



Pre-Election Political Environment Assessment **STATUS REPORT**



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Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice

EFSCRJ is an independent civil society organization dedicated to advancing human rights, democratic governance, accountability, transparency, and constitutionalism in The Gambia. Through regular monitoring, the Centre documents incidents that may affect the enjoyment of fundamental rights and assesses the response of public institutions.

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About the EFSCRJ Election Watch Campaign

The EFSCRJ Election Watch Campaign is a non-partisan civic initiative established to independently monitor The Gambia's electoral and political environment throughout the 2026 electoral cycle. The Campaign monitors and documents the conduct of political parties, candidates, public officials, state institutions, the media, and other electoral stakeholders to promote compliance with electoral laws and democratic norms and standards. Particular attention is given to electoral malpractices, hate and dangerous speech, divisive and tribal politics, disinformation, political and campaign financing, abuse of incumbency and state resources, selective law enforcement, media fairness, institutional neutrality, and the performance of the IEC. Through periodic status reports, public statements, civic education and stakeholder engagement, Election Watch seeks to expose violations, highlight good practices, promote accountability, and contribute to free, fair, transparent, inclusive, peaceful, and credible elections.

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EFSCRJ Election Watch Campaign

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first Status Report under the EFSCRJ Election Watch Initiative. It assesses developments in the political environment as political parties intensify preparations for the December 2026 Presidential Election.

The report finds that while the electoral process has begun peacefully, there are emerging trends that pose significant risks to the integrity, fairness, and peaceful conduct of the elections. These include the early abuse of incumbency, partisan use of traditional authorities, unequal access to state media, selective law enforcement, inflammatory political rhetoric, and the growing influence of money in politics in the absence of campaign finance regulations.

The report also notes concerns regarding the effectiveness of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in proactively enforcing electoral laws and democratic standards before formal nomination of candidates.

Unless these issues are addressed promptly, they risk creating an uneven political playing field and undermining public confidence in the electoral process.

Ballow drums in the 2021 presidential elections



Disclaimer

The information contained in this report is derived primarily from open and publicly accessible sources, including official websites and social media pages of public institutions, political parties and actors, media organisations, journalists, influencers, civil society organizations, and other relevant sources. EFSCRJ makes reasonable efforts to verify and cross-check information before publication. The report reflects information available during the period under review and may be updated or corrected where new or more authoritative information becomes available.

1. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Political activities have intensified across the country with presidential aspirants, political parties and emerging political movements engaging citizens through rallies, meetings, and public engagements.

The political atmosphere remains generally peaceful. However, political discourse is increasingly becoming confrontational and personalized, with growing use of insults, derogatory remarks, inflammatory language, and accusations rather than issue-based engagement.

EFSCRJ notes that political competition should focus on policies, programs, and leadership qualities rather than personal attacks and rhetoric capable of creating hostility among citizens.

2. ABUSE OF INCUMBENCY

a. Issue of Seyfolu and Alkalolu

EFSCRJ expresses concern over statements made by President Adama Barrow during the National People's Party (NPP) rally in Sukuta in November 2025 in which he declared his intention to bring Seyfolu and Alkalolu into his campaign activities. Such remarks are inconsistent with the principles underpinning the Local Government Act and democratic governance.

Seyfolu and Alkalolu are custodians of their communities and serve all residents regardless of political affiliation. Their offices are intended to remain politically neutral in order to preserve public confidence and social cohesion. Any attempt to involve these traditional authorities in partisan political campaigns undermines their neutrality and risks politicizing traditional governance structures.



b. Use of the State House Grounds for Partisan Activity

One of the most serious and unprecedented manifestations of abuse of incumbency observed by EFSCRJ is the use of the State House¹ grounds for partisan NPP activities. The State House is a national asset and the official seat of the Presidency, embodying the authority, sovereignty and dignity of the Republic and belonging equally to all Gambians regardless of political affiliation. It must therefore not be reduced to a venue for the activities of any political party.

¹ The Alkamba Times, Barrow Welcomes GDC into NPP-Led Alliance, Urges National Unity Above Party Interests, July 29, 2026, <https://alkambatimes.com/barrow-welcomes-gdc-into-npp-led-alliance-urges-national-unity-above-party-interests/>

The use of State House for NPP partisan activities blurs the fundamental distinction between the State, the Presidency, and the ruling political party, creates an unfair advantage for the incumbent, and undermines the political neutrality of public institutions and resources. The President may be the leader of a political party, but the State House is not a party headquarters, campaign venue, or political organizing centre. It exists to conduct the official and national business of the Republic.

EFSCRJ therefore considers the partisan use of State House facilities a blatant abuse of incumbency and public resources that must cease. We urge the President and relevant state authorities to preserve the institutional integrity of the Presidency by ensuring that the State House is used exclusively for official, constitutional and national purposes, while all NPP meetings, mobilization and other partisan activities are conducted at party premises or other appropriate non-state venues.

Assessment

Status: High Concern

EFSCRJ urges the President to publicly withdraw these remarks and ensure that Seyfolu and Alkalolu remain strictly non-partisan throughout the electoral period.



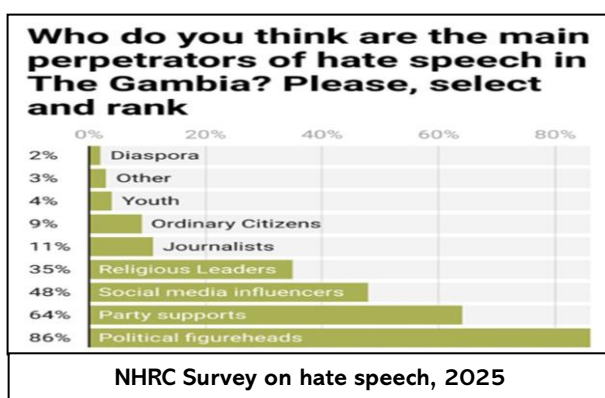
3. POLITICAL RHETORIC

EFSCRJ has documented a pattern of derogatory, inflammatory, and demeaning political rhetoric by several leaders, members and supporters of political parties and movements. Of particular concern are leaders and supporters of the ruling NPP and its allies who frequently direct derogatory remarks at opposition figures. For example, Dr. Ismaila Ceesay, leader of the Citizens' Alliance and a government minister, recently referred to the campaign manager of the opposition UNITE Movement, MC Cham, as a “gigolo” and a “puppy during a

primetime interview on *Coffee Time with Peter Gomez* on West Coast Radio².” We have also noted increasingly vociferous and hostile rhetoric online between supporters of the UDP and UMC, marked by exchanges of derogatory remarks, personal attacks, and inflammatory language.

Overall, EFSCRJ has documented rhetoric from both sides of the political divide that portrays political opponents as undesirable elements, enemies, threats, unpatriotic, dangerous, or otherwise unworthy of respect and legitimate participation in the political process. Such rhetoric risks shifting political competition away from contestation over policies, ideas and leadership towards personal vilification, hostility, and the dehumanization of opponents.

Multiparty democracy and freedom of expression necessarily permit robust criticism, strong political language, satire, and vigorous disagreement. However, these freedoms must be exercised within the law and democratic norms and should not become a licence for speech that promotes discrimination, alienation, political polarization, hostility, or violence. Political actors must recognise that persistent demonization and degrading characterization of opponents can create an environment in which intolerance and political violence become increasingly acceptable.



The current tone of political engagement therefore presents early warning signs that require sustained monitoring and timely intervention. Political leaders, in particular, carry a heightened responsibility because their words influence the conduct of their supporters and the wider political environment. EFSCRJ therefore urges all political leaders, candidates, party officials and supporters to promote issue-based political discourse, respect the dignity and rights of their opponents, condemn abusive rhetoric from their own ranks, and contribute to a political environment in which disagreement does not translate into enmity or violence.

Assessment

Status: High Concern

² Speaking on ‘Coffee Time with Peter Gomez’ on July 22, Dr. Ceesay described Cham in such derogatory terms: <https://www.facebook.com/Kerrfatou/videos/did-dr-ismaila-ceesay-call-mc-cham-jr-a-puppy/1032284922877253/>

4. MONEY IN POLITICS

One notable feature of the emerging political landscape is the increasing visibility of campaign resources. Political parties have begun displaying expensive fleets of vehicles, motorcycles, campaign offices, promotional materials, branded clothing, public rallies, and logistical support.

In particular, EFSCRJ notes that the NPP, UDP, UNITE and NDP are among the leading political parties and movements acquiring and displaying luxury vehicles and other expensive campaign materials and resources. Yet, there is little or no public disclosure regarding the sources of these funds, the identities of major donors, or the amounts being spent on such acquisitions and campaign activities. This lack of financial transparency raises serious concerns about the growing influence of money in politics, potential undisclosed interests behind political financing, and the implications for a level electoral playing field, political accountability, and the overall integrity of the 2026 elections.

While the Elections Act requires political parties to disclose their income, assets, and sources of funding to the IEC, as well as submit their audited accounts, these requirements appear to be inadequately enforced, while information submitted to the Commission is not routinely made available to the public.

Furthermore, although the law prohibits political parties from receiving funds or other assistance from non-Gambian persons or entities, there remains limited transparency and public accountability around political party financing. Without effective enforcement, disclosure and scrutiny, these legal safeguards risk becoming merely procedural requirements, leaving significant room for undisclosed financing, undue influence and potential violations that could undermine the integrity and fairness of the electoral process.



Assessment

Status: Serious Structural Concern

Vehicles and Motorbikes Belonging to Various Political Parties



5. SELECTIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT

EFSCRJ continues to observe concerns regarding equal application of the law in politically sensitive matters.

Opposition politicians have on several occasions been investigated or arrested over allegations relating to insulting language, inflammatory statements, or other issues. Among these include the arrest of UDP's Borry Touray³ in December 2025 and Muhammed Raney, a German associate of NDP's Kebba Madi Bojang⁴ leading to a physical encounter with immigration officers in June 2026, as well as the arrest of Fanding Baldeh in August 2026⁵.

Meanwhile, ruling party officials and supporters have made comparable public statements⁶ or engaged in tribal politics⁷ without similar law enforcement responses. Justice requires that the law be applied equally to all citizens regardless of political affiliation. Any perception of selective policing undermines public confidence in law enforcement agencies and weakens electoral credibility.



**Kebba Madi Bojang knocked
on the ground by GID officers**

Assessment

Status: High Concern

5. PUBLIC MEDIA COVERAGE

EFSCRJ remains concerned about the role of the Gambia Radio and Television Services (GRTS) Observations indicate that GRTS continues to provide extensive coverage of government activities involving President Barrow while also broadcasting National People's Party events, including live coverage of party rallies⁸.

Opposition political parties have not enjoyed equivalent opportunities on the national broadcaster.

³ Standard Newspaper, UDP's Lawyer Borry Touray charged with incitement to violence December 5, 2025, <https://standard.gm/udps-lawyer-borry-touray-charged-with-incitement-to-violence/>

⁴ Kerr Fatou, NDP Leader Kebba Madi Not Arrested, His Friend Detained, Jun 26, 2026, <https://www.kerrfatou.com/ndp-leader-kebba-madi-not-arrested-his-friend-detained/>

⁵ Kerr Fatou, Former NPP West Coast Executive Fanding Baldeh Arrested at Brikama Home, 8th August 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/Koragambia/posts/former-npp-west-coast-executive-fanding-baldeh-arrested-at-brikama-homeformer-na/1605061154312592/>

⁶ The Alkamba Times, UDP Condemns Minister Sabally's "Shed Blood" Remark as Threat to Gambia's Democracy, June 25, 2025, <https://alkambatimes.com/udp-condemns-minister-saballys-shed-blood-remark-as-threat-to-gambias-democracy/>

⁷ The Point, PPP demands action over Seedy Njie audio, warns against tribal politics May 11, 2026, <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/ppp-demands-action-over-seedy-njie-audio-warns-against-tribal-politics>

⁸ GRTS, President Barrow Presents Vehicles To NPP-Led Grand Coalition Partners Ahead Of December Poll, National News, July 26, 2026, <https://www.grts.gm/news-article-details/news/president-barrow-presents-vehicles-to-npp-led-grand-coalition-partners-ahead-of-december-poll>

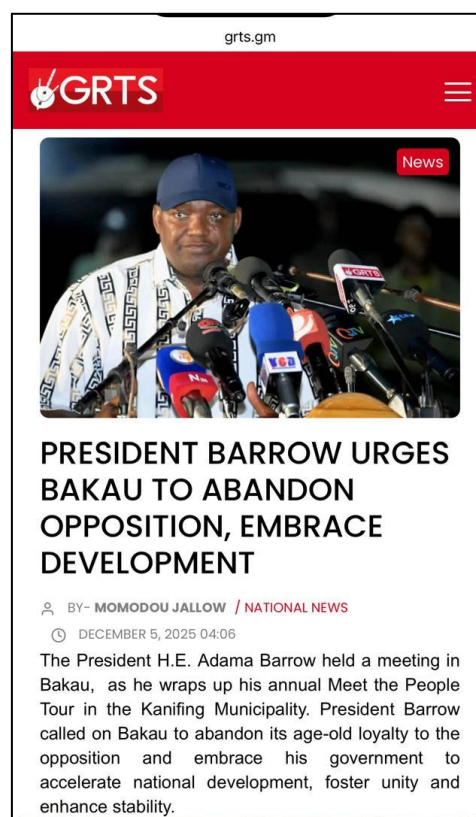
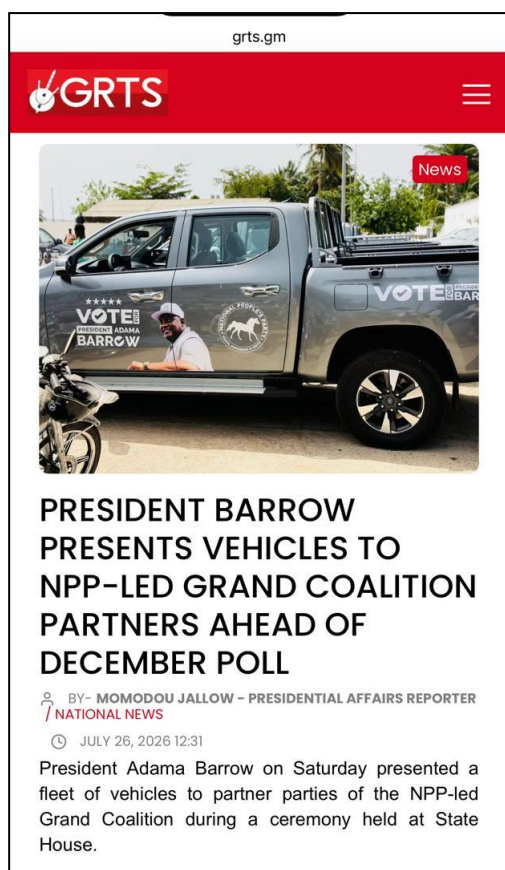
As a publicly funded institution, GRTS has an obligation to provide fair, balanced, and impartial coverage of all political actors. Section 208 of the 1997 Constitution provides that state-owned media, including GRTS television and radio to “*afford fair opportunities and facilities for the presentation of divergent and dissenting opinions.*”

Public broadcasting should never become an extension of partisan political communication.

Assessment

Status: High Concern

Evidence of GRTS exclusive coverage of NPP activities



6. EMERGENCE OF ASPIRANTS AND COALITION BUILDING

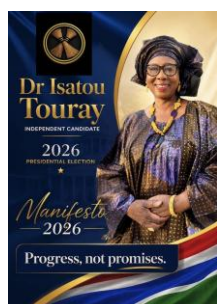
EFSCRJ has observed an increasing number of political parties, movements and presidential aspirants entering the electoral space, including female aspirants. Notable among them are former Vice Presidents Dr. Isatou Touray and Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, as well as Marie Sock of Alliance of Social Democrats. The emergence of women seeking the highest political office is a positive development for political inclusion and provides an opportunity to challenge the longstanding underrepresentation of women in Gambian political leadership.

Alongside the growing number of electoral actors, EFSCRJ has observed intensified efforts at coalition building, facilitated through independent mediation initiatives as well as party-led platforms. These include the Coalition Mediation Committee (CMC), an independent group of mediators that has identified UNITE leader and KMC Mayor Talib Ahmed Bensouda as its flagbearer. The UDP is similarly positioned to lead an alliance of political parties and movements. The APeX Initiative, another independent volunteer mediation platform, facilitated approximately 18 months of cross-party dialogue that culminated in the formation of the CHANGE Coalition – Coalition for Hope, Accountability, National Renewal, Good Governance and Equity, which is yet to select a flagbearer. The People’s Alliance for Change (PAC) has also emerged as a coordination platform, with no flagbearer identified so far.



Notwithstanding these developments, EFSCRJ notes with concern the near absence of women from the major coalition-building and leadership negotiations. This situation only began to change more visibly with former Vice President Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang suspending her individual presidential bid to support coalition-building efforts. The limited presence of women aspirants, coupled with their marginal participation in negotiations where political alliances, leadership and candidacies are being determined, reflects the deeply male-dominated character of Gambian politics.

Since independence, only three women have publicly expressed an intention to contest the presidency of The Gambia: Dr. Isatou Touray, who emerged as presidential aspirant in 2016, Marie Sock in 2021 and 2026, and Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang in 2026 and then withdrew. This extremely limited representation underscores the persistent gender imbalance in presidential politics, and the significant barriers women continue to face in accessing the highest levels of political leadership in The Gambia.



EFSCRJ considers this not merely a question of the number of women contesting elections, but a broader issue of equal political participation, representation, and influence in political decision-making. Political parties, movements, and coalition platforms must therefore deliberately ensure that women are not merely mobilized as voters and supporters but are meaningfully represented at the negotiating table, in leadership structures, in candidate-selection processes and ultimately in elective positions. An electoral process cannot claim to be fully inclusive when half of the population remains significantly underrepresented in the spaces where political power is negotiated and determined.

7. VOTER REGISTRATION AND INTEGRITY OF THE VOTERS' REGISTER

The 2026 Supplementary Voter Registration Exercise constituted one of the most important milestones towards the December 2026 Presidential Election. The exercise was conducted nationwide by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) from 8 April to 24 May 2026, targeting eligible Gambians who were not registered during the 2021 general registration exercise, including citizens who had subsequently attained voting age. According to figures subsequently announced by the IEC Chair, 212,095 people were registered, comprising 115,504 females and 96,581 males.

EFSCRJ welcomes the opportunity provided to eligible citizens to register and participate in choosing their representatives. The relatively high number of new registrants is significant and demonstrates continuing public interest in electoral participation.

However, the exercise also raised serious concerns about the integrity of the voters' register, particularly reports of thousands of multiple registrations, complaints of missing names during the display of the provisional register, and continuing concerns over the use of attestation by Alkalolu and Seyfolu as proof of citizenship. These issues require thorough verification and transparent resolution before the final register is certified.



EFSCRJ therefore urges the IEC to ensure that the revision, adjudication, and sanitization of the voters' register are conducted transparently and that all legitimate omissions, duplications and objections are properly resolved. The IEC should publish comprehensive statistics on the final register, including new registrations, duplicates identified and removed, and other adjustments, while providing political parties, civil society, and election observers reasonable opportunities to scrutinize the process.

The integrity of an election begins with the integrity of the voters' register: every eligible Gambian must be able to register and vote, while no person should be registered or vote more than once and no ineligible person should be admitted onto the register. Resolving these concerns well before polling day is essential to maintaining public confidence and preventing disputes that could undermine the credibility and peaceful conduct of the election.

Assessment

Status: High Concern – Requires Corrective Action and Continued Monitoring

8. PERFORMANCE OF THE INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

EFSCRJ acknowledges that the IEC has continued preparations for the electoral process. However, concerns remain regarding its visibility and effectiveness in enforcing electoral standards during the early stages of political campaigning.

The Commission should not limit its role to organizing registration, nomination of candidates, and polling day. Rather, it should actively monitor political rhetoric, abuse of incumbency, compliance with electoral laws, campaign conduct, political advertising, and media fairness.

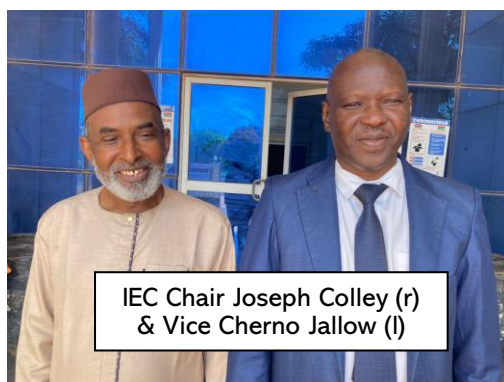
While EFSCRJ has observed numerous instances of electoral malpractice and conduct of concern by political actors, our monitoring has found little to no evidence of proactive intervention by the IEC to hold political parties, their leaders and supporters accountable for rhetoric and activities that may undermine electoral laws, democratic norms and the integrity of the electoral process.

For example, the increasing influence and visibility of money in politics demands greater transparency, scrutiny, and accountability from the IEC, particularly regarding political party financing, sources of funding and compliance with statutory financial reporting requirements. Yet, such proactive oversight and public disclosure have not been forthcoming. Similarly, incendiary rhetoric, hate speech, tribal politics and dangerous speech are increasingly evident within the political space, without visible and decisive action from the IEC to address these trends. EFSCRJ therefore urges the Commission to exercise its mandate more proactively, consistently, and transparently to ensure compliance, deter malpractice and protect the credibility of the 2026 electoral process.

Preventive enforcement is more effective than responding after violations have already occurred.

Assessment

Status: Requires Greater Proactive Engagement



9. POSITIVE POLITICAL PRACTICES

EFSCRJ acknowledges and commends the PPP for issuing a memorandum in July 2025 urging all its members to refrain from the politics of insults and violence. By calling on its members to uphold the principles and values of the party and focus on issue-based political engagement and discourse, the PPP has set an important standard for responsible political conduct that other parties should emulate.

EFSCRJ therefore urges all political parties to not only adopt this good practice, but also establish effective internal policies, codes of conduct and accountability mechanisms to monitor, detect, document, address and prevent derogatory, inflammatory and divisive rhetoric, including hate speech and dangerous speech, by their leaders, officials, members and supporters. Parties must take responsibility for the conduct of their members by promptly investigating violations, applying appropriate disciplinary or corrective measures, and publicly disclosing the actions taken. Political parties cannot credibly demand accountability from state institutions while failing to enforce democratic standards and accountability within their own ranks.



10. OVERALL RISK ASSESSMENT

EFSCRJ assesses the emerging 2026 electoral environment as competitive and increasingly active but marked by significant risks to electoral integrity and a level playing field. While the proliferation of political parties, movements, aspirants and coalition-building efforts demonstrates growing political participation, serious concerns persist regarding inflammatory and divisive rhetoric, the growing influence and opacity of money in politics, abuse of incumbency and state resources, unequal access to public media, selective law enforcement, limited participation of women, and inadequate proactive enforcement by the IEC. These trends require urgent corrective action by all electoral stakeholders to prevent further deterioration of the political environment and ensure that the 2026 elections are free, fair, transparent, inclusive, peaceful, and credible.

Issue	Risk Level
Abuse of incumbency	High
Neutrality of Chiefs and Alkalolu	High
Unequal media coverage	High
Selective law enforcement	High
Campaign finance transparency	High
Political rhetoric	High
Electoral violence	Moderate
IEC enforcement	Low

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the President and the Government

- Publicly reaffirm commitment to free and fair elections.
- Ensure that Chiefs and Alkalolu remain politically neutral.
- Prevent the use of public resources for partisan political purposes.
- Ensure equal treatment of all political parties by state institutions.

To Political Parties

- Conduct issue-based campaigns.
- Reject hate speech, tribalism, derogatory and inflammatory rhetoric.
- Promote peaceful political competition.
- Uphold the Inter-Party Committee's MOU and Code of Conduct.
- Voluntarily disclose campaign financing and major political donations.

To the Inter-Party Committee

- Monitor political parties.
- Enforce the IPC's MOU and Code of Conduct.
- Publish monitoring and accountability measures and decisions.

To the IEC

- Strengthen monitoring of political activities.
- Publicly enforce compliance with electoral laws.
- Issue timely directives where violations occur.
- Establish a transparent complaints and reporting mechanism.

To the Gambia Police Force

- Apply the law impartially.
- Protect the constitutional rights of all political actors equally.

To GRTS

- Ensure equal access to the national broadcaster.
- Provide balanced political coverage.
- Separate government news from partisan political programming.

To Civil Society

- Intensify independent election observation.
- Document electoral violations.
- Conduct civic and voter education.
- Promote peaceful participation throughout the electoral period.

To Citizens

- Reject violence, tribalism, vote buying and all forms electoral malpractices.
- Verify political information before sharing.
- Report electoral malpractices.
- Vote peacefully and responsibly.

12. CONCLUSION

The pre-election environment presents both opportunities and challenges for Gambian democracy. While political participation has expanded and parties have begun engaging citizens across the country, early warning signs of abuse of incumbency, unequal access to public resources, selective enforcement of the law, growing influence of money in politics, and partisan use of state institutions threaten to undermine electoral integrity if left unchecked.

The credibility of the 2026 Presidential Election will depend not only on the conduct of polling day but also on the fairness of the entire electoral process. Democratic elections require a level playing field, impartial institutions, responsible political leadership, and informed citizen participation. Every violation that goes unaddressed today increases the likelihood of electoral disputes tomorrow.

Through our Election Watch Initiative, EFSCRJ will continue to independently monitor the political environment, document violations and positive practices, engage relevant authorities, and provide periodic public status reports. Our objective is not to favour or oppose any political party or candidate, but to ensure that every stakeholder complies with the Constitution, the Elections Act, and democratic norms so that the sovereign will of the Gambian people is freely and fairly expressed. The time to safeguard electoral integrity is now and not after the ballots have been cast.

3. Language

A party that has subscribed to this code will:

- i. Organize and conduct its activities, at all times, in a manner that contributes to a congenial and peaceful atmosphere;
- ii. Avoid using inflammatory or defamatory language;
- iii. Not in any way threaten or incite violence, in any form, against any person or groups of persons.
- iv. Will not issue, either officially or anonymously, pamphlets, newsletters or posters containing language or material that threatens or incites disorderly conduct or violence.

Section 3 of the Code of Conduct of the Inter-Party Committee MoU



SUPPORT EFSCRJ

Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice hereby solicits support to advance the struggle and attainment of human rights, justice, and accountable governance in The Gambia.

Your contribution empowers citizens to demand accountability, defend democratic values, promote equality, and safeguard the Republic for the good of all. At EFSCRJ, we believe that sustainable development, shared prosperity, peace, and dignity can only be achieved through informed, organized, and empowered citizens holding leadership and institutions to account.

We rely primarily on Gambian citizens at home and in the diaspora to enable us to fulfil our sovereign rights and civic duty to strengthen good governance and protect our democracy.

By supporting EFSCRJ, you directly advance **freedom, equality, transparency, accountability, and justice for all**, and help build the Gambia we deserve.

All donations are accepted and managed in line with EFSCRJ's **Gift Policy** (attached), which guarantees independence, integrity, transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination in all our work.

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- In-kind support (equipment, services, venues, expertise)
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Why Your Support Matters

- ✓ Strengthens citizen empowerment and civic participation
- ✓ Promotes human rights, rule of law, and accountability
- ✓ Supports anti-corruption and transparency advocacy
- ✓ Advances inclusive, peaceful, and democratic development

Your Support Advances Freedom, Equality, and Justice For All for a Better Gambia.

www.efscrj.org

OUR ULTIMATE GOAL

A Gambia where citizens actively shape governance, institutions uphold justice, and human rights are universally protected.