

# THE GAMBIA PRE- ELECTION OPINION POLL SURVEY 2021

Center for Policy, Research and  
Strategic Studies (CepRass)

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## 1. Introduction

The Gambia, in its more than fifty years of nationhood, has just been introduced to enhanced democratic institutions that ensure the freedom of speech and association, allowing every citizen the space to communicate her/his views on national issues. The 2016 elections were the first time that the Gambia changed its political leadership through the ballot box. This ushered in a new government who's constitutional first term will end in January 2022. As mandated by the 1997 constitutions, an election must be held before the presidents' term ends. Considering the foregoing, presidential elections in the Gambia are scheduled to take place on December 4th, 2021.

The new political dispensation that emerged in 2017 has led to the promotion of democratic values such as freedom of speech, promotion of human rights, independence of the judiciary, and political pluralism. The latter contributed to the emergence of many political parties with competing ideas on the governance of the state. Never in the history of The Gambia, has there been such several political parties. As a result, the upcoming election will arguably be one of the most heavily contested elections in the history of The Gambia. For the contest for the presidency to be based on pertinent issues on the governance of the country, it must be guided by a good understanding of public opinion on issues of national interest. In consideration of the foregoing, the Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies (CepRass) through the "Opinion Polls and CSO Capacity Building" project funded by National Endowment for Democracy (NED) commissioned the first series of political Opinion Poll (OP) research in the Gambia to track public perception on issues of national interest. OP surveys are very popular in modern democracies.

However, in the Gambia no OP has so far been conducted that is focused on informing the public on pertinent issues concerning an election. Hence, this maiden edition is aimed at bringing to light all the key national issues in the run up of the December polls for the purpose of informing the populace, political parties, other state, and non-state actors for more informed decisions regarding the elections.

Moreover, to strengthen the hard-earned democracy in The Gambia, it is imperative that issues are crafted with an understanding of what most citizens want. Knowledge of public opinion on national matters will help promote democracy in ensuring that citizens hold the leaders accountable for their actions by bringing to light their discontentment and grievances.

This report presents the first release of the findings from the second pre-election OP organised by CepRass. The report is structured as follows: the methodology of the OP is discussed in the next section; section 3 presents the findings from the OP; and section 4 provides the main takeaways from this round of findings from the OP.

## 2. Methodology

To conduct the pre-election opinion poll, CepRass followed a sound methodological approach that draws on standard scientific practice in opinion poll research, which is explained below.

## 3. Design of the Opinion Polls Survey

The design adapted the recent Integrated Household Survey (IHS) with telephone numbers as the frame, which comprises of **14,191 households** from **8** local government areas (LGAs) within **48** districts in The Gambia. A multi-stage sampling design was used where in the first stage households were stratified according to LGAs, and at each stratum (LGA) proportional sampling was used to select a

representative sample of districts. The proportion of districts selected from each LGA is weighted according to the proportion of registered voters in that LGA vis-à-vis the total registered voters. This way, WCR with the highest number of registered voters has the greatest number of districts included in the first stage sampling.

In the final stage, depending on the proportion of registered voters in each district vis-à-vis all selected districts in the LGA a specified number of households were randomly selected from each district. A total of 1140 households were selected, which was increased to 1254 to account for 10 percent oversampling. Furthermore, to ensure that the survey is representative of the gender dimension of the registered voters, the number of respondents allocated at each district was divided into male and female respondent sequentially in accordance with the male and female proportion of registered voters in that district. In the final analysis, the total 1254 were divided to the 8 LGA, which were later divided to 34 sampled districts. The surveyed assumed a margin of error (MoE) of +/- 3.

To account for nonresponses, which is usually high in telephone surveys, sampling with replacement was used. Specifically, oversampling of respondents was done at the districts level and in each district 10 percent of the respondents were oversampled in order to take care of the nonresponses. Out of the total number of respondents surveyed, 1185 had voter's card, they are considered the likely voters. Therefore, the poll results are focused on these respondents.

#### 4. Data Collection Instruments

Before the data collection, CepRass in consultation with NED developed a comprehensive questionnaire using Survey Solution's Designer tool. The questionnaire is

divided into 7 sections with the main sections being voting, political parties, and COVID-19 implication for election.

#### 5. Field Exercise

Prior to data collection, a total of 12 enumerators and 3 supervisors were recruited and trained to conduct the data collection. After setting up the questionnaire on tablets, a two-day training session was conducted to familiarise the enumerators with the survey instrument and the study methodology to avoid mistakes and to ensure data quality.

Finally, the team of 12 enumerators was provided airtime on the various cellular networks (Africel, Qcell, and Gamcel) to call respondents, specifying when a female member of the household should be interviewed and when a young member of the household should be interviewed. The data collection started on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and ended on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021 covering the selected households identified in the sampling. Overall, the exercise covered a total of 1256 households interviewed with 32% female and 68 % male; this is not representative of the population proportion of male and female due to insufficient responses despite replacement.

#### 6. Data Analysis

The researchers used a computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI) to collect the data hosted on CepRass's own cloud server, which was retrieved using a format readily available for use in STATA. Then STATA software (version 17; StataCorp. 2021) was used for the analysis, which was entirely descriptive. The statistical programme was used to generate graphs such as bar and pie charts for all the interesting issues on which the respondent's opinion were being sought. For clarity, every issue is analysed in the context of its past and current environment. As the

target respondents for the poll were likely voters, the analysis is based on respondent's self-report on their willingness to vote and considering just the likely voters (97% of the respondents). The detail analysis of various modules in the instrument are presented in the findings.

## 7. Findings from Opinion poll

In this section we analysed the findings from the opinion poll survey focusing on three main issues: electorates perception on voting; political parties; COVID-19 and Election.

## 8. Profile of Respondent

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents Surveyed**

Variable	Frequency	Proportion (Percentage)
<b>LGA</b>		
Banjul	29	2.5
Basse	153	12.9
Brikama	447	37.72
Janjanbureh	88	7.43
Kanifing	188	15.86
Kerewan	145	12.24
Kuntaur	63	5.32
Mansakonko	72	6.08
<b>ETHNICITY</b>		
Mandinka	445	37.58
Fula	279	23.56
Wolof	181	15.29
Jola	101	8.53
Sarahule	81	6.84
Manjago	21	1.77
Aku	5	0.42
Serrer	33	2.79
Other	38	3.21
<b>AGE</b>		
18 -24	72	6.08
25-34	282	23.82
35-44	332	28.04
45 -54	270	22.80
55 and above	228	19.26
Total	1185	100.00

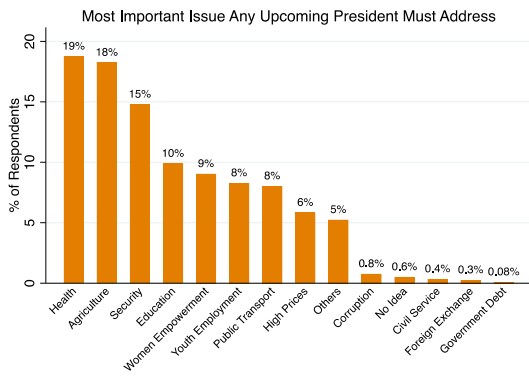
Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of Local Government Area (LGA), ethnicity, and age.

On LGA, the results show that majority of the respondents (about **38%**) are from the Brikama local government area of the West Coast Region, followed by Kanifing (about **16%**) and Basse of Upper River Region (about **13%**). Regarding ethnicity, most of the respondents surveyed are Mandinka (about **38%**). About **24%** are Fula and **15%** are Wolof. Therefore, the distribution of respondents by ethnicity mimics ethnic distribution in the population. On age, the table shows that majority of respondents are in the age category 35-44 (i.e., young adults), which is followed by the age category 24-34 (about 24 percent of respondents). Only about 19% of the respondents are in the 55 and above age category. Therefore, majority of the respondent survey are either youth or young adults.

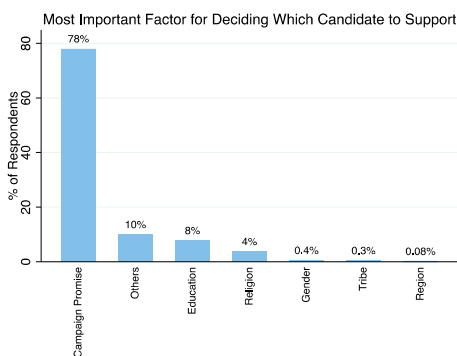
## 9. Voting

With the country still grappling with effects of the pandemic, and its health sector continuing to face challenges under the weight of the deadly virus, **nearly one-in-five registered voters (19%)** say the **health care** is very important to their vote, while **18%** cite **Agriculture**.

As the country continues to grapple with domestic security issues, **15%** of voters say that how candidate's intent to address the security issues will be a very important factor in their decision while education stood at 10%. Fewer than **10%** say women empowerment (**9%**) or youth Employment (**8%**), which was considered the most important issue in the first poll. This change in perception could be due to the effect of the campaign; the talk on key issues by candidates makes them fresh on the mind of voters. Corruption, civil service reform, foreign exchange, and government debt are the issues of least priority to likely voters surveyed.



Support for a political party can be motivated by several factors. In the Gambia many have argued that party support is usually based on the personality of a party leader (socio-economic status) rather than on the ideologies of the party. To gauge how widespread such a mindset is, participant in this poll were also asked to state the most important factors they consider before supporting a presidential candidate. The bar chart below summarizes the findings.

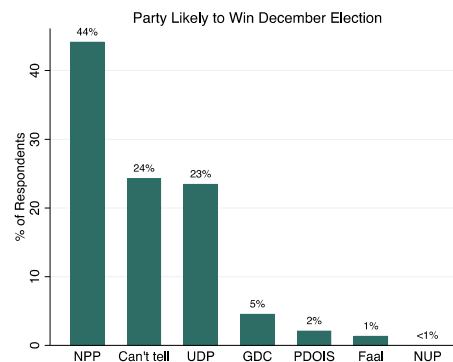


Interestingly, a substantial majority of the electorates (about **78%**) reported that the most important factor for them in deciding which candidate to support is the candidate's Campaign priorities. This is consistent with the poll results from round one. Campaign promise is followed by education level of the party leader (**8%**) and religion (**4%**). Other factors, including gender, tribe, and region of a candidate have little interest among voters.

### 10. Political Party Likely to Win and the Intention to Vote

Voting is a game of numbers. The more votes a candidate obtains, the greater the chances of electability. Thus, in a political environment that is marked by crowd counts, politicians may rely on big crowds as an indicator of party popularity among likely voters, which assumes that the candidate can transform such crowds into actual votes. However, not all individuals that turn up for political events, turn out to vote on election day. Although, polling survey doesn't address all the challenges mentioned above, it provides a more reliable information on opinion of potential voters.

In this poll, two indicators were used to gauge the popularity of candidates: **party likely to win and intention to vote**.



In this poll, respondents were asked to indicate which **candidate is likely to win the December 4<sup>th</sup> presidential election**. The results are presented in the chart just above. The result show that about **44%** of the respondents revealed that **NPP coalition is likely to win** the election with **24%** reported that they **can't tell** at this moment which party is likely to win. The latter is a **big drop from the earlier opinion poll results (43%)**. About **24%** of the respondent reported that **UDP** is likely to win the election, which is also a slight

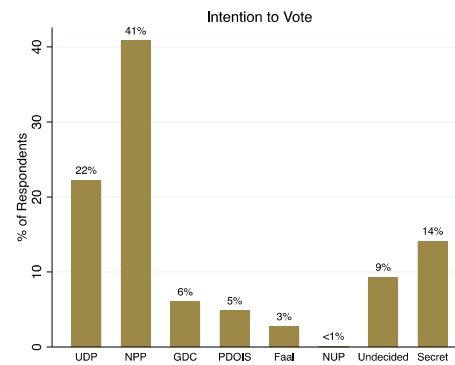
improvement from the first poll. The UDP is followed by Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) 5%. Like the previous poll, 2% of respondents think People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS) is going to win the election and 1% reported that Essa Faal (Independent) is going to be winner of this year's election with NUP mentioned by less than 1% of respondents as potential winners of this year's election.

This poll has witnessed a further consolidation of gains by NPP and UDP on the party likely to win. The performance of NPP on this indicator has improved by 13 percentage points while for UDP it has increase by 9 percentage points. However, the gap between the two parties has widen by 4 percentage points (in favour of NPP) since August 2021. Therefore, UDP does not seem to be closing the gap on NPP on party likely to win.

It is interesting to note that from the previous poll, there is a significant drop in the proportion of the electorates that are not sure which party will win in the upcoming election. The current poll results presented here show that most of the electorates have the perception that NPP is going to be the likely winner of the upcoming election.

Interestingly, none of the new parties other than the incumbent's party has a high approval rating among the electorates included in this study, indicating the power of the incumbency. In addition, an independent candidate, Essa Faal did not attract more attention of electorates and for NUP, they are unable to make their presence felt.

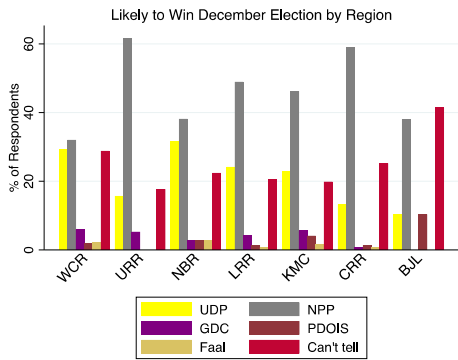
In the survey, respondents were also asked on their intention to vote. The results are summarized in the bar chart above.



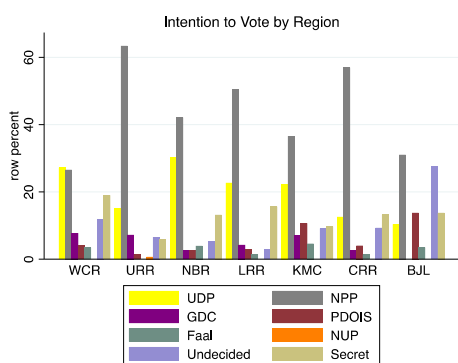
The findings revealed that most of the electorates (about 41%) reported that they will cast their marble for the NPP followed by 22% who reported that they will vote for UDP, 6% for GDC, 5% for PDOIS, 3% for Essa Faal and less than 1% for NUP. The intention to vote show a substantial reduction in the proportion of undecided voters; 9% in this round relative to 40% in round 1. About 14% revealed that who they will vote for is a secret that they can't share.

While both NPP and UDP have made substantial gains on the intention to vote, NPP still currently leads on the intention to vote among decided electorates according to this poll results. Interestingly, a substantial margin of 19 percentage points exists between the NPP and UDP on the intention to vote, which is 3 percentage point gap increase from the previous poll. Between UDP and the rest of the parties the margin is also big (average of about 17 percentage points), but not as sizeable as the margin between them and the NPP.

The analysis of the results on perception of which party is likely to win and the intention to vote by region focusing on the NPP and UDP presented next. The results on the regional dimensions of these indicators are summarized in the bar charts below.



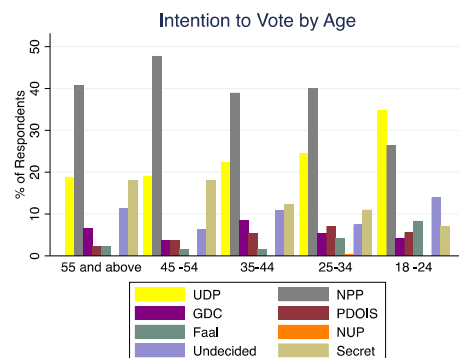
Results on the party likely to win by region indicates that, the proportion of respondents that reported that they can't tell is high in the regions, but not as high as it was in the first OP survey conducted between August and September 2021. Furthermore, the proportion of such respondents is highest in Banjul, followed by WCR and CRR and lowest in URR. In all regions, NPP leads on the party likely to win with their greatest performance on this indicator coming from URR and CRR, respectively. The popularity of the UDP on the party likely to win is highest in NBR followed by WCR, LRR, and KMC. Furthermore, the results shows that performance on the likely to win is closer in WCR and NBR, even though NPP has a minor lead over UDP in both regions.



The distribution of the intention to vote by region is shown in the chart above. While there are undecided voters in all regions, the proportion of respondents in the regions that are undecided is not as substantial as

it was in the first OP survey. This shows that across all the regions, most respondents have now decided on which candidate to elect. Notwithstanding, Banjul and Brikama have the most undecided voters among the respondents.

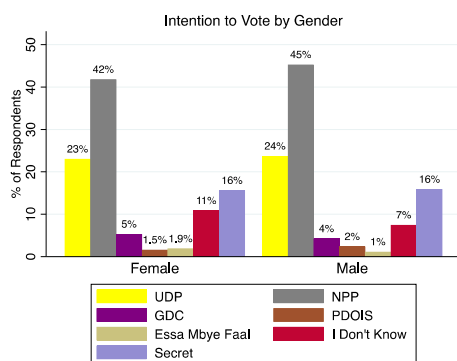
NPP leads on the intention to vote in all regions except WCR, where UDP has a slight lead on the intention to vote. Having said that, at this juncture, it is important to highlight that the sampled districts in WCR does not include Kombo North, which is the largest district in the region and where the popularity of the UDP could be higher. Furthermore, as was the case in the first round OP survey, the intention to vote for NPP is highest in URR followed by CRR and NBR. For UDP, the intention to vote is highest in NBR, followed by WCR, LRR, and KMC, respectively.



The study also assesses the intention to vote by age group. This is done to highlight which party is doing well on which age categories of likely voters surveyed. While NPP and UDP performed better than the rest of the parties on all age groups, NPP is more popular among likely voters with ages 45-54 and UDP is doing well on the young voters, especially those in the age group 18-24. In fact, is only on this age group, that UDP is edging NPP. Otherwise, NPP edges UDP on all age categories.

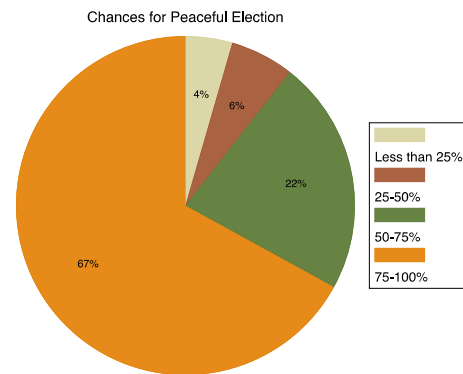
The chart below shows the intention to vote by Gender. The results show that the NPP

also leads on the intention to vote by gender for both male and female respondents surveyed. While the intention to vote for UDP is 23% among female respondents, it is 24% among male respondents. For NPP, the intention to vote is 42% and 45% among female and male respondents, respectively. However, the gap on the intention vote between UDP and NPP is 2 percentage points wider on male respondents (21 percentage point gap) than female respondents (19 percentage point gap), which shows that UDP's performance is better on female than male likely voters.



In the survey, respondents were asked to provide a rating on the chances of the country having a peaceful election. The results are reported in the pie chart below. An overwhelming majority of respondents (about 89%) have indicated that there is above 50% chance that there will be peaceful election.

Only 4% said that the likelihood of a peace election is less than 25%. Therefore, despite the political tension being high at moment, respondents are optimistic that the presidential election will be peaceful.



## 11. Political Parties

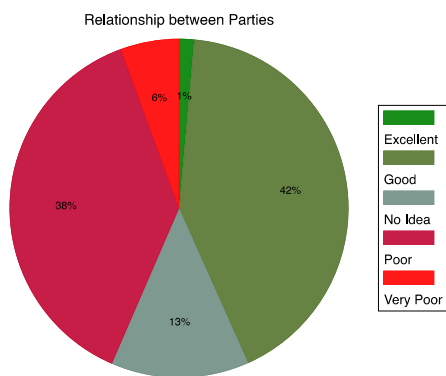
Election evolves around political parties. Since 2017, the Gambia has seen a substantial proliferation of political parties. In 2016, there were 9 political parties of which 7 formed “Coalition 2016” that defeated Jammeh at the polls. Currently, 18 political parties are registered with the IEC.

Gambians will head to the polls on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 to pick the country's president, in a race that will see five challengers seeking to unseat incumbent **Adama Barrow**. They are **ANM Ousainu Darboe**, who for two decades was Jammeh's nemesis as leader of the United Democratic Party, the country's largest opposition political force. **Mama Kandeh**, who came third in the 2016 polls, was a former APRC MP until his expulsion that year led to his formation of the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC). Three other candidates are vying for the highest office in The Gambia: **Essa Mbye Faal**, who resigned his position as the lead prosecutor of the TRRC to contest as an independent candidate; former aviation chief **Abdoulie Ebrima Jammeh**, the leader of the National Unity Party (NUP); and **Halifa Sallah**, MP with the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS). Among the people vying for the highest office of the land, only independent candidate **Essa Mbye Faal** and NUP leader will be on the ballot for the first time.



The country's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) disqualified 15 of the 21 hopefuls – including Marie Sock, the only female aspirant – for not meeting the constitutional requirements. About half of them were running on independent platforms. Only the 6 candidates mentioned above, were cleared by the IEC to be on the ballot. However, two other candidates (Ismail Ceesay of Citizens Alliance (CA) and Mai Ahmad Fatty of Gambia Moral Congress (GMC)) may likely be on the ballot, too. They challenged the rejection of their nomination in court and had a ruling in their favour on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021. However, it is currently not clear how their case will be handled given that it is less than two weeks to the election.

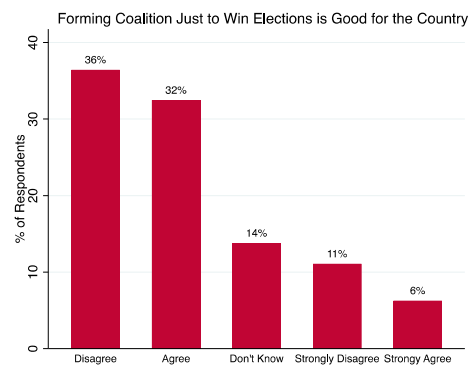
In this round, respondents were asked about the relationship between political parties and perception about forming political parties and whether all parties were fairly treated in the nomination process.



The result shown in the pie chart above shows that regarding relationship between political parties, about **43%** of participants in the poll reported that the relationship between political parties is either good or excellent, while a similar percentage (**44%**) revealed that the inter-party relationship is either poor or very poor, and just **13%** of the respondent reported that they have no idea. However, reporting single answers to

this question, majority (**42%**) thinks that the relationship is good.

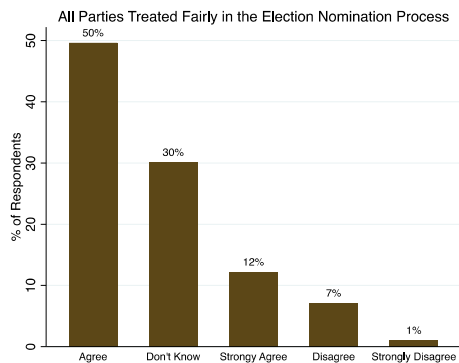
The 1997 constitution of the Gambia has been amended under the former president Yaya Jammeh to abrogate absolute majority to a simple majority system in which the party or candidate with a simple majority becomes the winner of the presidential election. And since the 1997 constitution still governs the Gambia, candidates have seen the need to form coalitions with others to attract the needed majority to win the election. This has become even more pressing after the IEC rejected the many parties and independent candidates. In the bid to win the December 4<sup>th</sup> election, there has been a proliferation of coalition in the runoff to the election.



In this poll, respondents were asked whether they think forming coalition alliance just to win election is right. The results show that majority disagree that forming coalitions just to win election is right. Collectively, **47%** disagreed and strongly disagreed that forming coalition just to win election is right, while **38%** agree or strongly agree that it is right.

The impartiality of the election referee is paramount to the credibility of the election results. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is an important stakeholder in nurturing the nascent democracy in the Gambia supposed to

commit to conducting a free and fair election. The IEC as an institution was credited for its performance in the 2016 elections by refusing to overturn the will of the people in favour of the sitting president; and this has since attracted much respect for it and its leadership.



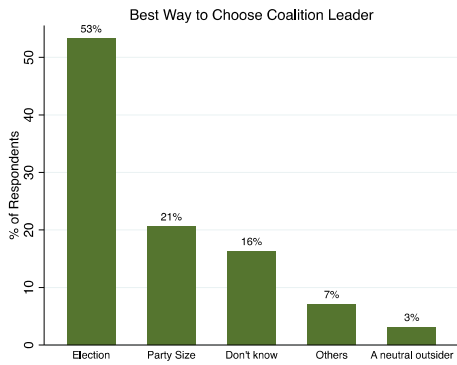
As part of the 2021 election cycle, the IEC recently concluded the nomination process which saw 12 independent candidates and 11 political parties applied but only five political parties and one independent candidate qualify to run for the December 4<sup>th</sup> election. This attracted a lot of discontents from some of the parties and candidates resulting in two parties filing a law suite at the high court against the IEC; and all two won their case against the IEC. However, IEC is adamant that the 2015 election act empowers them to make decisions that cannot be challenged at the court.

In the midst of all this uproar, it is important to know the perception of electorates on **whether all parties are fairly treated in the nomination process**. In this wave of the OP, respondents were asked whether all parties were treated fairly in the election nomination process and **62%** of respondents strongly agreed and agreed that all parties were treated fairly during the nomination cycle. About **8%** of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that all parties were fairly treated at the nomination. Therefore, the result

overwhelmingly show that IEC does not suffer from huge reputational damage among the likely voters sampled despite they rejected the candidature of many of the aspirants.

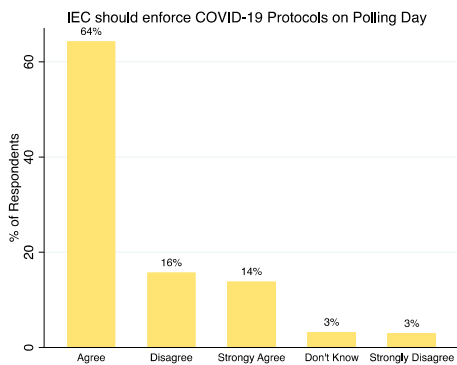
Due to the simple majority system of winning presidential election currently in place in the Gambia, the December 4<sup>th</sup> election have become a contest among different coalition forces. All the six candidates that are running for the Marina Parade Office on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December have formed alliance with at-least one former presidential aspirant. What has happened in most cases however was a rejected candidate endorsing a qualified candidate. Often times choosing a coalition leader becomes so controversial that it becomes the *raison d'etre* for non-formation of coalition alliances among parties/candidates. This was the case in the Gambia in 2006 presidential election where the grand coalition among opposition parties (National Alliance for Democracy Development – NADD) ended up disintegrating.

**As parties form coalition, it is important to know the perception of the electorates on what the best way is to form coalition.** Hence, the respondents were asked: what is the best way to choose a coalition leader? The results show that more than half of the respondents (**53%**) believe that coalition leader should be chosen through an election, while **21%** believe that it should be chosen based on the party size of the contestants, and only **3%** think that it should be a neutral outsider.



## 12. COVID-19 and Election

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose threat to health, socio-economic conditions, and delivery of elections across the globe. Elections are indispensable for democracy, but the high volume of human interactions within the electoral process risked spreading the virus. Electoral officials therefore found themselves planning or managing an election during an emergency, often for the first time.



Hence, in this survey the opinion of respondents or likely voters was sought on what they think will be the impact of the pandemic on this year's election. Specifically, whether IEC should enforce COVID-19 Protocols on Polling Day. The results indicate that the respondents (78%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the IEC should enforce COVID-19 protocols on Polling Day. About 1 in 5 strongly disagreed and disagreed on the enforcement of COVID-19 Protocols on Polling Day. Therefore, there is an overwhelming

support for observance of COVID-19 protocols on polling data.

## 13. Key Takeaways

The conduct of election polls is an important part of any democratic dispensation. It is against this backdrop that CepRass has collaborated with NED to organize these maiden sets of opinion polls on election in The Gambia. In this round, respondents were selected from a representative sample of household in the Gambia focusing on the likely voters. About 1185 likely voters were sampled across the country and involved in a survey that lasted for 10 days. The findings of the report can be summarized into the following key takeaways:

First, the results revealed that the most important issue that the upcoming president must address are health, agriculture, and security, while foreign exchange, civil service reforms and government debt are the least on the agenda of issues to address.

Second, when asked the most important thing for deciding which candidate to support, a substantial proportion of the respondents (78%) said campaign promise while cumulatively less than 0.5% of the respondents said region or tribe.

Third, NPP leads on the likely to win and intention to vote at 44% and 41% respectively, followed by UDP at 24% and 22% respectively, while others (PDOIS, GDC, GUP and Essa Faal) struggle for less than 10% and 15% of respondents votes respectively. However, a significant 24% of respondents say they can't tell who will win, while 25% say they are undecided or say it their secret when asked about their intention to vote.

Fourth, a very high proportion (89%) of the respondents believe that the chances of

peaceful election are very high (**50%** and above).

Fifth, almost an equal percentage of the respondents believe that interparty relationship among political parties is favourable as the unfavourable proportion.

Sixth, on the coalition formation, majority of respondents disagreed that it is fine to form coalition just to win election, while majority also believe coalition leadership should be chosen based on election over party size of the contestant.

Seventh, when asked about IEC's conduct of the nomination, majority believe that IEC was fair to all parties during the nomination process. Finally, nearly **80%** of the respondents think that IEC should enforce the Covid-19 protocols on the polling day.