

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2021

Introduction

Today 4th December 2021, eligible Gambians went to the polls from 8am to 5pm to elect a candidate to serve them as president for the next five years.

As they head to cast their ballots they do so believing that it would be credible, transparent and fair process.

The Independent Electoral Commission, which is constitutionally tasked to conduct elections is expected to conduct the exercise in line with the electoral laws.

The Ombudsman plays an important role in good governance and as an administrative watchdog, the Office has jurisdiction over all public institutions including the Independent Electoral Commission.

The role of the Ombudsman in this election, therefore, is to observe the IEC and its conduct of the process. It seeks to ensure that the independent electoral commission conducts elections in line with its mandate in a free, fair, transparent and credible manner.

Observation

The Office has dispatched 19 observers to the various administrative regions to observe the entire process: opening, voting and the counting. Our findings will be mainly contained in the final report to be submitted to the Independent Electoral commission and it will contain recommendations to help improve subsequent elections.

The scope of this preliminary report is therefore limited to the general view of the Office of the Ombudsman of the conduct of today's polls

According to the IEC polls should open at 8am. Some of the polls did not open exactly at 8am but general it is our view that there was timely opening of polls as the delays were not significant enough to affect the process.

For all the polls that were opened in our presence, it is our expressed view that it was all done in a transparent manner. The party agents were shown the empty drums of their candidates, which were sealed and the serial numbers of the seals recorded by the agents after which the drums were put in the polling booths.

It was observed that queuing was handled in a manner that caused great inconvenience to many. The IEC did not educate voters on what to expect at the polling stations in terms of the expected number of polling booths at polling stations and how they should find out which queue to join. Voters were moving from one booth to another this was compounded by the unsatisfactory performance of polling assistants.

There were instances in which some voters spent considerable amount of time on queues only to later discover they were on the wrong queues and when they found their queues, they were asked to

go to the back of their queue. We have evidence of voters threatening to not vote and a case of voter going home as a result of this frustration.

Largely, voters were patient and determined to vote despite suffering this great inconvenience.

Many people came out early to vote as long queues were observed at many polling stations since early hours of the morning.

Voting was generally peaceful and orderly as only one station was reported to have been exceedingly chaotic.

The voters have conducted themselves in a peaceful and respectful manner and highly cooperative with the instructions of the polling staff

The counting process was also done in a transparent manner.

Conclusion

It is to be noted that the Office of the Ombudsman could not do a wider coverage of the polling stations because of the limited number of observers deployed for this exercise; that notwithstanding; our observers have done their best to sample the polling.

The voters have exercised their constitutional right without any evidence of intimidation.

Based on our observation and findings, we did not see anything that indicated that the process was flawed. The Office did not observe any violation or breach of the process. On the contrary it is the view of the Ombudsman that the process was done in a free, fair, transparent and credible manner.

This conclusion is based on the observations of the opening, voting and the counting at the polling stations witnessed by our observers. It is not based on the tallying of votes at collation and regional centres.