

**Elections Watch Committee (EWC)
2022 Local Government By Election-Pre-Elections Observation (PREO)**

**ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION DAY DEPLOYMENT UPDATE
(13th May 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 Local Government by 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 equally observed the pre-election period which include candidate nomination and campaign as well as the April 2022 National Assembly election day processes. Ahead of the 14th May Local Government by-elections in the four wards, 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 deployed 6 trained long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within the two regions i.e. Brikama Administrative Area (Sanyang and Marakissa wards) and Kanifing Administrative Area (Bundung Six Junction and London Corner wards) for the 2022 Local Government by-elections. This update contains observation findings covering the Independent Electoral Commission’s (IEC) official campaign period from 2nd May - 12th May 2022. It contains findings from the observation to the final stage of campaigns conducted by political parties and independent candidates within the different wards 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 14th May, 2022 Local Government by-election.

Campaign Observation Summary

Overall, the Elections Watch observers’ reports during the campaign show that political parties and candidates conducted their campaign activities within the four wards with no restrictions. Observers’ reports also showed that the campaign had been peaceful. However, the EWC Observers noted the low presence of security personnel during campaigns and low sensitization of COVID-19 prevention messages. Similarly, Elections Watch observers reported the visibility of civic and voter education efforts by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs, and others ahead of the May 14th polls.

Campaign Observation Methodology

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) deployed 6 long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within the 2 regions i.e. Brikama and Kanifing Administrative Areas for the 2022 Local Government by-elections in four wards; Marakissa, Bundung Six Junction, London Corner and Sanyang wards. These include 2 Regional Coordinators; 1 deployed to each administrative area and 4 campaign observers i.e. One representing each ward to monitor the conduct of the Local Government by election campaign processes in their respective regions and wards. All Elections Watch observers were carefully selected and accredited by the IEC.

The 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 four wards (Marakissa, Bundung Six Junction, London Corner and Sanyang wards) within the Kanifing Municipality and West Coast Region, respectively. Administrative Areas . Observers were trained to observe campaign activities and send in reports on a designated day at the end of the campaign period, 12th May, 2022 as well as critical incidents whenever they occur. For this reporting period, the observers 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).

Findings

The Elections Watch Committee's Local Government by-election campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Elections Watch observers deployed in the four wards across the Two Administrative Areas during the campaign period from the 2nd to 12th May 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

During the campaign period, political parties conducted their campaign activities in all the four wards with no restrictions. EWC's observers in the four wards reported either witnessing or hearing of at least one campaign event; 3 of the 4 observers reported witnessing or hearing of 1 or more events. Observers further reported the postings and distribution of campaign flyers by political parties and independent candidates. The EWC observers reported compliance of the Code of Campaign Ethics and Code of Conduct by all candidates.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

During the campaign period, EWC observers in 3 of the 4 wards witnessed or heard about IEC preparations in their wards. The level of communication and information sharing by the IEC is a commendable initiative that should be encouraged during future electoral engagements.

Additionally, the EWC observers in 3 of the 4 wards 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.

COVID-19 Prevention:

The EWC observers reported low levels of adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocols during campaign activities. 1 of the 4 observers reported not witnessing or hearing of COVID-19 prevention messaging in their area. 2 of 4 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 EWC encourages citizens and all electoral actors to adhere to the COVID-19 preventive measures during the 14th May Local Government by-election.

Electoral Violence and Security

EWC Observers' reports showed that the campaign had been peaceful. The EWC commends electoral actors for peacefully conducting themselves during the campaign and encourages the same on election day and when results are announced. The EWC observers, however, continue to report the low presence of security forces during the campaign. Observers in all 4 wards reported not seeing or hearing of the presence of security officials during political campaigns.

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 59 election day observers for the 14th May Councilor By-elections in the four wards. The EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign and will monitor the collation process. The EWC's observations of all of these processes will factor into the overall assessment of the May 2022 Councilor By-elections.

The EWC has deployed 59 accredited election day observers for the 14th May 2022 Local Government by-election. This includes 53 stationary polling stream observers, 4 ward supervisors, and 2 regional coordinators. The 53 polling stream observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by wards. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the IEC polling streams in each ward and administrative area. For example, 53% of polling streams where Elections Watch observers are deployed are in Sanyang ward and 54% of overall polling streams are in the Sanyang ward. This proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process regionally, drawing on data points from every ward across the regions. Additionally, the EWC will deploy its two regional coordinators to observe the collation process at the two IEC's 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 two days after which will include findings from the voting, closing and counting processes.

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, 13th May.
- 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 ward 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 May 2022 Councilor By-elections and follow the prescribed legal channels to pursue any objections or grievances in a peaceful manner.

The Elections Watch Committee reminds the voters to bring their voter card and cast their vote on 14th May at the polling station where they previously voted during the 2022 National Assembly 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 / Ward	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Brikama – Marakisa Ward	28	26.2%	14	26.4%

Brikama – Sanyang Ward	58	54.2%	28	52.8%
Kanifing – Bundungka Kunda Ward	11	10.3%	6	11.3%
Kanifing – London Corner Ward	10	9.3%	5	9.4%
Total	107	100%	53	100%