

Chapter 5

VOTING, COUNTING AND RESULTS

The Gambia's 2011 presidential election took place on 24 November 2011 following an eleven-day campaign period. For the purpose of voting, 1,302 polling stations were established across the country's seven regions and 48 constituencies.

Opening procedures and Voting

Most polling stations opened at 7.00 am to allow eligible voters cast their votes. Polling materials were laid out efficiently by polling officials, supervised by the presiding officer. There was a good balance of males and females in the security presence at each polling station. This presence was notably unobtrusive, unarmed and cordial to voters, observers and party agents.

In some cases party agents and polling station security assisted in the preparatory process. As part of the opening process, most polling officials showed the empty ballot drums to all present to ensure transparency.

Voter identity (ID) cards were used for identification and indelible ink used to mark the forefinger to prevent multiple voting. Polling officials and party agents all had copies of the voter register, which aided the effectiveness and efficiency of the electoral process. The Team noted that the photos and text on the register were small and cramped, with many names on each sheet. This made reading quite difficult for some officials.

It was observed that in some instances, and after a long wait in the queue, voters did not find their names in the register. This led to frustration and in some cases the affected voters ultimately deciding to not cast their ballot. That said, the Team observed polling officials making great efforts to overcome this problem where it was encountered.

Polling officials generally managed queues of voters efficiently. Significant numbers of polling officials were female and many served as presiding officers. These were notable for the high sense of diligence they displayed in fulfilling their duties.

Party agents and domestic observers were observed in most polling stations, lending credibility to the voting process. However, as noted elsewhere, the party agents of the United Front were few and far between whilst the incumbent had as many as two party agents in each polling station visited.

The Gambia's unique voting system

The Gambia has a unique voting system – the use of metal ballot drums fitted with internal bells which ring once a ballot token, a marble, is dropped into the drum (detailed in Chapter 3). Voters appeared familiar with this system, and polling officials were often seen listening for the sound of the bell to ascertain that the voter had indeed voted, and to identify any incidents of multiple voting.

The secrecy of the vote was guaranteed as ballot drums were placed behind dark screens away from voters, polling staff, party agents and observers. Transparent and broken windows of school classrooms where ballot boxes had been placed were covered with improvised opaque materials.

Overall, the Team was impressed by the atmosphere in the polling stations, the enthusiasm of voters and the genuine desire of all involved that the voting process be conducted according to the rules.

At 4.00 pm when polls closed, the voting drums were inspected by polling officials, party agents and observers. The holes of the drums were sealed and serial numbers recorded by party agents and observers before being transported to the counting centres across the country, with adequate security and within view of polling agents and observers. The transportation of the drums to the counting centres took between two to three hours in cases where the Team observed, due to the inadequate resources of the IEC.

The counting and results process

The counting of ballots took place in the designated counting centres in all regions observed by the Team. IEC Commissioners (or their proxies) in their respective regions ensured that all voting drums from the various polling stations were received before the official count started. This caused some delay in counting. Drums were inspected by polling officials and - where present - party agents.

IEC Commissioners (or their proxies) oversaw the count from beginning to end and ensured that the rules of counting were followed to the letter. However, at one count observed by the Team, the presence of the local Governor was intrusive and overbearing.

The rules of counting were closely followed. Presiding officers publicly announced ballot tokens supplied, those remaining as well as any invalid votes. The seals of the ballot drums were broken in full view of those present, emptied into a sieve, and the marbles arranged into special counting trays holding 200 or 500 marbles at a time. Each candidate's result was publicly announced and the trays holding their tokens shown around before the result was certified. After this, the results were collated and declared by the Assistant Returning Officer before being transmitted to the regional IEC office, and then to the IEC headquarters.

The Team was impressed by the general atmosphere of transparency and in some cases, collegiality, within which the closing and counting processes were conducted. The Team also commends the prompt announcement of results by the IEC on 25 November, the day after the election.

The following is an overview of the national results:

CANDIDATE	POLITICAL PARTY	VOTES OBTAINED	PERCENTAGE (%)
President Yahya Jammeh	APRC	470,550	72%
Lawyer Ousainou Darboe	UDP	114,177	17%
Mr Hamat Bah	NRP, GPDP,NADD,PDOIS	73,060	11%
Total Votes Cast	-	657,904	
Invalid Votes	-	264	-
National Total Registered	796,929	-	
Voter Turnout	658,168	-	83%

Recommendations

In any electoral process, there will always be room for improvement. We make the following technical recommendations in this spirit:

- Although the number of polling stations has been increased to 1302 for the presidential election, some polling stations in urban centres are still large and overcrowded with long queues. We recommend a further increase in polling stations.
- Voters' lists need to be more legible with bigger and clearer photos.
- A more effective way of managing queues must be devised and efforts should be made to post lists of voters in their respective polling stations before polling day.
- The current arrangement of transporting ballots drums to counting centres is susceptible to avoidable hazards. It would be much better for the votes to be counted and recorded at polling stations and results displayed accordingly before tallying at collation centres in constituencies.