



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

# **Election FAQs: The Gambia**

*Presidential Elections*

*December 4, 2021*

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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## Election Snapshot

- Election Day
  - Dec. 4, 2021
  - 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; all voters in the queue at 5 p.m. will be allowed to cast their ballots
- Registered voters
  - 962,157
- Polling stations
  - 1,554
- Physical distancing
  - Physical distancing is required, although the distance is not defined.
- Seats
  - 1 (President)
- Candidate lists
  - The Independent Electoral Commission released a list of the six candidates whose nominations were approved to contest for the presidency.
- Candidates
  - Adama Barrow, National People's Party
  - Ousainou Darboe, United Democratic Party
  - Essa M. Faal, Independent
  - Mama Kandeh, Gambia Democratic Congress
  - Abdoulie Ebrima Jammeh, National Unity Party
  - Halifa Sallah, People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism
- Campaign expenditure and donation limits
  - None
- Domestic and international observers
  - European Union Election Observation Mission
  - African Union
  - Westminster Foundation for Democracy
  - The Commonwealth
  - Economic Community of West African States
  - CSO Coalition on Elections
  - Gambia Participates
  - Gambia National Youth Council

## When is Election Day?

Presidential elections in The Gambia will be held on Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021. The polls will open at 8 a.m. and close at 5 p.m., local time, although any voters in line at 5 p.m. will be able to cast their votes. Voters will cast their ballots at 1,554 polling stations across The Gambia's various regions.

## **Why are these elections important?**

In the December 2016 presidential elections, Yahyah Jammeh, who had led the country since coming to power in a military coup in 1994, was defeated by an opposition coalition headed by incumbent President Adama Barrow. The elections were followed by a tense post-election period, with Jammeh initially conceding but subsequently rejecting the outcome of the election, claiming “unacceptable abnormalities.” Following a month-long standoff and the threat of military intervention by the Economic Community of West African States, Jammeh conceded in late January and went into exile in Equatorial Guinea.

While parliamentary elections were held in April 2017 and local elections in 2018, the December 2021 contest will be the first presidential elections in what has become referred to the “The New Gambia,” in reference to the post-Jammeh era. The elections will not only determine whether incumbent President Barrow is elected to a second term but will also serve as a litmus test of the capacity of The Gambia’s democratic institutions and the ability of the Independent Electoral Commission to conduct large-scale elections. The elections are occurring in a tense political climate, which was heightened by the decision of President Barrow to enter into a coalition agreement with the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction, the party of former President Jammeh.

## **Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?**

Citizens will vote for the president of the Republic of The Gambia, who will be seated for a five-year, renewable term. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has approved the nominations of six candidates to run in the elections. 21 candidates filed nomination papers, but 16 were disqualified because they did not meet the nomination requirements outlined by the IEC.

The candidates for president are incumbent Adama Barrow of the National People’s Party; Ousainou Darboe of the United Democratic Party; Essa M. Faal, an independent candidate; Mamma Kandeh of Gambia Democratic Congress; Abdoulie Ebrima Jammeh of the National Unity Party; and Halifa Sallah of the People’s Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism.

## **What is the electoral system?**

The presidential elections in The Gambia will use the first-past-the-post electoral system, whereby a candidate needs only to obtain a simple majority of all of votes cast in order to be declared the winner. This means that even if the top candidate does not obtain 50 percent of the vote, he will be declared the winner, because he obtained a simple majority.

In The Gambia, votes are not cast with ballot papers but by placing a marble or token into a ballot drum. This system was introduced in 1960 to address high illiteracy and has been maintained since then. However, the Independent Electoral Commission has expressed a desire to reform the voting system in recent years. Each voter enters a private voting compartment and drops the marble into the ballot drum of his or her preferred candidate. The

presiding officer confirms, by the sound of the token hitting the drum, that the vote has been cast.

## **What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?**

The legal framework for elections in The Gambia is the Constitution of The Gambia (1997), Elections Act (2009), Chapter 3:01 and the Local Government Act (2002). While many in politics and civil society agreed on the need for constitutional reform, lawmakers rejected efforts to put a new constitution to a referendum in the fall of 2020.

## **Who is eligible to run as a candidate?**

In order to be eligible to run for the presidency, candidates must meet the following qualifications. The candidate must:

- Be a Gambian citizen;
- Have resided in The Gambia for the five years preceding Dec. 4, 2021;
- Be at least 30 years old;
- Have completed at least senior secondary school;
- Be nominated by at least 5,000 voters, including at least 200 from each of The Gambia's six regions;
- Provide a sworn asset declaration and a tax clearance certificate;
- Deposit 10,000 Gambian dalasi (approximately \$190 USD) paid to the bank account of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) during the submission of nomination papers held at the IEC headquarters; and
- Provide his or her party symbol, color and photograph.

Any candidate who is not selected to represent a political party can run as an independent candidate. All candidates must adhere to the Independent Electoral Commission's Code of Campaign Ethics and have a manifesto on tolerance and multi-culturalism. This manifesto is produced by each political party or candidate that is contesting the elections.

## **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?**

The only position being contested in these elections is that of the president of The Gambia. Therefore, no seats are reserved for women.

No women candidates have met the nomination requirements set by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

## **What are the campaign expenditure and donation limits?**

There is no legal framework for campaign expenditure and donation limits.

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

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of The Gambia will manage the elections. The commission is divided into numerous divisions, including administration, operations, training, communications and public affairs, finance and information and technology.

The IEC is responsible for electoral oversight at all levels in the country, with responsibilities outlined in the Constitution of 1997. The Constitution gives the IEC the responsibility for:

- The conduct and supervision of the registration of all voters for public elections and referenda;
- The conduct of elections for the speaker and deputy speaker of the legislature;
- The registration of political parties;
- Ensuring that the dates, times and places of public elections and referenda are determined in accordance with law and that they are publicized, and elections held accordingly; and
- Ensuring that each candidate in the elections makes a full declaration of his or her assets at the time of nomination.

The commission is also responsible for tabulating and announcing the results for elections and referenda.

## **How is the election management body protecting the elections and voters from COVID-19?**

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) voter awareness campaign includes COVID-19 preventive measures, including in public service advertisements and announcements. The IEC's handbook for polling officials also includes preventive measures, and personnel and hand-washing stations will be available at polling stations. The Gambia Red Cross Society has offered to provide support at polling stations to implement public health protocols. The specific guidance in the IEC Handbook is as follows:

- Regular cleaning of hands with soap or sanitizer;
- Wearing of face masks;
- Social distancing; and
- Wearing of gloves, etc.

## **Who can vote in these elections?**

Gambian citizens who are at least 18 years of age are eligible to register to vote in elections in The Gambia. On Election Day, registered voters are able to vote if they arrive at the correct polling station with a voter card. Registered voters must not be currently serving a prison term and must be of sound mind and not in a state of inebriation.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

Voter registration occurred in registration centers across the country from May 29 to July 11. Gambians were able to register to vote if they could provide one of the following documents:

- A birth certificate;
- A Gambian passport;
- A national identity card; or
- A document certified by local traditional authorities stating the district or village where the applicant was born.

A total of 962,157 Gambians are registered to vote. Official registration data list 545,318 women and 416,839 men as registered voters.

## **What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?**

Prior to the election, civic and voter education efforts included radio public service announcements and billboards encouraging women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized persons to participate in the election and informing them of their right to do so.

Trainings for media personalities and others also included conversations on how to address issues, such as inclusion topics regarding gender, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups in the election process.

## **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

Gambians living outside the country cannot take part in the elections unless they return to The Gambia to register and to vote on Election Day. As over 200,000 Gambians who live outside the country are eligible to vote, the Elections Act (Section 11) established mandates to provide a register of voters in foreign countries. However, the Act stalled in the National Assembly and is not in effect in this election cycle. Therefore, the voting process for Gambians overseas remains unchanged.

## **Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?**

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) will accredit two categories of election observers for the 2021 presidential elections in The Gambia. These are international election observers and local and domestic election observers.

Those wishing to be accredited as election observers must submit a written statement to the IEC of their intention of observing the elections and must fill out accreditation forms. Then, they submit the forms either at the IEC headquarters or on its website. After reviewing the forms, the IEC determines which individuals or organizations to grant accreditation to observe the elections.

## **Who is managing security on Election Day?**

The Gambia police force will put security arrangements in place to ensure a peaceful and orderly electoral process. As necessary, other security agencies will provide support.

## **Where are vote counting and tabulation held?**

Vote counting and tabulation will occur at polling centers across The Gambia. Those allowed inside the polling centers during the counting procedures include Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) officials, regional authorities, two polling/counting officers per candidate, accredited domestic and international observers, partners and guests of the IEC, one accredited media agent per media organization, security personnel on duty at the polling center and candidates.

The results will be tabulated at the collation center. Here, polling station results are calculated at the constituency level prior to being handed over to the Regional Electoral Officer. Each candidate's agent will receive a copy of the counting form. Additional copies will be posted at each polling stations and counting centers.

## **When will official results be announced?**

There is no official date for the announcement of election results. However, in previous elections, results have been tabulated within 24 to 48 hours of the polls closing. For instance, the 2016 elections were held on Dec. 1, and results were released on Dec. 2.

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

The Gambian judiciary, up to the level of the chief justice of The Gambia, will adjudicate election disputes. The chief justice simultaneously serves as the chief judge of the Supreme Court of The Gambia.



## Resources

- The Gambia elections: Meet the men running for [president](#)
- Gambia's electoral commission rejects first-ever female [candidate](#)
- [Gambia: Election candidates challenged on their commitment to human rights](#)
- EU election observation mission to Gambia deploys 16 long-term observers [Banjul](#)
- Gambia: Barrow and 5 others confirmed to run in upcoming December [polls](#)

## About IFES in The Gambia

Since 2017, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has been providing technical assistance to the Gambian election management body – the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) – and other local stakeholders to support the development of free, fair and credible elections. IFES' current work in The Gambia is informed by a foundational Electoral Integrity Assessment analysis it conducted ahead of the April 2017 legislative elections focused on the country's legal and regulatory framework, vote counting, certification of results and electoral dispute resolution. Through the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, IFES is currently implementing the "Gambia Governance Reform Activity" funded by the United States Agency for International Development. IFES' work in this project includes technical assistance to the IEC with its electoral operational planning, the development of the IEC's strategic plan and facilitating the prioritization of the electoral process through leadership and capacity-building trainings for IEC commissioners. IFES' support to the IEC is focused on increasing its capacity to promote inclusive democratic governance, electoral integrity and democracy in The Gambia.

## Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Independent Electoral Commission as of Nov. 30, 2021, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

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