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Elections in the Gambia

2017 Parliamentary Elections

Frequently Asked Questions

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

2011 Crystal Drive | Floor 10 | Arlington, VA 22202 | www.IFES.org

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Disclosure:

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Gambian elections authorities as of April 4, 2017, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

When is Election Day?

The Gambia will hold parliamentary elections on April 6, 2017.

The last election to take place in the Gambia was a presidential election held on December 1, 2016. Voter turnout was calculated at 59.4 percent.

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Gambian voters will elect members of the unicameral National Assembly. There are 53 open seats that will be filled.

The National Assembly is composed of 58 members. Fifty-three members are directly elected from single-member constituencies for a five-year term using the first-past-the-post electoral system. The remaining five members are appointed by the president.

What is the electoral system?

The Gambia uses a single-member plurality voting system to elect the members of parliament to serve for five-year terms. The Gambia has a unique system that is based on the use of ballot tokens to be cast in separate sealed iron-made drums for each political party/candidate competing in the election. Each drum is painted with identifying colors that correspond to the party affiliation of the candidate, and has the party symbol/candidate's photograph.

Who can vote in the country?

The 1997 constitution affirms that any citizen 18 years or older and of sound mind has the right to vote in elections.

The Gambian Independent Electoral Commission further outlines the following conditions that must be met in order for a person to cast a vote: 1) be in possession of a Gambian voter's card; 2) present oneself at the right polling station; 3) be on the voter register; 4) not be serving a prison term; and 5) not be in a state of inebriation.

How many registered voters are there?

The final 2016 voters list has 886,578 voters.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was formed on April 17, 1997. It conducts and controls all elections and referenda in the Gambia. It is mandated to manage all public elections in accordance with Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Gambia, and operates within the confines of the electoral laws in the constitution, the Elections Act, and the Local Government Act of 2002. Article 42 of the constitution assigns the IEC

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, 796,929 people voted out of a voting age population of 920,752.

the responsibility to register Gambian citizens to participate in public elections and the Elections Act guides the IEC to prepare, gather, and maintain a register of voters for each constituency.

The IEC, which was formed in 1997, is made up of two distinct parts; the commission and the staff of the IEC. The commission is comprised of a chairman and four other members, one of whom is elected vice chairman. Under the constitution, the president, in concert with the Judicial Service Commission and the Public Service Commission, appoints and may dismiss members of the commission. Members of the commission are appointed for a period of seven years and are limited to two terms. They direct the policies of the IEC and appoint the staff of the IEC responsible for implementing adopted policies.

What are the registered political parties in the Gambia?

There are currently nine registered political parties in the Gambia.

- Democratic Congress (GDC)
- Moral Congress (GMC)
- Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (ARPC)
- Party for Democracy and Progress (GPDP)
- National Convention Party (NCP)
- National Reconciliation Party (NRP)
- Peoples Progressive Party (PPP)
- People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS)
- United Democratic Party (UDP)

Who are the candidates in the parliamentary elections?

The Independent Electoral Commission has accepted 239 candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections. Twenty-nine candidates hail from the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction Party, which was formerly led by Yahya Jammeh, the recently ousted president.

Other candidates hail from the following parties:

- Gambia Democratic Congress (52)
- United Democratic Party (44)
- Independents (42)
- National Reconciliation Party (24)
- People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (22)
- People's Progressive Party (14)
- Gambia Moral Congress Party (5)
- Gambia Party for Democracy and Progress (4)
- National Convention Party (3)

Are there reserved seats for women?

In the Gambia, there are no reserved seats for women. Currently, five seats are filled by women out of 53 total seats. Women therefore make up nine percent of the National Assembly. There are 239 candidates running for the National Assembly, including 17 women.

Although the constitution does not require seats to be reserved for women, seven percent of candidates in the April 6 parliamentary elections are women.

How many polling places are set up on Election Day?

On Election Day, 1,422 polling stations will be in operation.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

Currently, Gambians living abroad must return to the country during the voter registration period and on Election Day to vote. However, the Independent Electoral Commission is in the process of determining how to create a voter registration specifically for Gambians abroad in compliance with Section 11, Subsection 1 of the Elections Act.

How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?

Any voter with disabilities or visual impairment can be assisted by a person of their choice to cast their ballot token. Alternatively, the voter is allowed to ask for assistance from the presiding officer.

What technology will be used?

The Independent Electoral Commission uses a biometric voter registration system integrated in both the voter card and the data capture processes to ensure that the list of voters is accurate. However, electronic voting is not presently used in any elections.

Who will observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

The Independent Electoral Commission accredits both international and national observers to observe all the phases of the elections. International election observers include international bodies or organizations, embassies or foreign missions, international charitable organizations, internationally established democracy and good governance organizations, as well as foreign media houses. National election observers include organizations such as local charitable organizations, locally established democracy and good governance organizations, and local media houses.

The European Union (EU) has deployed an Election Observation Mission, consisting of a core team of seven EU election analysts and 14 long-term observers to observe the parliamentary elections. The 14 long-term observers will be deployed throughout the country, and later joined by additional short-term observers on April 1. A delegation of the European parliament and diplomats from EU member states will also participate in the observation mission on Election Day.

Where is voting, counting and tabulation held?

Voting is held in 1,422 polling stations around the country. Once voting is completed, the votes are counted and recorded at the polling station. The presiding officer then delivers the results to the collation center. The collation center tabulates the result.

How will official results be announced?

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) presents the official results locally at the collation center, and then faxes results forms to IEC headquarters for party representatives to see before the IEC chairman announces the results on television and radio. The IEC does not publish election results online on the day it announces election results. Election results are not published online until later. Election results are typically established within one day.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

According to Section 5, Article 33 of the Elections Act, a petition contesting an election may be submitted to the Supreme Court within one month from the date of the declaration of the election results. Those submitting a petition must be: (1) a registered voter; (2) a person claiming they have the right to be elected; or (3) a person who alleges they are a candidate in the election. Any election petition submitted to the Supreme Court within the allotted timeframe will be tried by the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Once the trial is concluded, the chief justice will deliver the court's decision to the speaker and the supervisor of elections. The Supreme Court may declare that the election is void, that a candidate was fairly elected, or dismiss the petition. The decision by the Supreme Court regarding election petitions is final.

How will Election Day security be ensured?

Gambian security forces will be put in place to ensure security on Election Day. Additionally, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the United Nations signed a joint declaration on January 21 to reinforce their commitment to work with the Gambian government, defense, and security forces toward the maintenance of peace and stability. A West African regional military force (Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal) launched by ECOWAS is also present in the Gambia to secure peace for a period of six months.

Resources

- Independent Electoral Commission Website ([English](#))