

STATUS REPORT



Pre-Election Political Environment Assessment Report No. 2

*Political Conduct, Hate Speech, Abuse of Incumbency and Electoral Integrity
Ahead of the December 2026 Presidential Election*



Picture Credit: Youth Journalism Initiative/Banna Sabally

September 2026

Status Report on December 2026 Presidential Election

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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Abbreviation

Acronym	Full Name
APEX	Alliance for Political and Electoral Transformation
APP-Sobeyaa	All People's Party – Sobeyaa
EFSCRJ	Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice
GDC	Gambia Democratic Congress
GFA	Gambia For All
GMC	Gambia Moral Congress
GMP	Gambia Movement for Progress
GRTS	Gambia Radio and Television Services
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)
IPC	Inter-Party Committee
NAM	National Assembly Member
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NPP	National People's Party
NRP	National Reconciliation Party
NUP	National Unity Party
UDP	United Democratic Party
UNITE	Unite Movement for Change

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Disclaimer

All information, including photographs and other visual materials, presented in this report has been obtained from publicly accessible sources, including government publications, official statements, political party reports and communications, mainstream and online media, social media platforms, civil society publications, and other relevant sources.

EFSCRJ has compiled, reviewed, and analyzed this information in good faith for the purposes of independent election monitoring, civic education, public accountability, and the promotion of free, fair, transparent, inclusive, and peaceful elections. The assessments, observations and recommendations contained in this report reflect EFSCRJ's independent analysis of the information available at the time of publication.

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INTRODUCTION

The Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice, through its **Election Watch Initiative**, presents its second Pre-Election Assessment Report ahead of the December 2026 Presidential Election. The first assessment, released in August 2026, identified several emerging threats to electoral integrity, including hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric, abuse of incumbency, concerns about political and campaign financing, unequal treatment of political actors, and the need for stronger enforcement of electoral laws and democratic standards.

This second assessment comes at a critical stage of the electoral process, as presidential nominations approach and the country prepares for the commencement of the official campaign period announced by the IEC. Since August, political activities have intensified considerably. New coalitions and alliances have emerged, parties are holding rallies and community engagements across the country, diaspora fundraising has increased, and political rhetoric has become more confrontational.

Of particular concern to EFSCRJ is the persistence and escalation of hate speech, ethnic and tribal rhetoric, xenophobic narratives, disinformation, and inflammatory political speech. While such conduct is not confined to a single political actor, EFSCRJ has observed particularly concerning examples emanating from figures associated with the ruling NPP and its alliance during recent political activities. Earlier in the electoral period, EFSCRJ also raised concerns about election-related rhetoric attributed to influential religious figures, including Imam Baba Leigh, a member of the National Human Rights Commission, and Imam Daru Sanyang.

EFSCRJ is further concerned about the transformation of President Adama Barrow's constitutionally mandated nationwide tour into what appears, in substantial part, to be a campaign platform for his re-election. The presence of NPP campaign paraphernalia, political speeches canvassing votes, party leaders and supporters, campaign vehicles and musicians promoting the President's candidacy raises serious questions about the distinction between official presidential functions financed by the State and partisan political campaigning.



The continued absence of publicly announced enforcement action by the IEC and IPC against political actors responsible for inflammatory rhetoric is equally concerning. Electoral violence rarely begins on polling day. It can develop gradually through the normalization of hatred, misinformation, exclusionary rhetoric and the portrayal of political opponents or communities as threats.

EFSCRJ therefore considers the present period a critical early-warning stage. Immediate action by political parties, the IEC, IPC, law enforcement agencies, public institutions, civil society,

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religious leaders, and the media is necessary to prevent further deterioration of political discourse and to safeguard peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections.

EFSCRJ calls on all electoral stakeholders – political parties, candidates, public officials, state institutions, the media, religious and community leaders, civil society, and citizens – to act collectively to ensure zero tolerance for hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, electoral violence, and deliberate disinformation. The warning signs documented in this report must be addressed now, not on election day and certainly not after violence has occurred.

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT

EFSCRJ Election Watch released its first Pre-Election Assessment Report in August 2026, highlighting concerns ranging from hate speech and abuse of incumbency to campaign financing, media fairness, and institutional accountability.

The Election Watch Initiative monitors the statements, decisions, actions and activities of political parties, politicians, state institutions, and other electoral stakeholders to assess their compliance with the Constitution, electoral laws and established democratic norms and standards.

This second assessment focuses particularly on developments since August, including:

- political coalitions and shifting alliances;
- campaign and fundraising activities;
- hate speech, tribal, and xenophobic rhetoric;
- misinformation and disinformation;
- abuse of incumbency and public resources;
- the President's nationwide tour;
- institutional responses to electoral misconduct; and
- initiatives to promote peaceful elections.

The purpose is not to favour or oppose any candidate or political party. EFSCRJ seeks to contribute to an electoral environment in which political competition is conducted peacefully, transparently and in accordance with the law.

2. Political Landscape: Growing Coalitions and Shifting Alliances

Political activity has intensified significantly since the first EFSCRJ assessment. Several coalitions and alliances have emerged within both the opposition and ruling party camps. Among the opposition formations are Gambia First, led by UDP leader Ousainou Darboe, and Coalition 2026, led by UNITE's Talib Bensouda. UNITE has also entered an alliance with the NUP, while the UDP has forged an additional alliance with GFA. Other coalition-building initiatives include Team Gambia, associated with Halifa Sallah and Sidia Jatta, and APEX, which are still under negotiation as the time of compiling this report.



Within the ruling camp, the NPP entered the present electoral cycle with alliances developed during previous elections and has subsequently forged additional agreements with the GDC led by Mamma Kandeh, APP-Sobeyaa led by Essa Faal, and GMP led by Professor Sidat Yaffa. Taken together, the NPP currently commands the largest collection of political parties within its various alliances.

The evolving political landscape has also been characterized by a series of withdrawals, defections and realignments among political parties and movements. These developments illustrate the fluidity of political alliances and the continuing realignment of political forces ahead of the December presidential election.

While political parties and movements have the democratic right to enter or withdraw from alliances, such decisions should be accompanied by clear public explanations, particularly where parties abandon previously declared political positions or commitments. Coalition agreements, withdrawal decisions, and new alliances should be publicly disclosed and explained to enable citizens to assess their consistency with democratic principles, political accountability, and the national interest.

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Dates of Coalition Withdrawals and Political Realignments Ahead of the 2026 Election

Political party / movement	Date	Development
UDP – Ousainou Darboe	28 July 2026	Formally withdrew from Coalition 2026 negotiations, citing concerns about the coalition model, constitutional accountability, candidate selection, and power-sharing arrangements.
APP-Sobeyaa – Essa Faal	8 August 2026	Withdrew from the Coalition 2026 flagbearer selection process.
APP-Sobeyaa – Essa Faal	6 September 2026	Announced withdrawal from APeX coalition negotiations, citing disagreements over power-sharing arrangements and failure to reach consensus.
APP-Sobeyaa – Essa Faal	21 September 2026	Announced that an agreement had been reached with the ruling NPP, subject to further formalization.
APP-Sobeyaa – Essa Faal	27 September 2026	Formally entered an alliance with the NPP at State House, Banjul.
GMP – Prof. Sidat Yaffa	24 September 2026	Effective date of withdrawal from Coalition 2026, citing alleged breaches of coalition agreements and internal decision-making concerns. The withdrawal became public on 29 September.
GMP – Prof. Sidat Yaffa	29 September 2026	Formally signed an alliance agreement with the NPP at State House, Banjul.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Fluid and Highly Competitive

EFSCRJ considers the political landscape highly fluid and increasingly unpredictable. Coalition-building is a legitimate feature of multiparty democracy. However, political alliances should be founded on clearly articulated programs, principles, and commitments to the public rather than merely electoral arithmetic or access to political power.

EFSCRJ reiterates its call for coalition agreements to be published so that voters can understand the policy commitments, governance arrangements and other undertakings made between parties seeking their mandate.



Essa Faal joins Barrow



Sidat Yaffa joins Barrow

3. INTENSIFICATION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND DIASPORA FUNDRAISING

Political parties and movements are undertaking rallies, community meetings, and other political engagements throughout the country. The diaspora has also become an increasingly important arena for political mobilization and fundraising.

At the time of preparing this report, UDP leader Ousainou Darboe was undertaking engagements in Europe with party supporters, including fundraising activities. EFSCRJ also notes that during the period of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, First Lady Fatou Bah-Barrow reportedly led a fundraising activity attended by several government ministers.

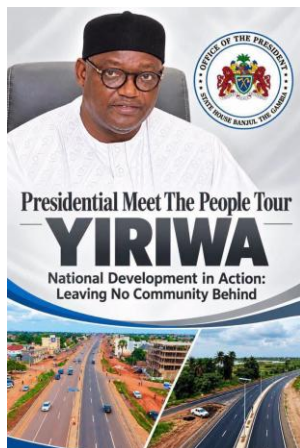
EFSCRJ Assessment: Campaign Finance Transparency Remains a Major Gap

Political fundraising is legitimate. However, the growing scale of fundraising and campaign expenditure reinforces concerns identified in our first assessment about money in politics and the absence of adequate campaign-finance transparency.

Political parties should voluntarily disclose major donations, fundraising proceeds, and significant campaign expenditure. Where ministers and other public officials participate in partisan fundraising activities, a clear distinction must be maintained between their public offices and their activities as party members.

The absence of an effective campaign-finance framework creates a major accountability gap and limits citizens' ability to determine who finances political parties and candidates and what interests may be attached to such funding.

4. THE PRESIDENTIAL NATIONWIDE TOUR AND ABUSE OF INCUMBENCY



On 1 October 2026, President Adama Barrow commenced a nationwide tour expected to last 18 days, beginning in the North Bank Region. The President has presented the tour as fulfilling Section 222(15) of the Constitution, which provides that:

"The President shall undertake a nation-wide tour at least twice a year in order to familiarize himself or herself with current conditions and the effect of government policies."

EFSCRJ Election Watch has monitored meetings held during the tour and is concerned that what is constitutionally intended as an official presidential exercise has also been transformed into a campaign platform for President Barrow's bid for another term.

At various meetings, the President, ministers, parliamentarians, and other speakers have openly canvassed support for his re-election. The events have featured large numbers of NPP supporters

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and alliance leaders as well as party vehicles, clothing, banners, and other electoral paraphernalia. Musicians and speakers have similarly promoted the President's re-election.

EFSCRJ Assessment: High Concern – Blurring State and Party

The Constitution provides a specific public purpose for the nationwide tour: enabling the President to familiarize himself with conditions in the country and assess the effects of government policies. Where a publicly financed constitutional exercise becomes a partisan campaign platform, the distinction between the State, the presidency and the ruling party becomes blurred.



This raises serious questions of abuse of incumbency, misuse of public resources and equality of opportunity between contestants. If an official presidential tour is financed by taxpayers, it must remain an official government activity. Where an event becomes partisan campaigning, the associated political costs should not be borne by the taxpayer.

5. ESCALATING HATE SPEECH, TRIBAL RHETORIC AND DISINFORMATION

EFSCRJ identified dangerous political rhetoric as an emerging concern in its August assessment. Rather than subsiding, this trend has persisted and, in some cases, intensified.

Earlier incidents included election-related statements attributed to religious figures such as Imam Baba Leigh and Imam Daru Sanyang. The intervention of religious leaders in electoral politics requires particular responsibility because of the authority and influence they exercise over their congregations and communities.

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More recently, EFSCRJ Election Watch has documented several instances of rhetoric involving ethnicity, origin, political affiliation, and allegations unsupported by publicly presented evidence.

EFSCRJ Assessment: High and Escalating Risk

The combination of competitive elections, ethnic rhetoric, disinformation, and political mobilization represents a significant early-warning indicator. Political disagreement must never be transformed into hostility between ethnic groups, regions, religions, or communities.

There must be zero tolerance for hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, dangerous speech, and deliberate disinformation, regardless of the political affiliation or status of the perpetrator.

EFSCRJ monitored and flagged four major cases involving senior government and NPP officials.

i. Hamat Bah's Remarks in Farafenni



At the NPP Alliance rally in Farafenni on 26 September 2026, Lands Minister and NRP leader Hamat Bah made statements concerning the UDP and an apparent indirect reference to UNITE leader Talib Bensouda that EFSCRJ considers highly concerning. Mr. Bah alleged that the UDP was targeting Wolof and Fula registrants through objections before the Revising Courts. He further claimed that a UDP government would remove civil servants and replace them with Gambians from the diaspora. He also stated that Lebanon would not own The Gambia and that no foreigner would rule the country, remarks widely understood in the prevailing political context as a reference to Talib Bensouda, who has himself been subjected to rhetoric questioning his origins. No evidence supporting these serious allegations was presented during the speech.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Dangerous and Divisive Rhetoric

Invoking ethnicity or ancestry to delegitimize political opponents is incompatible with democratic political competition. Equally, alleging that an opposition party intends to target particular ethnic groups without substantiating such a claim risks generating fear and resentment between communities.

Candidates must be judged by their eligibility, policies, competence, and conduct, not by stereotypes or insinuations concerning ancestry or ethnicity.



ii. Sainey Jawara: Ethnic Rhetoric and Attacks on Protesters

EFSCRJ Election Watch also monitored remarks by Lower Saloum National Assembly Member Sainey Jawara. At the 'Meet the People' tour rally in Kaur Wharf Town on 3 October 2026, Mr. Jawara reinforced allegations concerning UDP objections to voter registrations before the Revising

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Courts and went further to make derogatory generalizations involving the Mandinka and foreigners including Lebanon.

He also attacked young people who participated in protests against electricity blackouts, portraying them as criminals seeking to destroy the country. In highly confrontational language, he urged members of the NPP alliance not to fear anyone. Again, no evidence was presented to substantiate the most serious allegations.

The day after, October 4, Mr. Jawara issued a public apology for his irresponsible and inflammatory comments.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Inflammatory and Irresponsible

Citizens who exercise their constitutional rights to peaceful assembly, expression and protest should not be collectively criminalised because their actions challenge the Government. Similarly, attributing negative political behaviour to an entire ethnic group is dangerous and inconsistent with the responsibility of elected representatives to promote national cohesion.

iii. Maimuna Ceesay and Derogatory Remarks About Communities



EFSCRJ Election Watch has also reviewed a campaign video involving nominated National Assembly Member Maimuna Ceesay, in which she made sweeping remarks concerning the people of Banjul, Kiang and Badibu at an NPP rally in Badibu.

Her remarks portrayed Banjulians as people who take ownership of government, use it to educate their children and secure important government positions, while contrasting them with people from Kiang and Badibu whom she characterized as engaging in insults and consequently failing to benefit from the country.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Divisive and Unbecoming of a National Representative

Such generalizations are derogatory to the communities concerned and risk fomenting resentment between Gambians based on geography and communal identity. National Assembly Members have a particular responsibility to represent the national interest and promote cohesion. Political mobilization should never depend on degrading one community to elevate another.

iv. Mai Ahmad Fatty: Inflammatory and Exclusionary Political Rhetoric at Taibatu

EFSCRJ Election Watch monitored inflammatory and exclusionary remarks made by Mai Ahmad Fatty, leader of the Gambia Moral Congress and member of the NPP alliance, during President Barrow's Meet the People tour at Taibatu in Wuli. Mr. Fatty warned citizens to “be careful” of the UDP, describing the legally registered opposition party as carrying a “baggage of regrets and mayhem.” He further urged citizens not to attend opposition meetings, listen to

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opposition politicians, welcome or host them, or accord them respect and honour, alleging that they do not wish peace for the country.

EFSCRJ Assessment: High Concern – Political Intolerance and Exclusionary Rhetoric



EFSCRJ considers these remarks inflammatory, undemocratic, and incompatible with political pluralism and the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, and political participation. Encouraging citizens to ostracize legally registered political parties undermines their right to campaign freely and voters' right to receive information from competing political actors. Such rhetoric risks fostering political hostility, intolerance, and intimidation, particularly during a sensitive electoral period. EFSCRJ calls on Mr. Fatty to retract his remarks and urges the NPP leadership, IEC, and IPC to condemn exclusionary political rhetoric and uphold the right of every political party to engage voters without obstruction or intimidation.

v. The President's Responsibility to Restrain Divisive Rhetoric

EFSCRJ is particularly concerned that the remarks by Hamat Bah and Sainey Jawara were made in the presence of President Barrow.



The President did not publicly correct or distance himself from these statements at the meetings monitored. Instead, in his own remarks at a rally in Passy Chally in the Lower Niumi District on October 2, President Barrow invoked religion in arguing that leaders should come from among people who know their communities. This is a veiled reference to origin and foreignness seeking to alienate opponents thereby entrenching a politics of division.

In the context immediately created by preceding statements concerning ethnicity, foreign origin and political opponents, such remarks risk reinforcing rather than de-escalating exclusionary narratives.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Leadership Requires De-escalation

The President carries a special responsibility as Head of State and a presidential candidate. He is not only the leader of a political party or alliance but President of all Gambians.

When inflammatory or discriminatory rhetoric is used in his presence, presidential leadership requires that such language be rejected and corrected, immediately. Silence can be interpreted by supporters as endorsement. Leadership must cool political tensions, not amplify them.

6. SILENCE AND ENFORCEMENT GAPS FROM THE IEC AND IPC



Several civil society organisations, political parties, citizens, and other stakeholders have publicly condemned the growing incidence of hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric.

However, EFSCRJ has not observed sufficient publicly communicated enforcement or corrective action by either the Independent Electoral Commission or the Inter-Party Committee against political actors responsible for such conduct.

EFSCRJ Assessment: Institutional Response Requires Urgent Strengthening

The IEC's responsibility cannot begin and end with voter registration, nominations, and polling arrangements. Electoral integrity includes the environment within which voters make their choices.

Similarly, the IPC should actively use its mechanisms for dialogue, mediation, and political accountability to address dangerous conduct by parties and their supporters. Institutions should intervene before dangerous rhetoric escalates into confrontation or violence, rather than responding after harm has occurred.



7. PEACE AND ELECTORAL MEDIATION INITIATIVE

EFSCRJ Election Watch notes the presence in The Gambia of former UN official and ECOWAS diplomat Mohamed Ibn Chambas, brought into the country through an International IDEA initiative aimed at promoting peaceful, inclusive, and credible elections.



Mr. Chambas has engaged a range of stakeholders, including the President, political leaders and civil society. The consultations are expected to contribute to the development of a peace pact for signature by nominated presidential candidates.

EFSCRJ welcomes initiatives aimed at strengthening peaceful political competition. However, a peace pact must not become merely ceremonial. It should contain concrete commitments to reject violence, hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, misinformation, and

disinformation, respect election results subject to lawful challenges, use established dispute resolution mechanisms, and hold party officials and supporters accountable for violations.

8. VOTER REGISTRATION, REVISING COURTS, AND THE IEC'S DUTY OF TRANSPARENCY

The integrity of the voters' register remains fundamental to the credibility of the December 2026 Presidential Election. EFSCRJ notes the concerns raised by the United Democratic Party regarding aspects of the voter-registration process and its requests to the Independent Electoral Commission for relevant electoral data. EFSCRJ considers requests by political parties for voter-registration information to be legitimate exercises of electoral scrutiny. Such requests should not automatically be interpreted as attempts to undermine the IEC or even the elections. Rather, scrutiny of the voters' register, accompanied by credible evidence and timely responses from the Commission, can strengthen confidence in both the register and the electoral process.



EFSCRJ therefore urges the IEC to adopt a policy of proactive disclosure and maximum transparency, consistent with the principles envisaged under the Access to Information Act. As the institution entrusted with administering elections, the IEC should endeavour to provide political parties, candidates, civil society, the media, observers, and citizens with all relevant and lawfully disclosable electoral information in a timely and accessible manner. This should include relevant registration statistics, objections, corrections, duplicate registrations and their resolution, decisions arising from the revision process, and ultimately the final voters' register. Transparency should be the default position of the IEC because unnecessary secrecy, delay or inadequate communication creates suspicion, fuels disinformation and can undermine public confidence in the election.

EFSCRJ welcomes the use of the Revising Courts as an important safeguard for addressing objections and strengthening the genuineness, cleanliness, and transparency of the voters' register. Parties and citizens should use this mechanism responsibly and base objections on credible evidence. The IEC must ultimately ensure that every eligible Gambian who lawfully registered remains on the register while duplicate, unlawful or otherwise invalid registrations are addressed through due process.

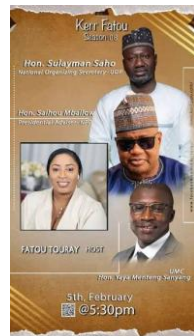
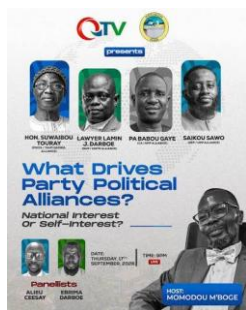
EFSCRJ Assessment: IEC Requires Greater Transparency and Proactive Disclosure.

EFSCRJ recognizes the value of the registration and Revising Court processes but considers greater transparency by the IEC necessary. Legitimate requests for electoral data should be addressed promptly and comprehensively. The Commission should proactively publish relevant information rather than wait for political parties or citizens to demand it. Electoral transparency strengthens rather than weakens the IEC and is indispensable to public confidence in the December election.

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9. MEDIA PERFORMANCE, FAIR COVERAGE, AND INCLUSIVE ELECTION REPORTING

EFSCRJ Election Watch has observed a high degree of fairness and professionalism among independent media houses, both online and offline, in their coverage of the evolving political landscape. Independent media have reported extensively on the activities of political parties, movements, politicians, and presidential candidates while also providing interviews, debates and prime-time discussion programs involving political actors, experts, and civil society representatives. This pluralistic coverage contributes positively to informed citizen participation and electoral accountability.



Selection of prime time programs from some of the key media houses in which male feature most

Given the sensitivity of election reporting, EFSCRJ nevertheless urges all media houses to develop and enforce in-house election reporting guidelines and editorial policies covering accuracy, verification, impartiality, political balance, hate speech, disinformation, political advertising, conflicts of interest and corrections. Such policies would reinforce editorial independence, transparency and public confidence in journalists and media institutions.

By contrast, EFSCRJ remains seriously concerned about the performance of state-owned media, particularly GRTS and *The Gambia Info*. Our monitoring indicates that the NPP and President Barrow receive extensive coverage, including live broadcasts of political activities, while opposition parties and candidates are not afforded comparable opportunities. This disparity is inconsistent with the responsibilities of state-owned media under Section 208 of the Constitution

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to facilitate the expression of divergent views and opinions. State media are funded by the public and therefore belong to all Gambians, not to the government or ruling party alone.

GRTS and *The Gambia Info* should provide fair and equitable coverage to all contestants and clearly distinguish between President Barrow's official activities as Head of State and his partisan activities as an NPP presidential candidate. Incumbency must not translate into an unfair media advantage.

EFSCRJ further calls for greater diversity and inclusion in election reporting. We have observed that many individual guests invited for political interviews, whether politicians, experts or civil society actors, are men, while women and persons with disabilities are frequently absent or inadequately represented on discussion panels. Media houses should consciously broaden their sources and guest lists to ensure that women, persons with disabilities, young people and other underrepresented groups have meaningful opportunities to contribute to national political discourse.

EFSCRJ Assessment:

Independent Media – Positive

State-Owned Media – High Concern

Diversity and Inclusion – Requires Improvement

EFSCRJ commends the independent media for the generally professional, pluralistic, and competitive election coverage observed thus far and urges them to maintain and strengthen these standards throughout the campaign and post-election periods.

By contrast, the unequal coverage observed in state-owned media constitutes a high concern requiring immediate corrective action. GRTS and *The Gambia Info* must provide fair and equitable access to competing political actors and uphold their constitutional public service responsibilities. Across the entire media sector, greater attention must also be given to gender equality, disability inclusion, and diversity of voices in election interviews, panels, and political reporting.

10. OVERALL RISK ASSESSMENT

Issue	EFSCRJ Assessment Status
Hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric	High and escalating concern
Tribal and ethnic politics	High concern
Xenophobic political rhetoric	High concern
Political misinformation and disinformation	High concern
Abuse of incumbency	High concern
Use of official presidential tour for campaigning	High concern
Campaign financing and transparency	Serious structural concern
Political coalition transparency	Requires improvement
Political withdrawals, defections and realignments	Requires greater transparency and accountability
Voter registration and IEC disclosure of electoral data	Requires greater transparency and proactive disclosure

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Revising Courts and voter-register verification	Positive development requiring continued oversight
IEC enforcement and electoral monitoring	Requires urgent strengthening
IPC intervention and political accountability	Requires urgent strengthening
Independent media election coverage	Positive – generally fair and professional
State-owned media (GRTS and The Gambia Info)	High concern – unequal political coverage
Media editorial policies and election reporting guidelines	Requires improvement
Gender equality, disability inclusion, and diversity in media coverage	Requires significant improvement
Electoral violence and political confrontation	Moderate but increasing risk
Peacebuilding initiatives and proposed electoral peace pact	Positive development requiring concrete follow-through

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

a. To President Adama Barrow and the Government

EFSCRJ calls on the President to clearly separate his constitutional and official functions from his role as NPP presidential candidate. Public resources allocated to official presidential activities must not be converted into campaign resources.

The President should also publicly reject hate speech, tribalism, xenophobia, and disinformation by members of his alliance and instruct ministers and other public officials to respect the distinction between government and party activities.

b. To All Political Parties, Coalitions and Candidates

Political actors must immediately adopt zero tolerance for hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, dangerous speech, and deliberate disinformation. Parties should discipline members and supporters who engage in such conduct and focus their campaigns on policies, governance records, and competing visions for national development. Coalitions should publish their agreements and disclose the political and governance commitments underpinning their alliances.

Political parties should continue to scrutinize the voters' register and utilize the Revising Courts and other lawful electoral mechanisms to address genuine concerns. However, objections must be evidence-based and should never target voters because of ethnicity, geographical origin, perceived political affiliation or other discriminatory considerations. Parties should also avoid making unsubstantiated allegations that could unnecessarily undermine public confidence in the electoral process.

c. To the Independent Electoral Commission

The IEC should establish and publicly communicate an enhanced monitoring mechanism for campaign conduct and electoral violations. It should investigate reported violations, publish its findings, and apply the Elections Act consistently without fear or favour. The IEC should also

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clarify what rules govern campaigning during official government activities and the use of public resources by incumbents.

The IEC should adopt proactive disclosure as a central principle of electoral administration, consistent with the Access to Information Act. It should promptly respond to legitimate requests for voter-registration data from political parties and other stakeholders and regularly publish relevant registration statistics, objections, corrections, duplicate registrations and their resolution, Revising Court outcomes, and information concerning the final voters' register. Where requested information cannot legally be disclosed, the Commission should provide clear reasons and the applicable legal basis.

d. To the Inter-Party Committee

The IPC should urgently convene political parties to address deteriorating political rhetoric and establish clear commitments against hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, and disinformation. Repeated violations should be documented, publicly addressed, and referred to the appropriate institutions where they constitute potential breaches of law.

e. To Law Enforcement Agencies

The Gambia Police Force and other relevant agencies must apply the law equally and impartially. No political actor should enjoy immunity because of proximity to the Government, nor should opposition figures be selectively targeted for conduct tolerated from ruling-party actors.

f. To GRTS and *The Gambia Info*

State-owned media should immediately ensure fair, equitable and pluralistic election coverage in accordance with their constitutional responsibilities under Section 208. Opposition parties and candidates should receive meaningful opportunities for coverage comparable to those afforded to the ruling party. GRTS should also clearly distinguish between coverage of President Barrow performing official duties as Head of State and his activities as an NPP presidential candidate, so that incumbency does not create an unfair electoral advantage.

g. To All Media Houses

Media organisations should develop, publish, and enforce in-house election reporting guidelines and editorial policies addressing impartiality, accuracy, verification, political balance, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, political advertising, conflicts of interest, corrections, and responsible social-media use. Editors should establish internal mechanisms for monitoring compliance throughout the campaign and election period.

Public and private media should actively fact-check political claims, avoid amplifying inflammatory rhetoric without context, and provide equitable opportunities for political contestants.

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- **On Diversity and Inclusion:** Media houses should deliberately broaden their pool of interviewees, analysts, and panelists to include women, persons with disabilities, young people, and other underrepresented groups. Producers and editors should regularly assess the composition of political programs to ensure that election coverage reflects the diversity of Gambian society rather than repeatedly privileging the same predominantly male voices.

h. To Religious and Community Leaders

Religious leaders, Chiefs, Alkalolu and other influential community figures should refrain from rhetoric that divides citizens along political, ethnic, religious, or regional lines. Their influence should instead be used to promote tolerance, truth, peaceful participation, and respect for human dignity.

i. To Civil Society and Citizens

Civil society should intensify independent monitoring, factchecking, civic education and documentation of electoral malpractice. Citizens should reject attempts to mobilize them through ethnic fear, hatred or false information and should preserve and report evidence of serious electoral misconduct.

j. On the Proposed Peace Pact

The proposed peace pact should establish measurable commitments and accountability mechanisms rather than broad declarations of goodwill. Presidential candidates should commit themselves and their parties to peaceful campaigning, rejection of hate speech and ethnic politics, acceptance of lawful electoral processes, non-violence, responsible use of social media, and peaceful resolution of electoral disputes.

12. CONCLUSION: THE WARNING SIGNS MUST BE ADDRESSED NOW

The political environment ahead of the December 2026 Presidential Election remains competitive and vibrant, but EFSCRJ is increasingly concerned about the direction of political discourse. The persistence of hate speech, tribal rhetoric, xenophobia, disinformation and inflammatory language, combined with concerns over abuse of incumbency and weak institutional responses, represents a significant threat to electoral integrity and national cohesion.

Elections do not suddenly become violent on polling day. Violence is often preceded by the gradual normalization of hatred, fear, dehumanization, misinformation and the portrayal of political opponents or communities as enemies. The time to prevent election violence is therefore now and not on election day and certainly not after violence has occurred.

EFSCRJ calls on every political leader to recognize that winning an election cannot justify damaging the social fabric of the country. No political office is worth setting Gambians against one another. The IEC, IPC, political parties, Government, law enforcement agencies, religious

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leaders, media, civil society, and citizens must therefore act collectively to ensure zero tolerance for hate speech, tribal politics, xenophobia, electoral violence, and deliberate disinformation.

EFSCRJ Election Watch will continue to monitor, document, and publicly report the conduct of all electoral stakeholders without fear or favour.



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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.

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