

ELECTIONS WATCH

THE GAMBIA

Elections Watch Committee (EWC) 2023 Pre-Elections Observation (PREO)

Local Government Elections (Mayor & Chairperson) 2023

CAMPAIGN UPDATE – #2 and Pre-Election Statement

19th May, 2023

The Election Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 7 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA, National Youth Parliament (NYP), Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang, Peace Hub – The Gambia (PHTG), and The Gambia Federation for the Disabled (GFD) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. The EWC’s observation of the 2023 local government elections will build on the EWC’s observation of the 2021 Presidential election including the Voter Registration process, the display of a provisional list of voters, the candidate nomination and campaign period, the 2021 presidential election day and as well the 2022 National Assembly elections. Ahead of the May 20th local government (Mayor and Chairperson) elections, the EWC has observed the candidate nomination process and the campaign period.

For the Mayor & Chairperson campaign observation, the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) has trained and deployed 14 long-term observers i.e. 2 observers in each administrative region to observe the conduct of the campaign process within The Gambia. This update contains observation findings from the campaign beginning from 5th May to 18th May, 2023 and covers the conduct of campaigns by political parties and independent candidates within the different administrative areas during this period. The update also contains information as reported by observers on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) preparedness, the conduct of civic education and voter information campaigns for the elections, as well as recommendations for Election Day. Finally, this update also provides information about the EWC’s plans to observe the May 20th election.

Campaign Observation Summary

Overall, the Elections Watch Committee observers’ reports during the campaign period indicated that political parties and independent candidates ramped up their campaigns and campaigned with no major restrictions in all constituencies across the country. 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. The campaign period was peaceful in the vast majority of the country. Observers noted national security personnel presence in some of their areas and should be commended for their role in maintaining peace during this period. Elections Watch Committee observers also reported the visibility of civic and voter education efforts by the IEC, NCCE, CSOs, and others ahead of the May 20th polls.

Campaign Observation Methodology

The Election Watch Committee deployed fourteen (14) campaign observers i.e. two (2) observers for each region to monitor the conduct of the local government mayor and chairperson campaign exercise in their respective regions. All Election Watch Committee observers were carefully selected and thoroughly trained, as well as accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

All Elections Watch Committee observers were instructed to observe campaign activities and rallies of political parties and independent candidates in their respective areas covering the 7 regions within The Gambia. Observers were trained to observe campaign activities throughout the entire campaign period and send in reports on two days during the observation period, i.e. 11th May and 17th May 2023 as well as critical incidents whenever they occur. For each reporting period, every observer sent in their observation report using a comprehensive checklist via coded text message using their mobile phones to the Election Watch Committee National Information Center (EWC-NIC).

The EWC also trained two (2) Data Entry Clerks that were stationed at the EWC National Information Center in Kanifing to collect checklist reports from observers on the reporting days as well as critical incidents from all observers throughout the campaign process.

Campaign Observation Findings

The Elections Watch Committee's local government mayor and chairperson campaign update provides comprehensive information on reports from the Elections Watch Committee observers deployed across the country during the campaign period from 5th May to 18th May, 2023. This update also includes findings from the conduct of civic and voter education on the elections as well as the IEC preparedness.

Political Party Campaigns

During the campaign period, political parties were out in force holding campaign activities across the country. EWC's observers in all regions reported either witnessing or hearing of campaign events or rallies in their assigned regions. Observers' reports mostly showed that the parties and candidates are freely conducting their campaigns with no restrictions. However, EWC observers reported witnessing or hearing of incidents 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.

These violations create an unlevel playing field during the election campaign and dilute the premise that political campaigns should be contested based on a candidates' skills, ideas, and ability to lead the wards, and not based on their ability to purchase the most votes.

IEC Preparations and Civic Education/Voter Information

As the campaign period advanced towards Election Day, all EWC observers witnessed or heard about IEC preparations in their regions. EWC observers have previously reported that they have not witnessed or heard of IEC preparations, however, it is to be noted that during the 2023 Councillor and Mayoral campaign there has been an improvement in this matter. The level of communication and information sharing by the IEC is consistent with the past elections and should be commended.

Additionally, throughout the campaign period, the EWC noted that the civic and voter education campaigns targeting women, youth, and persons with disabilities are present in some parts of the country. However, it is to be noted that there has been a significant decline in the number of engagements with interest groups such as women, youths, PWDs compared to the campaign efforts and strategies during the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Presence of Security Forces

The majority of Elections Watch observers have noted they have witnessed national security forces during campaign events and rallies of political candidates. EWC did not receive reports of any cases of intimidation or abuse by security agents during the campaign period.

Electoral Violence

EWC's Election Day Observation & Deployment Strategy

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) plans to deploy 128 Election Day observers for the 20th May Local Government Mayor and Chairperson Elections across the 7 administrative regions of the country. 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 2023 Mayor and Chairperson elections.

On May 20th, the EWC plans to deploy 128 trained and accredited Election Day observers for the Local Government Mayor and Chairperson Elections. This includes 104 stationary polling stream observers, 10 mobile observers, and 14 regional coordinators. The 104 polling stream observers have been systematically deployed based on a proportional distribution by constituency. This means that the proportion of Elections Watch Committee stationary observers closely matches the overall proportion of the IEC polling streams in each constituency and administrative area. For example, 34% of polling streams where Elections Watch Committee observers are deployed are in Brikama and 34% of overall polling streams are in Brikama. This

proportional deployment enables the EWC to comment on the process nationally, drawing on data points from every constituency across the country. Additionally, the EWC will deploy its 14 regional coordinators to observe the collation process at the IEC's 7 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 one day after which will include findings from the voting, closing, and counting processes.

The EWC is proud to be among and coordinating with domestic groups accredited by the IEC to observe this process. The interest in observing this electoral process further highlights the interest in The Gambia's democratic process and the importance of local government elections for the people of The Gambia.

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, 19th 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 the ward level, the IEC should make public a disaggregated list of polling station-level results in an analyzable format and in a timely manner.
- Political parties, candidates, and their supporters should continue to adhere to the IEC regulations and the code of conduct during and after the May 2023 Local Government Mayor and Chairperson Elections and follow the prescribed legal channels to pursue any objections or grievances in a peaceful manner.
- Political parties, candidates to engage women, youths and PWDs in their campaign planning and activities.

The Elections Watch Committee reminds the voters to bring their voter cards and cast their vote on 20th May at the polling station where they previously voted during the 2022 National Assembly elections and presidential election.

Appendix A: Distribution of Elections Watch Observers

Administrative Area	Distribution of IEC polling streams/stations		Distribution of Elections Watch Stationary Observers	
	# of polling streams	% of polling streams	# of EW observers	% of EW observers
Banjul	36	2.3%	3	2.9%
Basse	198	12.7%	11	10.6%
Brikama	533	34.3%	36	34.6%
Janjanbureh	212	13.6%	17	16.3%
Kanifing	276	17.8%	17	16.3%
Kerewan	196	12.6%	13	12.5%
Mansakonko	103	6.6%	7	6.7%
Total	1554	100%	104	100%

About the Elections Watch Committee

The Election Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 7 organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA, National Youth Parliament (NYP), Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang, Peace Hub – The Gambia (PHTG), and The Gambia Federation for the Disabled (GFD) – 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).

CONTACT INFORMATION-EWC's SECRETARIAT:

Yankuba Manjang, Coordinator – 3914415 / 7175382
 Momodou Juju Jallow, Program Manager – 3438623 / 6429925
 Sabel Betts, Communication Officer – 2552662
 Website: www.peaceambassadors.gm
 Facebook: Elections Watch Committee 220
 Twitter- Electionwatch22