ballot tokens before voting began. This preliminary statement focuses on the voting, closing, and counting processes. It also reflects reports from EWC's observers deployed to observe the collation process conducted at collation centers located in each region. EWC observers will continue to observe in the post-election period.

Key Findings

Based on reports from Elections Watch Observers deployed to polling streams in all 53 constituencies, Gambians peacefully participated in the National Assembly elections and faced few challenges in casting their vote. The IEC polling officials generally followed procedures during the voting, closing, and counting process. Party agents were present in all of the polling streams observed by the EWC, and did not object to the count in nearly all observed locations. However COVID-19 protocols were largely not followed by IEC officials and voters.

Voting Process

Elections Watch Observers monitored the entire election day process at their assigned polling streams starting with the set-up, voting, and continuing through the closing and counting process. They reported in near real time using a unique observation checklist and coded text messages to a central database system at the EWC's National Information Center.

Within their polling streams, Elections Watch Observers witnessed IEC staff generally following voting procedures:

- Elections Watch Observers in nearly all of the polling streams observed reported that pregnant women, physically challenged, and elderly voters were given priority to vote and were allowed assistance from someone of their choice when requested.
- Elections Watch Observers reported that the IEC polling officials generally followed procedures. In nearly all polling stations observed, voters were always asked to present their voter's card before being allowed to vote,
- The finger of every voter was marked with indelible ink. and every voter received only one token in all polling streams observed consistent with the electoral law.
- In nearly all of the polling streams observed, voters were able to cast their ballot in secret.

Adherence to COVID-19 Safety Protocols

EWC reported low levels of messaging and adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocols during the campaign period as well as on election day. EWC observed that all eligible voters were allowed to vote as mandated by the IEC regardless of adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocol. For the 9th April elections, EWC Observers noted inconsistent adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols.

- 49% of Elections Watch observers noted that IEC officials wore face masks throughout the day.
- Observers reported that all voters wore a facemask in only 2% of observed polling streams. In 24% of the streams, none of the voters wore a facemask.
- In addition, only 24% of polling streams observed by Elections Watch Observers had sufficient social distancing throughout the day.

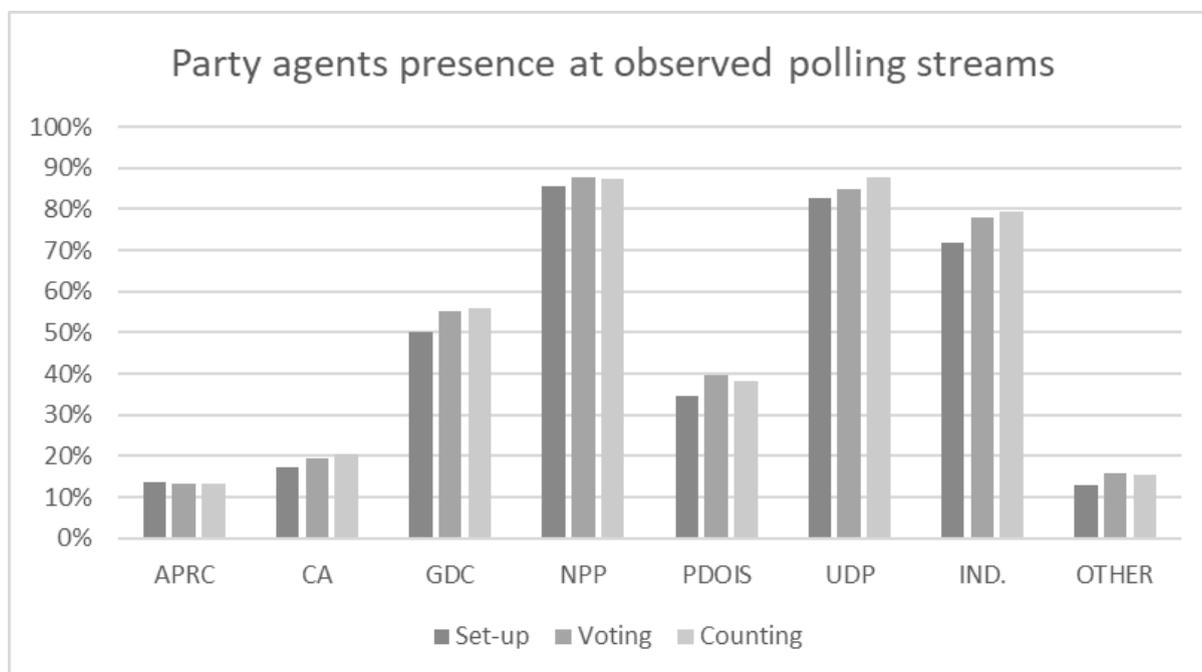
Closing and Counting Process

99% of polling stations observed closed on time and in all polling streams observed voters still in the queue at 5pm were able to cast their vote. In most polling streams observed by the EWC, IEC officials generally followed closing and counting procedures.

- In 99% of polling streams observed, the presiding officer sealed the entry to the ballot drums at the end of voting.
- Elections Watch Observers noted that the presiding officer counted the unused ballot tokens and returned the tokens to the sack in 95% of polling streams observed.
- After the completion of counting, the presiding officer in 99% of polling streams returned the ballot tokens to their respective drums and affixed the seals.
- In 99% of polling streams observed, all sensitive materials such as the Close of Poll Report and Counting Form were sealed in an envelope and signed by the Presiding officer and the party agents present.
- In all of the polling streams observed, Elections Watch Observers reported that the Presiding Officer pasted a copy of the Count Form on the wall at the polling stream.

Party Agents

Party agents vigilantly monitored the entire process including set-up, voting, closing and counting. All observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the voting, closing, and counting processes. In particular, party agents from the GDC, NPP, UDP, PDOIS and independent candidates were present throughout the day at most polling streams observed by the EWC. Party agents levied an objection to the Close of Poll report in only 1% of observed polling streams and to the Count Form in only one observed polling stream. This demonstrates that party agents did not challenge the counting process in nearly all the polling streams observed. Party agents continued to be present at the collation centers as well.



Critical Incidents

During the voting, closing and counting process, the Elections Watch Observers reported some incidents that occurred at their assigned stream. No incidents were serious or severely disrupted the election process. As noted in the EWC's mid-day statement, Elections Watch

Observers reported four incidents related to disagreements between party agents and polling officials over the counting of the ballot tokens, which delayed the start of voting. As well, there were six reports of campaigning by political parties or candidates. In one polling station in Banjul North, the observer witnessed an argument between party supporters and later between two candidates that resulted in the police being called to disperse the crowd. In another notable incident, an observer heard of an incident in Kerewan where UDP supporters were arrested for preventing eligible voters from voting.

Collation Process

The EWC deployed its observers to all seven regional collation centers to observe the collation process at the constituency level and received reports from 52 out of 53 constituencies. All EWC observers and party agents were permitted access to observe the collation centers. In 8 constituencies, observers noted there were discrepancies identified in the polling station count forms that were corrected during the collation process. The collation process was not postponed or interrupted at any time in any collation centers observed by EWC, and all polling station results were included in the collation result at all centers observed. While party agents were present at nearly all collation centers, the collated results form was not signed by all party agents present in 5 cases and a copy was not given to all present party agents in 19 out of 52 constituencies.

Preliminary Recommendations

To Political Parties and Candidates:

- Utilize the prescribed legal process to pursue any complaints or grievances.
- For future elections, ensure that party agents are trained on election procedures and understand their role in observing the voting and counting process.

To the IEC:

- Publicly provide polling stream level results in a machine-readable format in a timely manner as a measure of transparency. This includes the results from the presidential election which have still not been published on the IEC's website.
- Clarify and communicate collation procedures and locations in a more timely manner to ensure observers are able to fulfill their role in observing all the process.
- Reconsider the process for allowing those on official duty to vote during the National Assembly elections. This includes security officers, polling officers assigned to a polling station assignment as well as observers, the media, and party agents participating in the election process.
- Ensure all polling locations are accessible to all voters, particularly the elderly and persons with disabilities. In addition, take additional measures to make the process more accessible such as written material for the hearing impaired and listing the candidates' names in braille on the ballot drums.

To the Media:

- Continue to demonstrate professionalism in its reportage and ensure citizens continue to receive accurate information about the election process.

To the Security Forces:

- Continue to demonstrate neutrality and professionalism in dealing with electoral related matters.

The Elections Watch Committee will subsequently release a comprehensive observation report that will capture recommendations for future electoral processes.

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 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%