

# Final Election Observation Report

August 2020- May 2022



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. APP – All People’s Party
2. APRC – Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction
3. AU – African Union
4. CA – Citizens Alliance
5. CSO – Civil Society Organization
6. ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
7. EU – European Union
8. EWC - Elections Watch Committee
9. GDC - Gambia Democratic Congress
10. GFA – Gambia for All
11. GMC – Gambia Moral Congress
12. IEC – Independent Electoral Commission
13. IGP – Inspector General of Police
14. IPC – Inter-Party Committee
15. KAIPTC – Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center
16. NCCE – National Council for Civic Education
17. NDI – National Democratic Institute
18. NPP - National People's Party
19. NRP – National Reconciliation Party
20. NUP – National Unity Party
21. NYP – National Youth Parliament
22. PAG – Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia
23. PDIOS – People’s Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism
24. PPP – People’s Progressive Party
25. PWD – Persons With Disabilities
26. UDP - United Democratic Party
27. CA – Citizen Alliance



### **About the Elections Watch Committee (EWC)**

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 3 youth-led 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. 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).

The EWC in its observation efforts seek to promote youth participation in the electoral cycle as well as to facilitate a well-coordinated and organized observation of the electoral reform and election process. The EWC promotes a transparent and accountable electoral process in The Gambia by promoting and fostering peace and stability before, during and after elections.

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The EWC's systemic long-term observation project spans all electoral processes from November 2020 through May 2022 including political party congresses from November 2020 to January 2021; the Niamina West By-Election in November 2020; the voter registration process from May to July 2021; the presidential nomination period, campaign period, and the elections itself from October to December 2021; the entire process of the National Assembly elections from March 2022 to April 2022 as well as the Local Government by-elections in May 2022. The EWC also hosted monthly stakeholder dialogues with electoral actors to share their perspectives on the electoral process and activities as well as offer recommendations for a fairer, more inclusive, and transparent electoral process.

EWC observation reports showed that elections were generally peaceful although there were a few technical and administrative lapses or challenges. However, these were not enough to undermine the integrity and credibility of the process.

## **2. Introduction and Background**

The Elections Watch Project systemic long-term observation commenced with the observation of the Niamina West by-election in November 2020. The IEC was prompted to conduct this by-election due to a vacancy in the National Assembly, following the demise of the former National Assembly Member for Niamina West Constituency, Honorable Demba Sowe (Gambia Democratic Congress) in 2019. The initial plan set out by the IEC was to conduct the by-election in April 2020, however, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was postponed to November 7<sup>th</sup> 2020. Two major parties contested the by-election in Niamina West, the GDC who have held the seat over the past elections and the National People's Party (NPP), President Barrow's newly set-up political party. The Niamina West Constituency by-elections was the first by-election the Gambia will be conducting within the COVID-19 pandemic and under the Barrow Administration following the significant political developments such as the breakdown of the 2016 coalition, fallout between the President Barrow and the United Democratic Party, and the establishment of President Barrow's new political party, National People's Party(NPP).

The EWC deployed a team of five (5) observers, accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), to observe the Niamina West By-Election later issued an observation report on the political climate and campaign, opening of polls, voting, closing and counting of polls and offered recommendations to political parties, the IEC and voters.

The EWC also recognised the significance of political party congresses as the platforms through which political parties in The Gambia elect their party leaders and candidates standing for elective positions within the party structures or vying for elective positions

with other political parties in a general election. The EWC deployed two observers each between December 2020 and March 2021, to observe a total of 5 party congresses in The Gambia in the lead up to the 2021 presidential election scheduled for December 4. The parties observed were United Democratic Party (UDP), People's Progressive Party (PPP), Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC), Gambia Action Party (GAP) and People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS). Over the years, civil society participation in party congresses in The Gambia was virtually nonexistent. This, perhaps, registered as the first major civil society attempt to observe party congress in The Gambia in recent history.

In 2020, the IEC released an electoral calendar for the conduct of voters' registration and other activities in the electoral cycle. The registration exercise was initially scheduled to commence on the 14th of January, 2021, but was postponed at the last minute due to logistical reasons. Eventually, the exercise was rescheduled to commence on May 29, 2021. Thus, between May 29 and July 11, 2021, the IEC conducted a voter registration exercise in The Gambia ahead of the 2021 Presidential and 2022 National Assembly elections. A total of 1000 registration centers were established, a 20% increase from the 800 registration centers in 2016. By the IEC Operational Manual, each registration center was to be staffed by a team of four registration officials: a supervisor, a registration clerk, an operator, and a card issuer. Ahead of the exercise, the IEC released a movement plan indicating the dates each registration would be opened. Registration teams rotated to registration centers based on this movement plan.

The EWC trained and deployed 53 observers and 6 coordinators across the 7 Administrative Regions and 53 Constituencies of The Gambia to observe the voter registration exercise in three phases. Observers were tasked to send their observation reports via coded text messages using their mobile phones to the PAG's National Information Center located in Kanifing at the PAG Secretariat in near real time. The EWC released a report after each phase of its observation and a final report at the end of the entire registration process, covering its entirety.

The IEC held a nomination process and public scrutiny between 30<sup>th</sup> October to 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 at the IEC Headquarters in Kanifing. The EWC deployed a trained observer to report on specific issues of the process based on a comprehensive checklist. The EWC observer was permitted by the IEC to observe the submission of nomination papers by aspirants. The IEC allocated five minutes to each individual during the public scrutiny of all 23 aspirants who submitted nomination papers to the IEC, including the EWC observer. Therefore, observation findings only generally comprise the submission procedures and the general environment at the IEC office during the process. According to the IEC, only 6 of the 23 submissions were in compliance with the statutory requirements and were later announced as candidates for the 2021 Presidential Elections. These included five political parties and one independent candidate.

Shortly thereafter, the IEC declared the campaign period from 9<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2021; all six candidates held rallies and campaigns across the country during

this period. The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) trained and deployed a total of 59 campaign observers to observe the conduct of the campaign in all constituencies and regions within The Gambia. The EWC released updates containing observation findings from the initial period of the campaign beginning from 9<sup>th</sup> November to 1st December, 2021, covering the conduct of campaigns by political parties within the different constituencies during this period. The EWC also released updates containing 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.

The presidential elections were held on Saturday, December 4th, 2021. The EWC deployed 460 trained and accredited observers, including 160 mobile observers and 300 polling station observers. The 300 polling station observers were systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. In addition, the EWC deployed 53 observers to the constituency-level collation centers and 7 observers to the regional-level collation centers to observe these processes. On election day, the EWC released a mid-day update on the set-up and opening process, noting observers' reports that polling stations mostly opened on time, had all essential materials, and party agents as well as security forces were present. The EWC also released a preliminary statement based on reports that received from all 300 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally nationwide as of noon on December 5, 2021 and 60 collation observers deployed at constituency and regional collation centers.

In January 2021, the IEC released a statement announcing that the National Assembly Elections for all constituencies in The Gambia will be conducted on Saturday 9th April, 2022. In accordance with section 89 of the 1997 Constitution and section 42 of the 2016 Elections Act, the IEC also announced that nomination of candidates for the elections will be held from 5th to 13th March, 2022 at the IEC regional offices in Banjul, Kanifing, Brikama, Kerewan, Mansakonko, Janjanbureh and Basse. The campaign period for the elections was scheduled from 17th March, 2022 to 7th April, 2022.

The EWC observed all key aspects of the 2022 National Assembly elections 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. EWC trained and deployed a total of 71 long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within the Gambia for the 2022 National Assembly elections and released 2 updates containing observation findings covering the IEC's official campaign period. 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.

On 9th April, 2022 the EWC deployed 410 trained and accredited election day observers, including 300 stationary polling stream observers, 50 mobile observers, 53 constituency supervisors, and 7 regional coordinators. The EWC released a preliminary statement



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 covered reports received from collation observers deployed at constituency and regional collation centers. On election day, the EWC released a mid-day update on the set-up and opening process.

During the legislative elections, four local government councilors in Marakissa Ward, Sanyang Ward, Bundung Six Junction Ward, and London Corner Ward forfeited their positions to run for National Assembly elections, as required by electoral laws. The IEC announced that by-elections will be held in the aforementioned on Saturday 4th May, 2022 in the Brikama and Kanifing Administrative Areas. Nomination of candidates for the elections were conducted from 25th to 29th April 2022 and campaign was held from 2 May to 12 May 2022. Following the nomination period, the IEC announced the successful nomination of fourteen candidates with all the administrative areas.

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) deployed 6 long-term observers to observe the pre-election processes within the two regions i.e. Brikama and Kanifing Administrative Areas for the 2022 Local Government by elections. The committee then released an update containing observation findings covering the Independent Electoral Commission's (IEC) official campaign period from 2<sup>nd</sup> May - 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022 as well as 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. On election day, the EWC deployed 59 trained and accredited observers, including 6 mobile observers and 53 stationary observers and later released a preliminary statement based on observers' reports that the EWC received from all 53 stationary observers deployed to polling streams proportionally across the four wards by the end of the day on 14th May 2022 as well as reports received from collation observers deployed at the regional collation centers.

The EWC, during its observation of electoral processes from the Niamina By-elections in November 2020 to the Local Government By-elections in May 2022, had various engagements with different observer groups both Domestic and International. Notable among them include, CSO Coalition on Election, Gambia Participates, ECOWAS and AU joint mission, EU and KAIPTC. During these engagements the EWC shared key findings of its long-term observation findings of the various electoral processes.

### **3. Methodology**

EWC observed the different phases of electoral processes from November 2020 through May 2022 including the pre-election, election day and post-election period of each election held within that time frame. As mentioned, the EWC observation effort started with the systematic observation of the Naimina West By-elections, political party congresses, the voter registration process, the candidate nomination period, the campaign period and the Presidential election day as well as the pre-election, election day and post election period

of the National Assembly elections. This long-term observation of the electoral process allowed the EWC to have a wholesome view of the electoral practices and procedures to more accurately assess the credibility, integrity and transparency of elections in The Gambia.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020, the EWC deployed a team of 5 observers to observe the Niamina West By-Election. While EWC observers observed the opening, closing, and counting processes in three polling stations, on election day, observers were deployed to all five polling stations in Catamina, Nana, Papaa, Medina Kerr Ancha, Samben Fula. This election was the first to be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and under President Barrow's administration which made it a litmus test for future elections.

Between December 2020 and March 2021, the EWC observed 5 party congresses in The Gambia in the lead up to the 2021 presidential election scheduled for December 4, 2021. The objectives of the observation was to ascertain the credibility of the congresses - whether they were free, fair, inclusive and transparent, whether the congresses were conducted in accordance with party constitutions, the electoral act and other operational guidelines and to ascertain the extent political parties were following COVID-19 preventive measures. An observation checklist was designed to track whether the congress was conducted in compliance with its party constitution; whether the congress was inclusive – whether it accommodated women, youth and persons with disability; whether the congress was conducted in compliance with IEC and other laws of the country; whether equal opportunity was given to all the contestants vying for various party positions; whether the congress was being conducted in a peaceful, free, fair and transparent manner; whether the party was following COVID-19 prevention measures; and whether there were incidents of violence, intimidation or harassment during the party congress.

During the Voter Registration Exercise<sup>1</sup> i.e. between May 29 and July 11 2021, EWC deployed 59 trained observers across the 7 Administrative Regions and 53 Constituencies of The Gambia to observe the voter registration process. EWC's observation took place in three phases:

- Phase 1: Saturday, 29th May, 2021 - Wednesday, 2nd June, 2021
- Phase 2: Tuesday, 15th June, 2021 - Saturday, 19th June, 2021
- Phase 3: Wednesday 7th July, 2021 - Sunday, 11th July, 2021

EWC deployed its observers in every constituency using two deployment methodologies: stationary and mobile observation methodologies. All 53 constituency observers were deployed for a total of 9 assigned days (Deployment timeline attached as appendix A), each at a specific registration center within their respective constituencies. These observers were stationed at a different registration center throughout the day on specific assigned days of observation where they observed the entire registration process at a specific center and report observation data using a comprehensive observer checklist. They also reported

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<sup>1</sup> EWC Voter Registration reports are accessible at [www.peaceambassadors.gm](http://www.peaceambassadors.gm)

critical incidents as they occurred using the critical incident reporting form. On the other hand, 6 regional coordinators were deployed every day throughout the registration period within their assigned regions where they observed the general environment of the registration process and reported critical incidents as they occurred.

EWC deployed two observers to observe the IEC presidential candidate nomination process and public scrutiny for a total of eight days (30<sup>th</sup> October - 6<sup>th</sup> November) at the IEC Headquarters in Kanifing.

For the Presidential election campaign period from November 9<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, EWC trained and deployed 59 long-term observers, including 6 regional coordinators and 53 constituency observers, to observe the process in all regions and constituencies. All 59 observers observed and sent campaign observation checklist reports on two designated days (one in the middle and one at the end of the period, on November 17<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> respectively) and sent in critical incidents reports throughout the process anytime they occurred. The checklist and the critical incident forms were the two reporting tools the observers used to send their reports via SMS. In addition to observers, EWC also trained five Data Clerks that were stationed at the EWC National Information Center situated at the PAG Office in Kanifing to collect checklist reports from constituency observers on the two designated reporting days as well as critical incidents from all observers all through the campaign process.

During the Presidential Election, the EWC trained and deployed 460 observers which included 7 regional coordinators, 53 constituency observers, 300 Stationary Observers and 100 Mobile Observers to observe the election process in all regions and constituencies across the country. All 300 observers observed and sent observation checklist reports. The 300 stationary observers were systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency and region. This means that the proportion of polling stations observed by the EWC in each constituency and region closely matches the overall percentage of polling stations in each constituency and region. All 460 Observers were tasked to send in critical incidents reports throughout the day anytime they occur. In addition to observers, EWC also trained thirty Data Clerks that were stationed at the EWC National Information Center situated at the Sir Dawda Kairaba International Conference Center in Bijilo to receive and verify checklists as well as critical incidents reports from all observers. They were also responsible for the quality assurance calls, which are calls made to observers to clarify and correct any errors made by observers in sending and answering their checklists.

Elections Watch Observers monitored the entire election day process at their assigned polling streams starting with the set-up 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.

During the National Assembly Election, the EWC maintained the same deployment methodology as in the presidential election, except that the number of mobile observers

was reduced from 100 to 50 and intentionally deployed to hotspot areas.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, the EWC equally observed the Post National Assembly Election period by deploying 60 Observers, including 7 regional coordinators and 53 constituency observers, to monitor the post-election environment across the country using both the checklist and a critical incident form.

For the Local Government By-elections, the EWC deployed 59 trained and accredited observers. This includes 6 mobile observers and 53 stationary observers. The 53 stationary observers were systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by ward.

#### 4. Accreditation of Observers

The acquisition of accreditation is very fundamental in any election observation mission. This is why the EWC writes to the IEC for the accreditation of its observers before they carry out any observation. Throughout the EWC's observation, from the party congresses to the By-election the IEC has provided its observers with accreditation tags for the identification of its observers to enhance that they are from an organization recognized by the IEC and thus, observe freely. In obtaining these accreditations the EWC ensured that they requested for accreditation from the IEC before the start of each observation period allowing sufficient time for the IEC to process the requests.



*Mr. Yankuba Manjang, PAG Executive Secretary, (Right) and Mr. Juju Jallow, PAG Program Manager, (Left) after receiving the Accreditation TAGs from the IEC for the National Assembly election*

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<sup>2</sup> The Hotspot Areas were identified by the PAG Crisis Management Team and as well from the Critical Incident reports received from the EWC Observers during the Campaign period.

## 5. Legal Framework

One of the major principles of a credible election is a responsive legal framework that sets the guidelines, standards and procedures for the conduct of elections by the IEC, political parties as well as candidates. The legal framework is comprised of; the Constitution, the Elections Act and the IEC Code of Conduct on elections. Although there are many gaps and restrictions in these legal frameworks that required significant reforms, the 2021 General Voter Registration Exercise, Presidential and National Assembly elections were held under the provisions of the 1997 constitution and the Elections Act as amended in 2017, which makes up the Gambian legal framework on elections.

One of the gaps in the current Election Act is the issuing of attestation by Alkalos, Chiefs and Mayors. During the voter registration exercise, 385 of 472 EWC observer reports indicated that some or many applicants utilized an attestation form as identification. 11 of 472 reports indicated that all applicants used this method to register. Although the attestation form is an important mechanism that allows Gambians who lack another form of identification to register and is an accepted form of identification as per statutory law, this mechanism has been largely misused by Alkalos and chiefs by inappropriately issuing it to register minors and non-Gambians. Although alkaloships and chieftaincies should remain apolitical, a good number of these community leaders have political alignments.

The legal framework for the conduct of the voter registration remained contentious. Although the registration exercise was conducted pursuant to the Electoral Act 2016, the act was specifically silent about the power of the Mayor of Banjul to issue attestations for registrants who could not present any other form of identification to register. Though very controversial, this is still important in our case as it extends the right to franchise to many citizens. However, the issuance of attestation by the Lord Mayor of Banjul was contested in the High Court by some CSO's i.e. Gambia Participates and the Centre for Research and Policy Development, and the Councilor for Box Bar Ward, Banjul North who filed a suit on June 23rd 2021 against the Mayor of Banjul, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Attorney General. In a landmark ruling, the High court of The Gambia ruled that the actions of the Mayor of Banjul in issuing attestations to residents in the IEC's general voter registration are in contravention of section 12 (2) (e) of the Elections Act." The court in its judgment also declared that only the revising court established in accordance with section 24 of the Elections Act can deal with the individual entries in the register of voters. This means that the High Court did not have the jurisdiction to question the lists of voters or remove any name from it. PAG further notes that the Display and Appeals process offers the opportunity for voters, political parties, and others to challenge the registration of a person if the person is thought to be ineligible

During the campaign periods for all observed elections, EWC observers reported witnessing or hearing of campaign ethics violations including the use of state resources such as government vehicles or distribution of cash or items by government officials during the campaign, candidates providing money or gifts to supporters, or buying voters cards which is against the IEC Code of Conduct and Code of Campaign Ethics. For

example, during the presidential election campaign, 29 of 53 EWC constituency observers witnessed or heard the use of government resources, 26 of 53 EWC constituency observers witnessed or heard candidates providing money or gifts to supporters while 13 of 53 EWC constituency observers heard reports of buying voters' cards. These incidents were also reported during the National Assembly election campaign, at a lower scale.

The IEC's lack of a monitoring and enforcing mechanism fell short of restraining these malpractices.

## **6. Election Administration**

The IEC as established by the 1997 Constitution is the body responsible for the conduct of all national elections in the country. The body is composed of five-member commissioners headed by a chairperson. The commission members are appointed by the President in consultation with the Judicial Service Commission and the Public Service Commission.

The IEC is the body mandated to register political parties, voter registration, boundary delimitation, conduct elections and referendums, nomination of candidates, voter education and campaign.

During the Voter Registration Exercise, EWC observer reports indicated that registration officials followed most of the registration procedures:

- 469 of 472 reports show that all or many registrants were asked to present a valid identification document (such as national ID card, birth certificate, Gambian Passport or an attestation) before being registered.
- 452 of 472 reports show that no applicant who presented a valid national identification document was denied registration.
- 461 of 472 reports show that applicants were asked to affix their thumbprint to the registration form to certify that their information was correct before being sent to the operator.
- 464 of 472 observer reports show that the operator input the data of all applicants into the laptop and their photos were taken.
- 434 of 472 EWC observer reports show that applicants requiring assistance such as pregnant women and persons with disabilities were given priority to register.

In the same vein, during the campaign period ahead of the presidential election, EWC observers in 42 of 53 constituencies witnessed or heard about IEC preparations in their constituencies. Even while the EWC was training its own observers, the IEC was in the same venue training its own election officials. On December 1st, 2021, the IEC also held a briefing with domestic and international observers and the media to update them on their preparations and readiness for the presidential poll. The level of communication and information sharing by the IEC is an improvement from past elections.

For all observed polls, the EWC observers on election day reported that the IEC polling officials generally followed procedures during the voting, closing, and counting process.

EWC observers noted that, in some polling streams, a small number of voters' names were missing from the voter's list while in others, voters faced challenges in identifying their correct polling stream. However, a vast majority of Gambians were able to cast their ballot without issues. 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. While IEC officials in most observed polling streams complied with COVID-19 protocols by wearing face masks, there was insufficient social distancing and most voters did not wear facemasks in a majority of observed polling streams.

Generally, the IEC demonstrated a commendable degree of efficiency in administering and managing the 2020/2022 electoral process as the body responsible for elections. According to our observation, we have seen that the IEC manifested a high level of professionalism in terms of organization and ensuring citizen's confidence in the country's elections. They were able to ensure that all the activities from the voter registration to the elections were carried out on time.



*Mr. Sambujang Njie, CEO, IEC detailing IEC's preparedness before the National Assembly election at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Conference Center, Bijilo*

## **7. Civic and Voter Education**

Civic and Voter Education forms a very vital component of the democracy of any country, this is why it is key to the EWC to ensure the voters are highly sensitized ahead of the presidential election and the parliamentary election. These were in different mediums such as the radio, social media, fax sheets and posters. These were mainly provided to sensitize the voters on the necessary information they need to go out to vote, the IEC guidelines on

elections as well as how to vote during the elections. The committee used its platforms of experts that work around elections to share their knowledge and experiences with the registered voters.

For the presidential and National Assembly elections, the IEC, NCCE and select CSOs conducted voter education across the country to curb voter apathy and ensure citizens' participation in the political electoral processes. Specifically, the NCCE has a mandate to deliver civic education across the country and has rolled out elaborate voter sensitizations and civic education programs during the voter registration process, presidential and national assembly elections as well as the local government by-elections. Their sensitization efforts included face-to-face community meetings, radio and tv programs as well as select social media platforms. The IEC also designed and distributed voter education messages during the various elections to promote the peaceful participation of citizens.



*EWC observer groups such as the NYP leadership conducting a Nationwide voter sensitization caravan ahead of the Voter registration exercise.*

## **8. Registration of Voters and Voters' List**

The 1997 constitution mandates the IEC to carry out a general voter registration exercise every 5 years. In line with the constitution, the IEC held a voter registration exercise ahead of the December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Presidential election from 29<sup>th</sup> May to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021. This was to enable every Gambian citizen not less than 18 years of age to be registered as a voter and to vote in public elections. This process was part of those processes that enhanced and



strengthened the credibility and transparency of the elections. The process was part of those that are guided by the Elections Act, also as per the Election Act there are requirements to be fulfilled to attain a voter's card. Citizens must present valid and original copy of one of the following to register to vote:

- Birth certificate
- Passport
- National Identity Card
- A sign/Stamp Attestation from a village Alkali

As part of improving the integrity of the electoral process, a person can only register once and only one voters' card may be issued to a person. To discourage multiple registration and double voting, an individual is advised to register where he/she resides. The EWC's overall observation was that the process was peaceful and smooth and there were few critical incidents that were reported by our observers in various centers. Critical incidents include party agents claiming that certain registrants that brought Alkalo attestations were not Gambians. In some instances this caused delays in the registration process. EWC observer reports indicated incidents in some registration centers where minors were getting registered with the use of the Alkalos attestation. Specifically, during one of these reported critical incidents, EWC observers reported that an instance of a minor seeking registration with an inappropriately issued attestation. This resulted in a standoff between the village leadership and party agents. Similar incidents were also reported in other regions during the voter registration process.

Prior to the conduct of the registration exercise, IEC had announced to the public that its target was to register 1 million people. By the end of the process, the IEC was able to register a total of 962,157 citizens with women representation of 57% and 43% males, reflecting a significant drop in the estimate of the targeted one million people.



*Mr. Juju Jallow, PAG Program Manager, visits an EWC Observer at her observation station in Kanifing*

## **8.1 Appeal and Display Period**

In accordance with the Election Act, the IEC should display voters' registration list immediately after every registration exercise to each polling center in order for voters to inspect whether their names are on the list, whether their names are spelt correctly, among others. Voters can also raise their complaints to the various IEC regional offices.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) on Monday, 16th August, 2021, pasted the 2021 general voters' registration list in all registration centers across the country.

Acting as an oversight to the IEC, the Election Act mandates the setting up of Revising courts which are constituted for 60 days to hear and decide on all objections and appeals from the provisional voter list. An extra two days is dedicated to the High Court for objectors and appellants to give notice of appeal, if any.

However, during this period there was no appeal in the revising courts set up across the country. Thus, there was no case further submitted to the High Court for correction in the voter list.

Therefore, since there was no appeal to the high court, the revising court completed its work by the 7th November, and submitted its revised list to the IEC. Thereby, making those lists the final voter register 2021.

## **9. Candidate Nominations**

### **9.1 Presidential Candidate Nominations**

The nominations of presidential candidates were held from 6 to 12 November, 2021, where the EWC deployed two observers to observe the entire process at the IEC headquarters. During the nomination, 23 aspirants submitted their nomination papers to the IEC out of which only one aspirant was a female. The IEC ended up accepting only 6 out of the 23 submissions as candidates for the 2021 Presidential Elections. These include five political parties and one independent candidate.

EWC's findings showed that most of the candidates that were rejected were rejected due to their inability to provide all the required documents such as the failure to submit the required number of registered voters who support their candidacy for all or some administrative areas. In instances where some aspirants did not submit all the legal requirements as outlined by the electoral laws of The Gambia, the IEC provided them the opportunity to resubmit a complete nomination package. The IEC noted that aspirants whose submissions were disqualified were based on the following reasons: Failure to submit the required number of registered voters who support their candidacy for all or some administrative areas, a signed copy of the code of campaign ethics, a complete assets declaration form, Forgery detected from the submissions and submitting under the banner of an unregistered party; all of which are outlined by the electoral laws of The Gambia.

Two of the candidates that were rejected, one from the Citizen Alliance (CA) and the other from the Gambia Moral Congress (GMC), filed lawsuits against the IEC's decision to reject their parties' nominations. The political parties won the cases against the IEC, which led to a controversial public outcry questioning the credibility of the IEC to administer a free and fair election. The IEC issued press releases to calm the voters and assure them the elections would be more carefully conducted to avoid such mistakes.

Generally the EWC observer reports showed that the presidential candidate nomination period was very peaceful, however there were few instances of violence when parties like United Democratic Party (UDP) and National People's Party (NPP) went to submit their documents due to the large crowds that accompanied them.



*Mr. Sambujang Njie, CEO, IEC receiving the nomination papers from Presidential Aspirants at the IEC Headquarters*

## **9.2 National Assembly Candidate Nominations**

For the National Assembly Elections, the EWC trained and deployed a total of 14 nomination observers i.e. 2 observers per region across the country. The IEC conducted the candidate nomination process from March 5th through March 13th, 2022 in each of its seven regional offices. Political parties were assigned specific days on which their candidates were to submit their nomination packages. On March 15, 2022 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 were successfully nominated in Lower Saloum in Janjanbureh and in Old Yundum in Brikama with eight candidates running in each constituency. In two constituencies – Bakau in Kanifing and in Tumana in Basse – there were only two candidates contesting. The UDP fielded the largest number of candidates at 46 followed by the NPP at 40 candidates. As well, 85 independent candidates contested in the elections. Below is the breakdown of the approved Candidates across the country.

Political Party	# of Approved Candidates
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

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.



*A National Assembly aspirant submitting her nomination papers to the IEC Kanifing Regional Center*

## **10. Election Campaign**

Overall, the Elections Watch observers' reports during the campaign periods of the presidential and National Assembly elections showed that political parties and candidates ramped up their campaigns with no major restrictions in all constituencies across the country. However, observers witnessed and heard reports of instances of the abuse of state resources such as use of vehicles and vote buying by candidates and political parties during the election period. According to the findings of the EWC observers, instances of the inappropriate use of state resources such as the use of state vehicles were prevalent during the Presidential and National Assembly elections campaigns. The campaigns for both the presidential and National Assembly were generally peaceful in the vast majority of the country. However, some observers noted the use of hate speech or inflammatory language during campaign events by candidates and party supporters as well, predominant in the presidential election campaign and on social media. Observers noted national security personnel deployed in most of their areas during the presidential as well as National Assembly campaign period and should be commended for their role in maintaining peace during this time.

## **11. Election Day Findings**

### **11.1 Naimina West By-election**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020, the EWC deployed 5 observers accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission to observe the Naimina West By-Election on election day. The observers were posted in all five polling stations in Catamina, Nana, Papaa, Medina Kerr Ancha, Samben Fula. Observers observed the opening, closing, and counting processes in three polling stations. This election was the first to be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and under President Barrow's administration which made it a litmus test for future elections.

The death of the National Assembly Member for Niamina West Constituency in January, 2020 created a vacancy in this seat which prompted the IEC to conduct a by-election to fill the seat. The late Parliamentary representative of Niamina West was from the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC). EWC was particularly interested in this by-election because of its contentiousness. The two parties that contested had since inception been rival parties.

To ensure that the whole election procedure was conducted as it is laid down by the electoral laws and election procedures prescribed by the IEC, the observation team observed the following:

#### **11.1.1 Opening of Polls**

The polls were stationed at the place designated by the IEC and the polling staff were there on time. The polling stations opened at the slated time, 7:00am, and it was observed that all polling staff and party agents from both parties were present at the time of the opening of

polls. However the media was not present in some of the polling stations at the time of opening.

It was observed that all electoral materials were available at the time of opening of the polls and the opening procedures were complied with, including confirmation of the number of ballot tokens received by the Presiding Officer, reading out loud of the serial numbers of seals for party agents and observers to record, the emptying of drums etc.

#### 11.1.2 Voting

The polling stations were appropriately situated for the voting process. However, some of the polling stations were not easily accessible, mostly to persons with disabilities (PWDs) because they were located on high grounds with no ramps.

There were enough security personnel deployed in the polling stations to overcome unforeseen security threats and there were no cases of intimidation or threats witnessed in any of the polling stations. The queues were effectively controlled. A good number of voters were already on the queue before opening in some polling stations.

Priority was also given to voters with special needs, including persons with disabilities, pregnant women, women with babies and the elderly.

There was no display of party materials and symbols at any of the polling stations.

There was substantial compliance with voting procedures i.e voter identification scrutiny, application of ink on voters' thumbs or fingers, secret voting, non-interference etc.

#### 11.1.3 Closing of Polls and Counting

All polling stations closed at 17:00 and the closing was witnessed by all party agents, polling staff and observers. All counting of ballots were conducted at the spot. Every vote was counted at the spot it was casted. The presiding officer read aloud the serial numbers of the seals on both drums, in order for party agents and observers to confirm whether those were the same numbers being read at the opening.

The counting was conducted in a fair and transparent manner and there were no discrepancies in relation to tokens received and tokens issued to voters. The counting spaces were wide enough to allow a clear view of the whole process by all present in the room. Closing and counting procedures were fully complied with.

#### 11.1.4 Compliance to the COVID-19 Guidelines

All voters coming in to vote were made sure to wash and sanitize their hands before joining a queue, however, only a few of the IEC officials and voters were wearing face masks, and there was little or no social distancing.

#### 11.1.5 General Observations

The EWC was able to observe diverse issues; these include:

The voter turnout among women and men was impressive. However, according to observations from Elections Watch observers, there was low voter turnout among the youth population.

The IEC electoral officials displayed a sense of professionalism and maturity during the voting process. However, some of the IEC electoral officials were not wearing any sign for easy identification.

The counting process as well as the voting was very transparent and the results were witnessed and endorsed by all the party agents present.

The general atmosphere in the voting communities was calm and quiet, even though the EWC observed some politicians' vehicles transporting some voters to polling stations.

### **11.2 Presidential Election**

Based on reports from the Elections Watch Observers deployed to polling streams in all the 53 constituencies (Deployment timeline attached as appendix B), Gambians turned out in visibly large numbers, with over 89% of registered voters casting their votes to elect who will lead their country for the next five years. We commend all Gambians for their peaceful and orderly conduct and demonstrating their commitment to safeguarding our democracy. Some voters stood in line long into the night to cast their ballot tokens in a peaceful and orderly manner. EWC observers reported that the IEC polling officials generally followed procedures during the voting, closing, and counting process. EWC observers noted that in some polling streams, a small number of voters faced challenges in identifying their correct polling stream; however, a vast majority of Gambians were able to cast their ballot without issues. Party agents were present in all of the polling stations observed by the EWC, and did not object to the count in nearly all observed locations. While IEC officials in most observed polling streams complied with COVID-19 protocols by wearing face masks, there was insufficient social distancing and most voters did not wear facemasks in a majority of observed polling streams.



### 11.2.1 Arrival at Polling Streams

- By 7:00am, 100% of Elections Watch Observers were at their assigned polling streams. In all polling streams where Elections Watch observers are located, IEC staff respected the Elections Watch Observer's status as an accredited observer and permitted them to observe at the polling stream.

### 11.2.2. Set-up

- Elections Watch Observers reported that 98% of polling streams had at least 3 staff during set-up. 96% of polling streams had at least one staff member that was a woman.
- Observers reported that all essential materials (including the voters list, ballot drums, ballot drum seals, ballot tokens, and indelible ink) were available at all observed polling streams at the time of opening which reflects the good logistical preparation of IEC ahead of election day.
- In polling streams where Elections Watch observed, the ballot drums were shown to be empty and the ballot drums were sealed in a systematic manner.
- Observers reported that in 31% of polling streams the Presiding Officer did not count the number of ballot tokens at the polling stream before opening the process for voting. The Elections Watch Committee notes that the IEC Handbook advises Polling Officials to count the ballot tokens after they receive their materials, which occurs the day before the election. Though counting the ballot tokens at the polling station is not required, doing so in the future would increase the transparency of the voting process.
- Elections Watch observers in 20% of polling streams noted that they had to climb stairs to reach the polling stream. Stairs make the polling place inaccessible to PWDs and the elderly which may disenfranchise them from voting.
- In all polling streams where Elections Watch Observers were located, observers saw security personnel stationed.
- 99% of observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the set-up process.
- 70% of polling streams observed had at least four parties present which demonstrates parties' interest and engagement in observing the voting process.

### 11.2.3. Opening Time

Elections Watch Observers reported that voting generally commenced on time in most of the observed polling stations. By 8:15am, 93% of polling streams where Elections Watch Observers were assigned had opened. The remaining polling streams opened shortly thereafter, and all observed polling streams were open by 10:00am.

Elections Watch Observers monitored the entire election day process at their assigned polling streams starting with the set-up 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 98% of polling streams observed reported that pregnant women, physically challenged, and elderly voters were given priority to vote.
- In 99% of polling streams observed, all physically challenged or elderly voters were allowed assistance from someone of their choice when requested.
- In all observed polling streams, voters were always asked to present their voter's card before being allowed to vote.
- Elections Watch Observers noted that the finger of every voter was marked with indelible ink in 99% of observed polling streams as required by the IEC guidelines.
- As per the electoral law, every voter received only one token in all polling streams observed.
- In 97% of polling streams, voters were able to cast their ballot in secret.

At least one IEC staff in 96% of polling streams were women. However, only 25% of observed polling streams had a woman as the presiding officer.

Polling stations with more than 800 registered voters are divided into multiple polling streams where voters queue to vote. In these polling stations, a Polling Assistant was assigned to help voters to identify the correct polling stream or queue. Although there were assigned queue controllers, 9% of Elections Watch Observer reported that voters had trouble identifying the correct polling stream. In one instance in Busumbala, voters did not realize that they were in the incorrect polling stream until after 5:00pm, at which time they were not allowed to join the queue at the correct stream.

EWC observers noted that in 7% of polling streams observed, a few voters (usually one or two at a station) who had a valid voter card and who were at the correct polling stream were not allowed to vote because their names could not be found on the voter's list. Following the voter registration process, the EWC noted that the display of the voter's list was not well publicized or explained to voters, and as a result, very few voters were able to confirm that their name was on the voter's list, which could have led these voters to being disenfranchised. In three polling streams, the voter's name was eventually found on the list, but only after voting had closed at 5:00pm and they were denied the opportunity to vote.



*EWC Press Conference on Preliminary Statement on the Presidential Elections on 4th December 2021 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara Conference Center*

#### 11.2.4. Closing of the Polls and Vote Counting

In 57% of observed polling streams, there were still voters in the line at 5:00pm which shows the high turnout including towards the end of the day. In nearly all of these polling streams, voters in line at 5:00pm were allowed to vote. In some locations, such as polling streams in Sanneh Mentereng and Upper Salum, voting continued late into the night. In the latter, this was due to two polling streams being combined because only one stream had ballot drums.

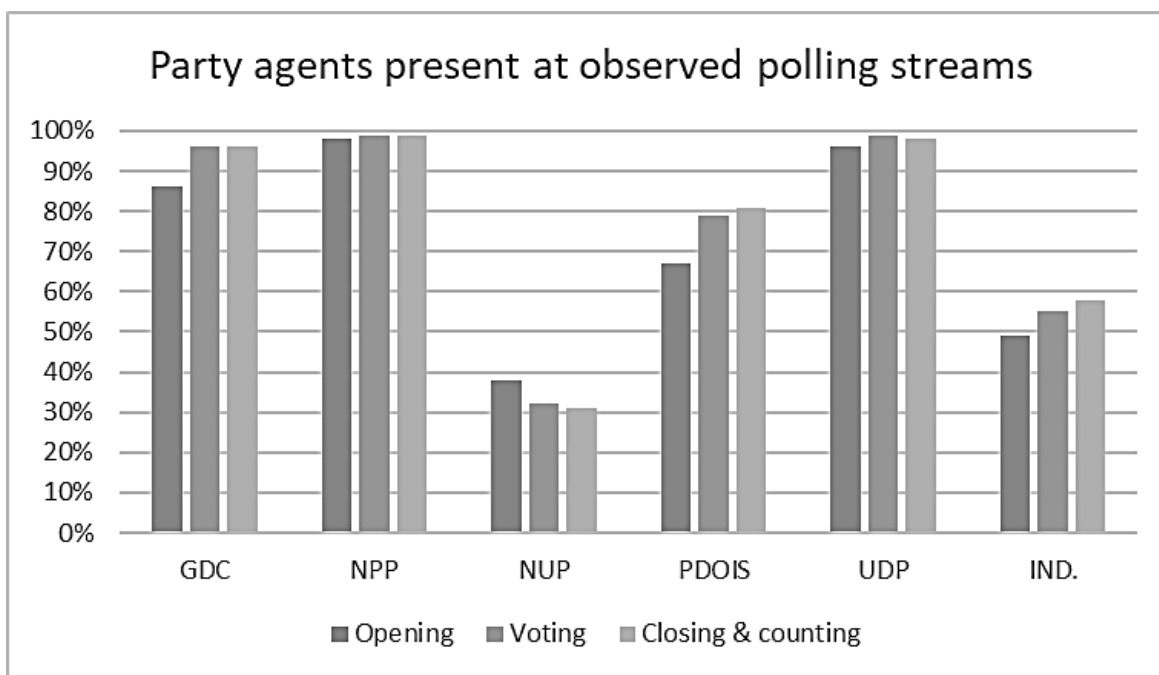
In most polling streams observed by the EWC, IEC officials generally followed closing and counting procedures.

- In 98% 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 99% 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 3% of polling streams observed, Elections Watch Observers reported that the Presiding Officer did not paste a copy of the Count Form on the wall at the polling stream as required by law.

### 11.2.5. 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, and UDP 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 1% of observed polling streams. 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.



### 11.2.6. Critical Incidents

During the voting, closing and counting process, the Elections Watch Observers noted a number of incidents that occurred at their assigned stream. No incidents were serious or severely disrupted the election process. Most of the incidents reported related to disorderliness and frustration as voters waited in long lines to vote, tensions between voters waiting in lines and party agents who took issue with the application of procedures.

These instances were all resolved and voting continued unhindered. One EWC observer reported an incident of vote buying occurring near a polling station in Banjul.

During the mid-day statement, the EWC highlighted an incident involving a security official using excessive force against a voter. The EWC passed along this report to the Police Commissioner for Kerewan, who promptly followed-up on the incident, including reaching out directly to the voter involved. The EWC commends the IGP's office for their responsiveness to act on the matter.

#### 11.2.7. Vote Tabulation

In its pre-election statement for the 2021 presidential elections, the EWC noted the lack of information concerning the location of collation centers and the collation procedures. The IEC did not publish collation center locations until a day before the conduct of the polls; this created challenges for the EWC's plans for observing the process. Despite this challenge, the EWC was able to deploy 52 of 53 constituency supervisors and 7 regional coordinators to the collation centers located in each region. At least two observers told the EWC that collation was moved from the identified location to the IEC regional office.

33 of 52 constituency collation observers reported that their collation center had opened by 10:00pm, with the remaining 19 opening after 10:00pm. 42 of 52 observers reported that security officials were present at the collation center. 50 of 52 observers at the constituency level reported at least two party agents present. However, two constituency observers in Janjanbureh reported that no party agents were present to observe the process. In 42 of 52 centers observed, party agents signed the result. In several of the centers where party agents did not sign the collation form, observers reported it was because party agents left before the completion of the process. According to Elections Watch Observers, one party agent in 1 of 52 constituencies opposed the coalition results.

The EWC also sent observers to the IEC's Election House to observe the national collation process, but observers were denied access. Party agents were, however, able to observe the process.



*The Elections Watch Committee, NDI Technical Assistance Team and Election Coordinating Committee- Liberia Consultant at the end of the EWC Presidential Election Observation on Sunday 5th December 2021*

### **11.3 National Assembly Election**

The National Assembly elections on the 9th of April the EWC deployed a total of 410 in 53 constituencies to observe the elections (Deployment timeline attached as appendix C). According to the findings of the observation, 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.

#### **11.3.1. Voting Process**

Elections Watch Observers observed the voting entire voting process in their respective assigned polling streams. Within their polling streams, Elections Watch Observers witnessed IEC staff generally following voting procedures:

- Elections Watch Observers in nearly all of the polling streams reported that pregnant women, physically challenged voters, 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.



*EWC Core team on an observation visit to polling stations where EWC Observers are posted during the National Assembly election*

### 11.3.2 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.

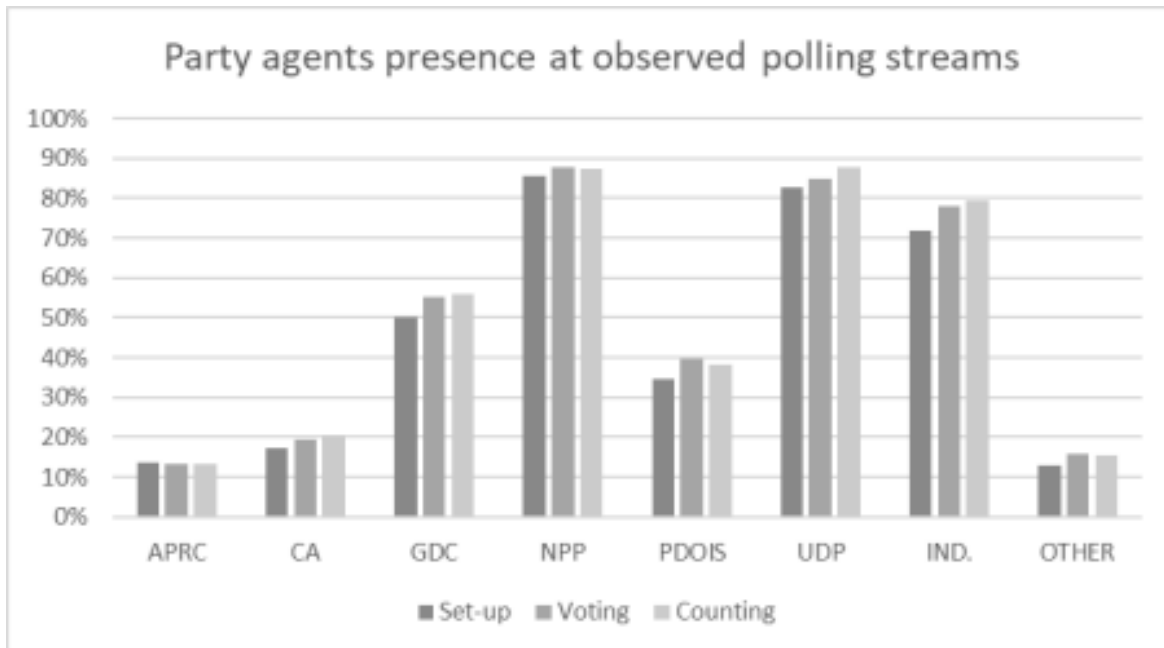
- In 99% of polling streams observed, the presiding officer sealed the entry to the ballot drums at the end of voting.
- Elections Watch Observers noted that the presiding officer counted the unused ballot tokens and returned the tokens to the sack in 95% of polling streams

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.

### 11.3.3 Party Agents

Party agents also monitored the entire process of the elections including set-up, voting, closing and counting. In all the polling streams EWC observed there was at least one party agent present during the voting, closing, and counting processes. The party agents that were present included party agents from the GDC, NPP, UDP, PDOIS and independent candidates throughout the day at most polling streams the EWC observed. 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.





## 11.3.4 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, an 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.



*EWC National Information Center, hosted at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Conference Center, Bijilo*

## 11.3.5 Collation Process

The EWC deployed its observers to all seven regional collation centers to observe the collation process at the constituency level for the National Assembly elections 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.

Even though there are quite a good number of similarities in the voting procedures of the 2021 presidential election and the 2022 National Assembly elections, there were a few differences that were observed between the two elections. It is evident that voting during the National Assembly elections takes place on the constituency level whereas the presidential elections are national. The National Assembly elections are by nature more intimate as voters are more likely to vote based on the candidates' identity than based on the candidates political party because they are more likely to be familiar with the candidates, compared to the presidential elections. This resulted in the large numbers of independent candidates that emerged victorious during the National Assembly elections. The voter turnout for the presidential election (89.34%) was higher than the turnout in the National Assembly election (51.21%); this was a major factor that appeared in EWC's observation reports. The security that was allocated to the presidential election candidates by the Gambia Police Force was not provided for the National Assembly elections candidates. As well, COVID-19 protocols were mostly observed during the presidential elections as opposed to the National Assembly elections where COVID-19 precautions were rarely followed.



*The Elections Watch Committee, NDI Technical Assistance Team and Election Coordinating Committee- Liberia Consultant at the end of the EWC Legislative Elections Observation on Sunday 10th April 2022*

## **11.4 Local Government By-election**

Based on reports from Elections Watch Observers deployed to polling streams in all four wards, Gambians peacefully participated in the Councilor by-elections held on 14th May 2022 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 the vast majority 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.

### **11.4.1 Voting Process**

Elections Watch Observers monitored the entire election day process at their assigned polling streams starting with the set-up, opening, 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:

- EWC observers reported that voters were able to easily locate their correct voting queue.
- 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. EWC observers reported no cases of missing names in the voter list. They also did not observe any case of a voter allowed to vote without a valid voter card or whose name was not in the list.
- The finger of every voter was marked with indelible ink in all observed polling streams except one. Every voter received only one token in all polling streams observed consistent with the electoral law.
- In all of the polling streams observed, voters were able to cast their ballot in secret.
- Voters received only one token in all observed streams.
- Elections Watch Observers in nearly all observed polling streams 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.

#### 11.4.2 Closing and Counting Process

All polling stations observed were reported to have closed on time and in all polling streams observed, In all polling streams observed by the EWC, IEC officials generally followed closing and counting procedures.

- In all polling streams observed, the presiding officer sealed the entry to the ballot drums at the end of voting and counted the unused ballot tokens and returned the tokens to the sack.
- 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 all of the polling streams observed, 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.

#### 11.4.3 Party Agents

Party agents vigilantly monitored the entire process including set-up, voting, closing and counting. 98% observed polling streams had at least one party agent present during the voting, closing, and counting processes. In particular, party agents from the NPP, UDP, PDOIS and Independent Candidates were present throughout the day at most polling streams observed by the EWC. 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.

#### 11.4.4 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 supporters over canvassing for votes at the Polling Station.

#### 11.4.5 Collation Process

The EWC deployed its observers to the two regional collation centers to observe the collation process and received reports from 4 out of 4 wards. All EWC observers and party

agents were permitted access to observe the collation centers. 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 the collation centers, the collated results form was signed by the party agents present and a copy was given to all present party agents.



*The EWC National Information Center hosted at the PAG Secretariat during the Local Government By-election on Saturday May 14th 2022*

## **12. Adherence to COVID-19 Safety Protocols**

The general EWC observation on the COVID-19 adherence by the electoral stakeholders in all the elections observed, including the Niamina By-Election, presidential election, National Assembly election and the Local Government By-elections, show that the IEC was one of the stakeholders that predominantly adhered to the COVID-19 protocols. During the Presidential Elections, EWC observer reports showed that in most centers observed, there was a high level of COVID-19 adherence by IEC staff. However, in the November 2020 Niamina By-elections, April 2022 National Assembly elections and May 2022 Local Government By-elections, EWC observers reported a low level of adherence to COVID-19 health and safety protocols by the IEC and voters. EWC observed that all eligible voters were allowed to vote as mandated by the IEC regardless of adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocol. During the December 4 presidential elections 73% of Elections Watch observers noted that IEC officials wore face masks throughout the day. However, Elections Watch Observers also reported that in only 7% of polling streams did all or most voters wear facemasks. In 87% of polling streams observed, some voters wore face masks,

and in 6% no voters wore face masks. In the National Assembly elections 49% of Elections Watch observers noted that IEC officials wore face masks throughout the day and Observers also reported that all voters wore a facemask in only 2% of observed polling stations. In the Local Government By-elections 30% of Elections Watch observers noted that IEC officials wore face masks throughout the day, while voters wore a facemask in only 2% of observed polling streams and in 49% of the streams, none of the voters wore a facemask.

### **13. Women Participation**

According to the 2021 IEC Voter Register, women form about 57 percent of the general voter population making them the largest group that participate in electing candidates. In all EWC observations, women's participation has been one of the priorities that the EWC has been keeping track of, as they are one of the most marginalized groups in the country. Women face a lot of limitations in terms of participation in elections as a result of the religious and cultural beliefs of most Gambians. This limits the participation of women most especially as candidates in the electoral cycle of the country. According to EWC's presidential election report, out of the 23 aspirants that submitted their nominations there was only one 1 woman aspirant, whose nomination was subsequently rejected. In the National Assembly election, the EWC observer report indicated that only 3 seats out of 53 seats were won by women.

Moreover, in other elections observed by the EWC such as the Niamina West By-election and the Local Government By-election, there was limited participation of women candidates as well.

However, in the EWC findings the IEC did an impressive job in the voter registration, presidential and national assembly elections with the recruitment of women as polling staff to work on the elections. In all the centers the EWC observers observed, there was at least one woman serving as polling officer.

### **14. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Upon completion of the EWC Election Observation mission, the EWC made recommendations to various Election Stakeholders on a series of issues aimed at making The Gambia's election processes more peaceful, transparent, inclusive and credible, thereby boosting citizens' confidence in the Electoral System. These include long and short term recommendations specific to different election stakeholders.

#### ***To the IEC:***

- Enhance the training of IEC staff to ensure they adequately understand election procedures, rules and regulations including the role of observers in the process to avoid any confusion.

- Alongside civil society, conduct widespread voter information campaigns sufficiently ahead of the voter registration and the display and appeal process to ensure that citizens are aware of the processes and how to participate.
- Work in collaboration with CSOs, the Inter- Party Committee (IPC) and lawmakers to review the Electoral Act to address the widespread use of the attestation by citizens.
- Work in collaboration with IPC, lawmakers and CSOs to institute a legislation and an independent oversight agency to regulate campaign financing.
- Publish all election results, including the 2021 Presidential election and 2022 National Assembly election results, 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 be given Duty Certificate to vote during elections both presidential and 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 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 allocating all polling streams on flatland for PWDs, written material for the hearing impaired and listing the candidates' names in braille on the ballot drums for visually impaired voters.
- Ensure that ballot tokens are counted at the polling station before the start of each voting process.
- Encouraged to appoint more women as presiding officers in future elections.

#### ***To Political Parties and the Inter-Party Committee (IPC):***

- Monitor and engage in the IEC Voter Register display and the appeal process.
- Encourage party supporters to stop spreading false information, hate speech and violent actions.
- Consider monitoring and enforcing the IPC code of conduct for political parties to minimize incidents of hate speech and other forms of political intolerance.
- 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 Media:***

- Demonstrate professionalism in reporting and ensure citizens continue to receive accurate information about election related matters, even after the elections.

#### ***To the Security Forces:***

- Continue to demonstrate neutrality and professionalism in dealing with electoral related matters and protect the safety of citizens as they participate in the electoral process.

# ELECTIONS WATCH

THE GAMBIA

- The Gambia Police Force and other security agencies should increase the presence of uniformed security personnel across the country to help enforce the law, troubleshoot problems that arise and enhance confidence in electoral processes.



## 15. APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Voter Registration Observation Deployment Timeline

#### 2021 Voter Registration Observation

##### Timeline for Deployment

On each of the assigned observation days, select one Voter Registration Center and observe there for the entire day. You will receive a call from the PAG National Information Center at every stage of the observation to provide observation data. The Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia cannot comment on the Voter Registration process without using your observation data.

**Always keep your phone on!!!**

Phase	Observation Dates			Activity
1	Saturday, May 29	Monday, May 31	Wednesday, June 2	On each of the assigned days in the first phase, select one Voter Registration Center and observe there for the entire day.
2	Tuesday, June 15	Thursday, June 17	Saturday June 19	On each of the assigned days in the second phase, select one Voter Registration Center and observe there for the entire day.
3	Wednesday, July 7	Friday, July 9	Sunday, July 11	On each of the assigned days in the third phase, select one Voter Registration Center and observe there for the entire day.
4	Two extra days for possibility of extension			Observation in this phase is based on the possibility of extension of the process by the IEC. If there is an extension, PAG will communicate to you on which days to observe.
<b>MOBILE OBSERVATION</b>				<b>On non-stationary days, all observers are to look out for critical incidents within their assigned constituencies and report directly to the PAG Information Center if there is any.</b>
<p>Finally, all Constituency Observers are required to report their observation checklists to their assigned regional coordinators for submission to the PAG Secretariat.</p> <p><b>You will only receive your deployment stipend after submitting all your observation checklists to your coordinator!!</b></p>				

## Appendix B: Presidential Election Observation Deployment Timeline

### 2021 Presidential Elections Observation

#### Timeline for Deployment

All 300 stationary observers **must** observe in the polling place they are assigned in their respective constituencies for the presidential elections. They must observe the entire Election Day activities from 6:45am to the counting of ballots and posting of results. All observers must also participate in all EWC activities prior to Election Day on these dates and no other dates. **YOU SHOULD NOT LEAVE YOUR ASSIGNED POLLING PLACE AT ANY TIME OF THE DAY.**

Just like the stationary observers, those assigned as mobile observers will start observing at 6:45am. They will move around during the day to different polling stations in their assigned area.

No.	Date	Activity
01	Friday 26 <sup>th</sup> November- Monday 29 <sup>th</sup> November	<b>Nationwide trainings</b> for all observers, constituency supervisors and regional coordinators
02	Tuesday, 30 <sup>th</sup> November	<b>Simulation 1</b> , for all 300 Stationary observers @ 2:00 pm
03	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> December	<b>Simulation 2</b> , for all 300 stationary observers @ 2:00 pm
04	Saturday 4 <sup>th</sup> December	<b>Election Day observation</b> , all PAG observers, Constituency Supervisors and Regional Coordinators
05	After Election	All observers should hold on to their observation packet until they are contacted by the EWC Secretariat

## Appendix C: National Assembly Election Observation Deployment Timeline

### 2022 National Assembly Elections Observation

#### Timeline for Deployment

All 300 stationary observers **must** observe in the polling place they are assigned in their respective constituencies for the national assembly elections. They must observe the entire Election Day activities from 6:45am to the counting of ballots and posting of results. All observers must also participate in all EWC activities prior to Election Day on these dates and no other dates. **YOU SHOULD NOT LEAVE YOUR ASSIGNED POLLING PLACE AT ANY TIME OF THE DAY.**

Just like the stationary observers, those assigned as mobile observers will start observing at 6:45am. They will move around during the day to different polling stations in their assigned area.

No.	Date	Activity
01	April, 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Nationwide trainings</b> for all observers, constituency supervisors and regional coordinators
02	Tuesday 5th April	<b>Simulation 1</b> , for all 300 Stationary observers @ 2:00 pm
03	Thursday 7th April	<b>Simulation 2</b> , for all 300 stationary observers @ 2:00 pm
04	Saturday 9th April 2022	<b>Election Day observation</b> , all EW observers, Constituency Supervisors and Regional Coordinators must observe in their assigned regions and constituencies
05	After Election	All observers should hold on to their observation packet until they are contacted by the EWC Secretariat

## 16. VISITS TO THE EWC NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTER



*U.S. Ambassador Sharon L. Cromer and team visits the EWC National Information Center during the National Assembly election*



*US Ambassador to The Gambia, Sharon L. Cromer introduced to the NDI Technical support team during EWC observation of the April 2022 National Assembly elections*



*British High Commissioner David Belgrove OBE and team visits the EWC National Information Center during its observation of the April 2022 National Assembly elections*



*The African Union Observer Mission visits the EWC National Information Center during EWC observation of the April 2022 National Assembly elections*



*The ECOWAS Observer Mission visits the EWC National Information Center during EWC observation of the April 2022 National Assembly elections*



*The UN Observer Mission visits the EWC National Information Center during EWC observation of the April 2022 National Assembly elections*



*The KAIPTC Training visits the EWC National Information Center at the PAG Secretariat during its observation of the Voter Registration process in June 2021.*



*The EWC briefs the head of African Union Observation Mission, HE Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe on its pre-election observation findings and the Elections Watch Project ahead of the National Assembly elections on Thursday April 7 2022.*