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**EFSCRJ's Concerns on
Threats to Civic Space and Attacks on Civil Society and the Media**

The Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice expresses deep concern over the continuing attacks, threats, misrepresentation, and intimidation directed at civil society organizations and the media in The Gambia, and the resulting threat to the country's civic space.

We are particularly concerned by the latest attacks directed at the Executive Director of Gambia Participates, Marr Nyang, and the organization following the publication of its election opinion poll on 21st August 2026. Since the release of the poll, we have observed mischaracterization, insults, and allegations directed at Gambia Participates and its leadership by some government officials, politicians, political parties, and their supporters.

EFSCRJ fully supports the right of every individual, institution and political actor to scrutinize, question and criticize the findings, methodology and conclusions of any opinion poll. No organization or individual is above scrutiny, and freedom of opinion and expression protects the right to disagree. However, legitimate criticism must not degenerate into personal attacks, insults, intimidation or attempts to impugn the integrity, reputation, dignity or the very existence of civil society organizations and the individuals who lead them.

Such attacks are not isolated incidents. Since 2017, civil society organizations and the media have repeatedly faced hostility and attempts to discredit them because of their work. When such conduct becomes normalized, it creates a climate of fear and intimidation that can discourage organizations, journalists, researchers, and citizens from speaking out, conducting research, or holding public institutions and political actors accountable.

Civil society and the media are indispensable pillars of civic space. Civic space is the open environment in which citizens, communities, civil society organizations, the media, businesses, and other non-state actors can freely organize, express themselves, participate in public affairs and hold power to account. A free and open civic space is therefore essential not only for the enjoyment of fundamental rights but also for democratic participation, institutional accountability, and national development.

Opinion polling is an important and legitimate feature of democratic societies. It provides timely information about public perceptions of government, political parties, institutions, public services, and other matters of national interest. Such information can contribute to public debate, improve decision-making, and enable citizens and institutions to better understand the society they serve.

Disagreement with the findings of a poll is entirely legitimate. Attacking the credibility or character of those who conducted it is not. Political parties and governments have every right to challenge methodology, question sampling, present alternative evidence and demonstrate why they believe findings are inaccurate. What is unacceptable is to automatically attribute ulterior motives, dishonesty or bad faith to researchers and civil society organizations simply because their findings are inconvenient or politically unfavourable.



EFSCRJ is particularly concerned that this pattern has occurred repeatedly in The Gambia. At various times, government officials, political parties, and their supporters have responded to national and international surveys by organizing press conferences, issuing statements, and granting media interviews aimed not merely at contesting the findings but at discrediting the organizations and individuals behind them. This is an unhealthy and undemocratic approach to public discourse and poses a direct threat to civic space.

A democratic government and political parties should welcome evidence, engage with research, and encourage citizens to examine competing claims. Where research is flawed, the appropriate response is evidence-based rebuttal, not intimidation or vilification. The answer to research one dislikes is more research and not attacks on researchers.

EFSCRJ therefore calls on:

1. **The Government, political parties, and their supporters** to refrain from unwarranted attacks, insults, intimidation and smear campaigns against civil society organizations, researchers, and the media.
2. **Government officials and political actors** to challenge opinion polls and research through evidence, reasoned debate, and transparent scrutiny of methodology rather than personal attacks or allegations of ulterior motives.
3. **The Government** to recognize its particular responsibility to protect and expand civic space, including by ensuring that civil society organizations, researchers and the media can operate freely and without intimidation.
4. **Civil society organizations, researchers, and the media** to continue exercising their legitimate roles as watchdogs, knowledge producers, and platforms for public participation, while maintaining professional standards, methodological integrity, and accountability.

EFSCRJ stands in full solidarity with Gambia Participates and its Executive Director, Marr Nyang, and with all civil society organizations, researchers and media practitioners who face intimidation or attacks for carrying out legitimate public-interest work.

We encourage Gambia Participates and all other research organizations and institutions to continue conducting opinion polls, surveys and research that expand knowledge, inform public debate, improve governance and decision-making, strengthen accountability, and contribute to national development.

The Gambia does not need a narrower civic space. It needs a stronger one. Democracy is not protected by silencing uncomfortable findings, rather it is strengthened when evidence can be produced, questioned, debated, and freely contested. EFSCRJ remains committed to defending that space.

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