

Election Situation Room (ESR)

Local Government Elections for Councilors 2023

Opening Statement

Introduction

The CSO Coalition on Elections is the premier domestic election observation body in The Gambia which comprises a total of national civil society organizations. The Coalition has fielded a total of 130 domestic observers across the country and has set up an Election Situation Room for the purpose of observing the councillorship elections. Comprising team of analysts and decision makers, the Situation Room, supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Freedom House, is based at Paradise Suites Hotel in Kololi. The Coalition also works with Electoral Watch Committee and WANEP Gambia which have also independently deployed observers across the country.

Background

The final stage of the 2021 – 2023 electoral cycle has kicked off today for local councilors across the country. The IEC announced 367 candidates for the election comprising 299 party candidates, 68 independent, 58 women candidates and 4 candidates with disabilities. Following nominations, there were one withdrawal, one objection and one rejection.

The elections register remains with 962,157 registered voters of which 57% are females and 43% male. Fifty-seven per cent (57%) of the registered voters are youths between 18 and 35 years. The election is being held in 1554 polling stations and 53 constituencies in the seven (7) regions of The Gambia.

The official campaign period for the councillorship elections ran from 31st March to 13th April 2023. The campaign period was largely peaceful.

Political parties contesting:

Seven political parties have fielded candidates on their own, while two coalitions comprising several parties each have also put up their candidates. Several independent candidates are standing in their own name. Eight political parties have no candidates in this election.

No	Party/Coalition/Independent	No. of Candidates
1	ANRD, CA, DP, GANU, GAP, GPDP, NCP & NUP	0
2	APP, GFA & GMC= 1 (one) candidate each	3
3	PAP	2

4	NRP	4
5	PPP	9
6	APRC	17
7	PDOIS	27
8	GDC	36
9	NPP	99
10	UDP	102
11	Independents	68

Observations at the Opening of Polls

Reports from our observers indicate that polling stations generally opened on time at 8am. Only a handful of polling stations opened a few minutes after 8am, with the latest being 8.24am. The processes to be observed for the official opening of polling stations and start of voting were generally followed. Electoral materials were adequately available, and polling stations were found to be at the designated place. There was adequate presence of IEC polling staff and polling agents, security personnel, and observers. Media presence has been found to be low at the opening of polls. Generally, the opening of polls went off smoothly without any major incidences of disruptions, violations or delays reported.

However, a low voter turnout has been observed, so far though women formed the majority of early voters. In line with good practice, priority is given to persons with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant women to vote first.

The voting environment generally remains calm and peaceful.

Conclusion

The CSO Coalition with partners will continue to observe the elections up to the declaration of results. In the meantime, the Coalition calls on all electoral stakeholders to continue to exercise tolerance and calm to ensure peaceful elections. At the same time, we wish to call on electoral stakeholders and supporters of parties and candidates to abide by the law and refrain from all forms of electoral malpractices and acts of violence.

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CSO Coalition on Elections,
15 April 2023