TOPIC: THE IMPACT OF THE 2021 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON THE PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE OF PEOPLE IN THE GAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to investigate the Impact of the 2021 Presidential Elections on the Peaceful Coexistence of People in The Gambia. The scope of the study was limited to people residing in The Gambia. The sampling was based on The Gambia Bureau of Statistics Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2015/2016. Samples of 440 (over sampled of 10%) households were selected from the sampling frame. The findings reveal that there was peaceful co-existence among people in The Gambia after the presidential election. A 1 to 10-point scale was used to determine this with 1 being the worst and 10 the best; and the mean response is 8 which is closed to 10 points. The majority of respondents (about 49%) on a cumulative basis agreed that multi-party system is a threat to the peaceful coexistence of society. Finally, the majority of the respondent on a cumulative basis agree on that political tolerance is high in The Gambia as which demonstrates the respect of other people's right to association, diverse individual views, freedom and majority have trust in IEC. The study recommends the government of the Gambia to empower the National Council for Civic Education (NCCA) by allocation enough resources for the effective and efficient execution of their mandates of educating and sensitizing the citizenry on their political rights and electoral laws of the land. Also, community and religious leaders such as district chiefs, village heads, youth leaders, and heads of women groups, mosque leaders and church leaders should be enlightened on political issues and empowered to preach and communicate peaceful co-existence in their respective jurisdictions.

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Elections are a mechanism that is important in any democratic and peace processes. The main purpose of elections is to provide citizens with an opportunity to choose their political leaders and allocate powers peacefully. However, underlying tensions in society and high-stakes competition can lead to violence. Such violence requires special attention as violence associated with presidential elections is less visible yet more complex than armed conflicts. Matter of fact, **p**olitical and election violence remains a threat to humanity and regional co-existence and stability. Elections can lead to the risk of dividing societies and steer up conflicts along ethnic, regional, and political lines.

In some parts of the world like Asia, numerous examples from the last ten years reflect the frequency of political violence (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia etc.). Based on studies, twenty (20) per cent of elections in Africa over the last decades were marred by during and post-elections violence within communities and regions. The episodes of violence did not result directly from elections but reflected a breakdown of political processes. This demonstrates the delicacy of election violence and requires a comprehensive understanding in order to build/empower the relevant restraining institutions. As such, if the elections are legitimate and inclusive, they can pave a way for the effective consolidation of democratic values and promote peaceful co-existence within and among communities.

The Gambia is relatively a peaceful country with different people from diverse backgrounds who interact and share a lot of values and traditions. The tolerance, nurtured peaceful and respect for diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity among others are what culminate to the popular pronouncement of the country as the Smiling Coast of West Africa. The Gambia as the country had its recent Presidential Elections in early December 2021.

The 2021 Presidential Election is the first post-dictatorship Presidential Election in The Gambia. As such the election was expected to be very competitive due competition to be in the corridors of power or to grip on to power. Accordingly, the campaigns were expected to be vigorous as aspirants attempt to sell their manifestos to the electorates in various Constituencies across the length and breathe of the Country. Different strategies were used by the various political groups including use of tribal rhetoric to dwindle the chances of rivals and also galvanize their base to come out on election day. The heightening of sentimental rhetoric in the runoff to the election, especially on social media platforms like WhatsApp, increased fears that the 2021-2022 election

cycle may jeopardize the peaceful co-existence between the Gambian people, especially among those that holds divergent political ideologies.

The six (6) candidates were of different regions and ethnic groups. However, despite the reports of elections observers noted no major problems during the elections period but certain ethnic remarks were heard from various political leaders which might have affected the peaceful co-existence of people in The Gambia. The Gambia – like other African countries – might not be resilient to the effects elections can have on the peaceful co-existence of people in all regions like the other part of the world, especially in light of potentially disturbing religious and ethnic comments by political leaders. There anecdotal evidences on the issue, but very limited scientific evidence exists on the matter. It is for this reason that the Students of the University of the Gambia through its Students' Union deems it very important to undertake research in this area, which will be the first time of its kind from University of the Gambia students. Thus, this study aimed to examine the impact of the 2021 Presidential Election on the Peaceful Co-existence of People in The Gambia.

1.2 Objectives of Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the Impact of the 2021 Presidential Elections on the Peaceful Coexistence of People in The Gambia.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the effect of the election on mistrust between people in communities in the Gambia.
2. Assess tendencies for conflict in communities after the 2021 presidential election.
3. Determine the effect of rhetoric espoused by politicians and supporters on peaceful co-existence of the people in the Gambia.
4. Gauge the perception of the citizens on the outcomes of the 2021 presidential elections.

1.3 Research Question

1. What is the difference in the Peaceful co-existence among people in The Gambia before the December 2021 Presidential Elections and after?

2. How does the 2021 Presidential Election affect peaceful coexistence of the people in Gambian communities?

3. What is the effect of rhetoric espoused by politicians and supporters on peaceful co-existence of the people in the Gambia?

4. What is the general view of the citizenry on the independence, credibility and fairness of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) on the outcome of the 2021 Presidential elections?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The Study is very important for the following reasons.

1. It will serve as a guide to design and evaluate Civic Education Programs (CEP) in Elections related matters in The Gambia.

2. It can guide the design of policies that will safeguard the peaceful co- existence of the people in the Gambia during National Elections.

3. It can mitigate political rhetoric or divisive remarks on political platforms.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study is limited to people residing in The Gambia. Areas considered for the study will be various districts and communities in The Gambia. The respondents will be asked about their perceptions on the effects of the 2021 Presidential Elections on peaceful co-existence between people in their communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"In some parts of the world like Asia, numerous examples from the last ten years reflect the frequency of political violence (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia etc.). Based on studies, 20 per cent of elections in Africa over the last decades were marred by violence within communities and regions. The episodes of violence did not result directly from Elections but reflected a breakdown of the political process. If the elections are legitimate and inclusive, it can pave the way for freedom of expression and promote peaceful co-existence within communities". (Konencna, 2021).

The report done by Conflict and Development Analysis The Gambia updated in 2019 shows that "Ethnic tensions and ethnopolitics are also on the rise, featuring more concretely in the perception and lived experiences of Gambians, linked to lived experiences of micro-aggressions to frustrations that institutions and leaders fail to provide transparency and clear criteria in promotions, hiring, and firing. Meanwhile, continuing rhetoric used by political party advocates, supporters, and opinion-shapers, employ divisive devices to promote supporter solidarity". (Government of the Gambia & Civil Societies, 2019)

The experience taken from Darfur and Burundi shows that several factors have accentuated the violent conflicts in these countries. The factors include issue of bad governance, pervasive corruption, absence of democratic culture, the neglect of traditional structures, the manipulation of ethnic and religious difference by politicians, and weak institutions to protect and enforce human rights are recipes for breeding conflicts in Africa (Ochoga, 2020).

Hate speech which publicly incites violence against individuals or groups of people, has exacerbated and worsened the security challenges and the situation of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Hate speeches were indiscriminately used during the 2015 general elections campaign in Nigeria (Muideen & Ibrahim, 2022).

The findings of a research on the role of religion on politics of Nigerian society shows that Religion has positive impact on politics which can enhance sustainable development and peaceful co-existence. Religion if well used in politics can contribute and value in national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic and social development of the Nigerian society (Habila, 2020).

According to Muhammed et al. (2014), electoral bodies which should be neutral to ensue a free and fair elections has sometimes courses violence through election rigging which affects the peaceful-coexistence of people in Nigeria. The Electoral bodies are elected sometimes to serve as a rescue to some candidates by ensuring that candidates emerged victorious in elections (Muhammed, 2013).

A study conducted on the Synthesis of the Electoral History of Africa reveals that Africa made a noticeable progress on the path of democracy but the rising trend of elections related violence presents worrying security challenges and it affects the peaceful co-existence of the people of the continent (Kenneth, 2016) .

The study conducted in Nigeria by (Isiaq, Adebiyi, & Bakare, 2018) reveals that candidates in the 2015 Presidential Elections received bloc votes from their various geo-political zones. The findings reveal that candidates use ethnic sentiments to garner votes which destroy inter-ethnic accommodation and the peaceful co-existence of people of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

According to (Aboh, Onuoha, & kalu, 2020) on their study in Nigeria, hate speeches in Nigeria follow the addition, deletion, repetition, and substitution rhetorical components of Van Dijk's political discourse analysis and this led to the entrenchment of ethnic tensions and, the hope of peaceful co-existence vanishes into thin air due to the rhetorical device of repetition.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative data collection approach. For the Quantitative approach, structured questionnaires were used to interview respondents. The research tool used was developed based on the indicators needed to address the research questions. The interviews were conducted through face to face. The Survey Solution App was used to developed the questionnaire and Computer Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) was used to conduct the interviews.

3.2 Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The target Population for the study was all residents of The Gambia. A representative sample of Samples of 440 (over sampled of 10%) households was selected for the survey using the updated The Gambia Bureau of Statistics Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2015/2016 as frame. To select households from the frame, a multi-stage sampling design was adopted using Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method. In each Local Government Area, three (3) districts were randomly selected scientifically and three (3) settlements were selected in each district. Finally, each selected household two members will be randomly selected for interview from a household roster via survey solution; for gender representation, one male and one female were selected from each household. Data Analysis was done using descriptive statistics and STATA 17 Software was used to make the analysis.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Local Government Area by Gender of Respondent

This part seeks to distribute respondents by Local Government Area (LGA) and gender of the respondent. Nationally, 749 people were interviewed across all LGAs. In particular, Brikama had the highest number of people who were interviewed (21.36%); this is followed by Basse (18.02%), Kerewan (17.49%), Janjanbureh (13.89%), Mansakonko (12.42%), Kuntaur (11.88%) while Kanifing and Banjul had the lowest number of respondent 3.34% and 1.60% respectively. Also, 302 males versus 447 females were interviewed which shows a representative study.. At LGA level, more males were interviewed in Basse, Brikama, and Janjanbureh (21.52%, 19.21% and 15.89% respectively) while more females were interviewed in Brikama, Kerewan and Basse (22.82%, 19.69% and 15.66% respectively).\

TABLE 1: Local Government Area by Gender of Respondent

LGA	Gender of respondent		
	Male	Female	Total
Banjul	1	11	12
	0.33%	2.46%	1.60%
Kanifing	9	16	25
	2.98%	3.58%	3.34%
Brikama	58	102	160
	19.21%	22.82%	21.36%
Mansakonko	36	57	93
	11.92%	12.75%	12.42%
Kerewan	43	88	131
	14.24%	19.69%	17.49%
Kuntaur	42	47	89
	13.91%	10.51%	11.88%
Janjangbureh	48	56	104
	15.89%	12.53%	13.89%
Basse	65	70	135
	21.52%	15.66%	18.02%
Total	302	447	749
	100.00	100.00	100.00

4.2 Age Group by Gender of Respondent Nationally

The study also attempted to figure out the participation of youths in the election. Thus, the distribution of age group youths aged 15 to 35 which is defined based on GLFS (2018) shows the highest representation of the response rate of this study. In particular, more female youths were interviewed than male youths; this could be a result of the fact that during the fieldwork, females were easily accessible than males partly due to irregular migration and yet again the gender nature of society were women mostly sit at home to take care of the children while men busy working to provide for the family. Those aged 36 to 59 years and, 60 years and above have more males than females. Overall, those above 60 years represent the lowest number of responses.

Figure 1: Age Group by Gender of Respondent Nationally.
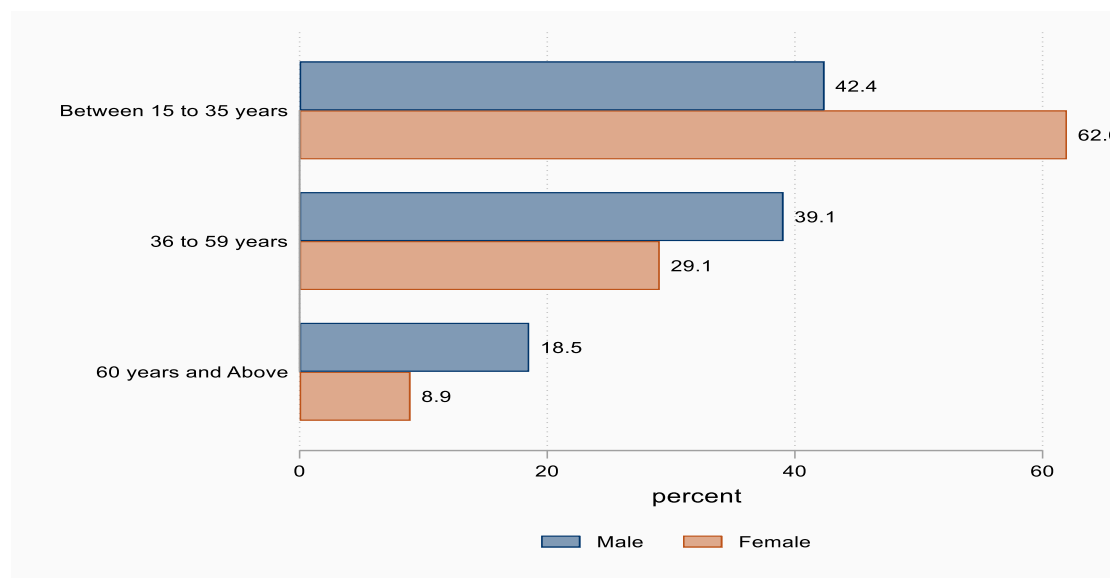
4.3 Gender of Respondent by Educational Level

The figure below shows the gender of respondents and their educational level. The study reveals that more females have no formal education and they have the highest percentage in terms of primary education, junior education and adult literacy, while the rest of the educational categories consist of more males responses such as secondary education and tertiary education. This result is in line with the current societal situation, especially in rural Gambia retention is a major issue as most females do not reach secondary education and tertiary education; this is propelled by early marriage and the socalled belief that they should be at home doing household chores   which keeps them away from doing any meaningful economic activity.

Figure 2: Gender of Respondent by Educational Level
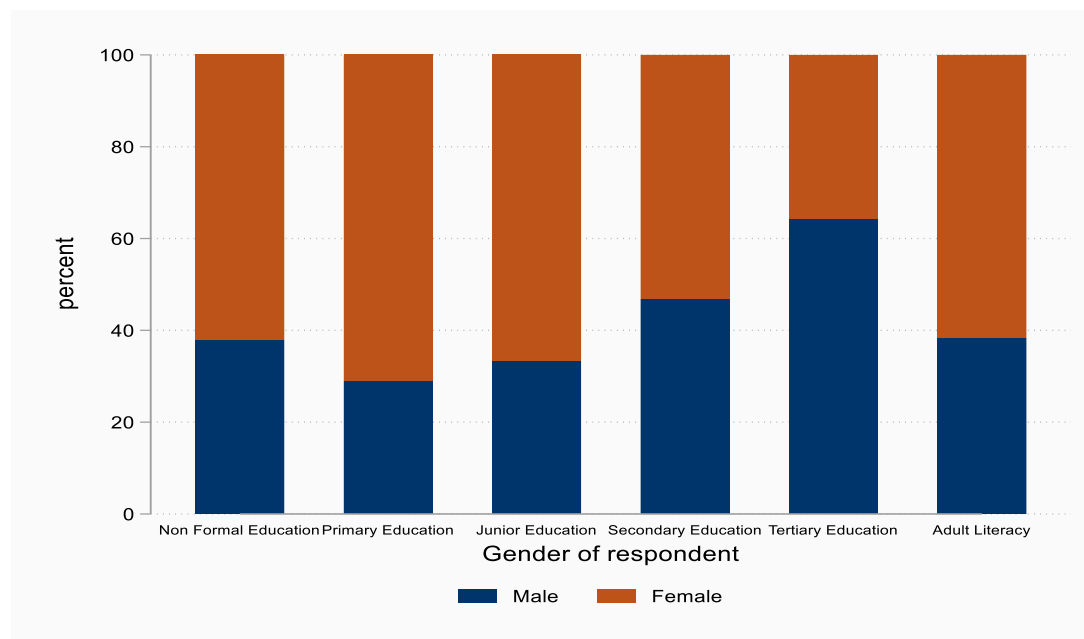
4.4 Peace and Peaceful Coexistence in the Community

The finding reveals that all respondents agree that peace is an important tool for smooth coexistence among people in the society. Essentially, about 76.23% strongly agreed and 23.77 agreed with the statement. Also, majority of the respondents (76.3%) reported that the Presidential Election does not affect the peaceful co-existence of their community while 23.63% reported that it affected the peaceful co-existence in their community as seen in figure 3.

TABLE 2: Importance of Peace in the Smooth Co-existence of people in the society

	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Strongly Agree	571	76.23	76.23
Agree	178	23.77	100.00
Total	749	100.00	

Figure 3: Impact of the Presidential Elections on the Peaceful Coexistence in communities
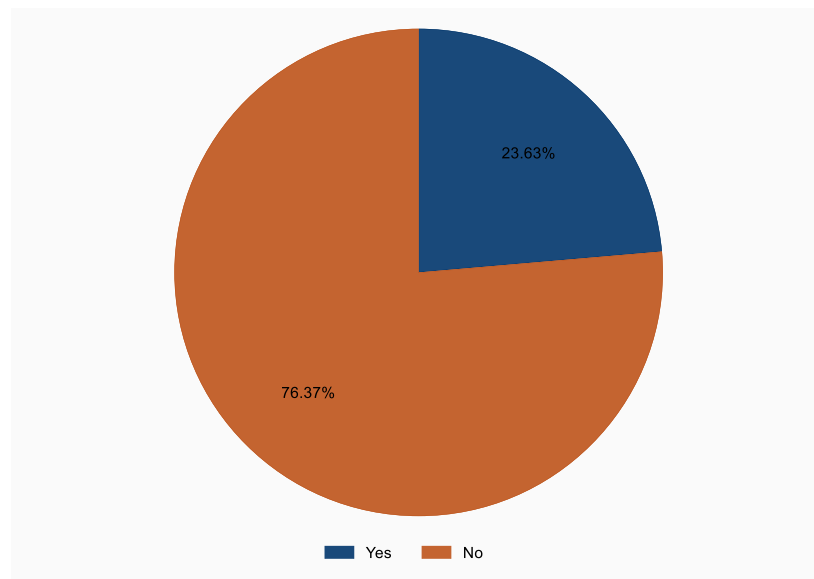

4.5 Advocate for Peace During the December 2021 Presidential Election

Respondents were asked about the advocacy for peace by religious leaders and cultural groups during the presidential election. The finding reveals that 94.26% of the respondent reported that peace was advocated for during the presidential election while 3.07% said peace was not advocated for and the rest of the respondents reported that they do not know. Also, more than half of the sample of respondents reported that they participated in peace seminars organized in their community as seen in figure 4.

TABLE 3:   Advocacy for Peace by Religious Leaders and Cultural Groups

	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Yes	706	94.26	94.26
NO	23	3.07	97.33
Don't know	20	2.67	100.00
Total	749	100.00	

Figure 4: Participation in Peace Seminars in the Community
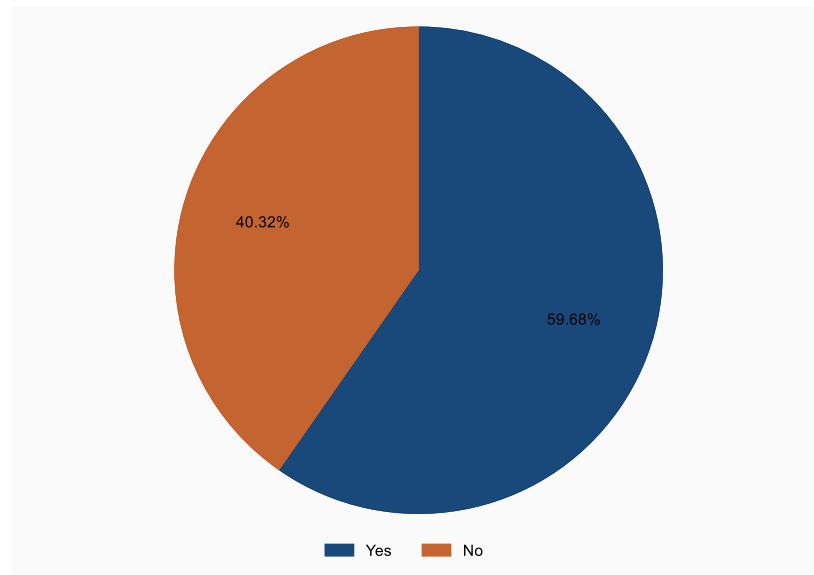
4.6 Ethnic Difference

Respondent was asked if ethnic differences are relevant in their community. Majority of them (81.32%) reported that ethnic difference is not an issue in their community 18.69% said it is indeed relevant. Also, the majority said they do not witness or heard of the ethnic-driven conflict in their society as seen in table 4. Similarly, over 83% said they do not face ethnic sentiments in their community during the presidential election. However, about 13.62% of the respondents reported to have voted based on ethnicity.
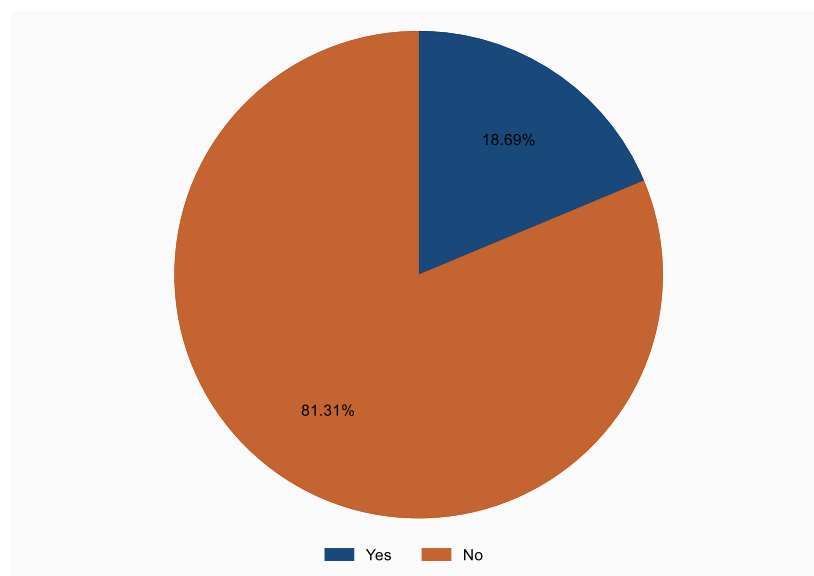
Figure 5: Ethnic Differences and Relevance

TABLE 4: Witnessed or Heard of Ethnic-driven Conflict in the Society

	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Yes	136	18.16	18.16
No	613	81.84	100.00
Total	749	100.00	

TABLE 5: Face Ethnic Sentiments in their Community during the Presidential Election

	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Yes	124	16.56	16.56
No	625	83.44	100.00
Total	749	100.00	

4.7 Summary Statistics of Peaceful coexistence in the Community During and After the Presidential Election

Respondents were asked to rate the peaceful coexistence of their communities during and after the presidential election using a scale of 1 to 10 where one is the worst and 10 is the best. From the descriptive statistics below, the mean response is 8 which is close to 10. Thus, it is conclusively, based on the study, there was peaceful coexistence during and after the election in the communities.

TABLE 6: 7 Summary Statistics of Peaceful coexistence in the Community During and After the Presidential Election

	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
During Elections	748	8.066	2.093	1	10
After Election	749	8.752	1.717	1	10

4.8 The Presidential Election and Division of People in the Society

Respondents were also asked if the outcome of the presidential election divided people in the community. However, majority of them disagree by reporting that it does not divide the people in the society.

Figure 6: The Presidential Election and Division of people in the society
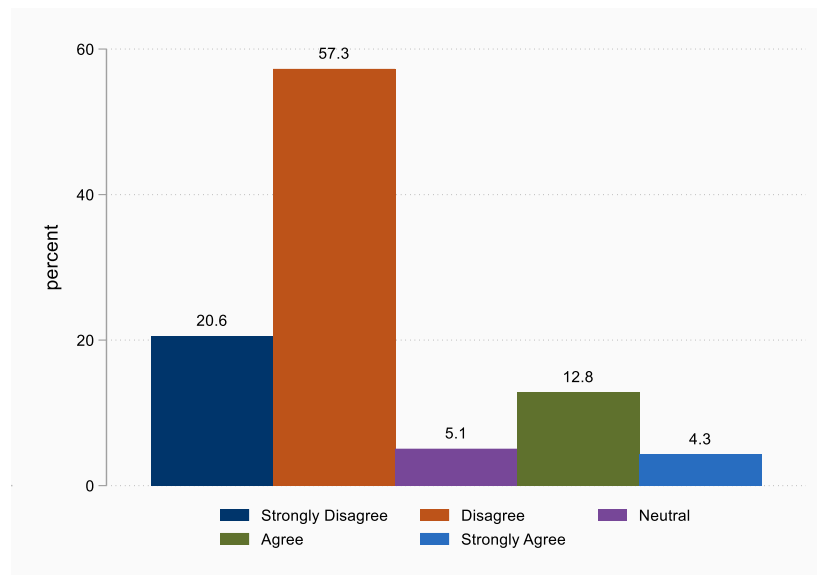
4.9 Freeness, Fairness and Transparency Presidential Election and Trust in the IEC

Majority of the respondent agreed with the statement that the presidential election was free, fair and transparent; this could be attributed to the practice of spot counting in the electoral system of The Gambia. Again, this is consistent with the fact that majority of the respondents (73.56%) trust the IEC in the election process.

Figure 7: Freeness, Fairness and Transparency of the Presidential Election
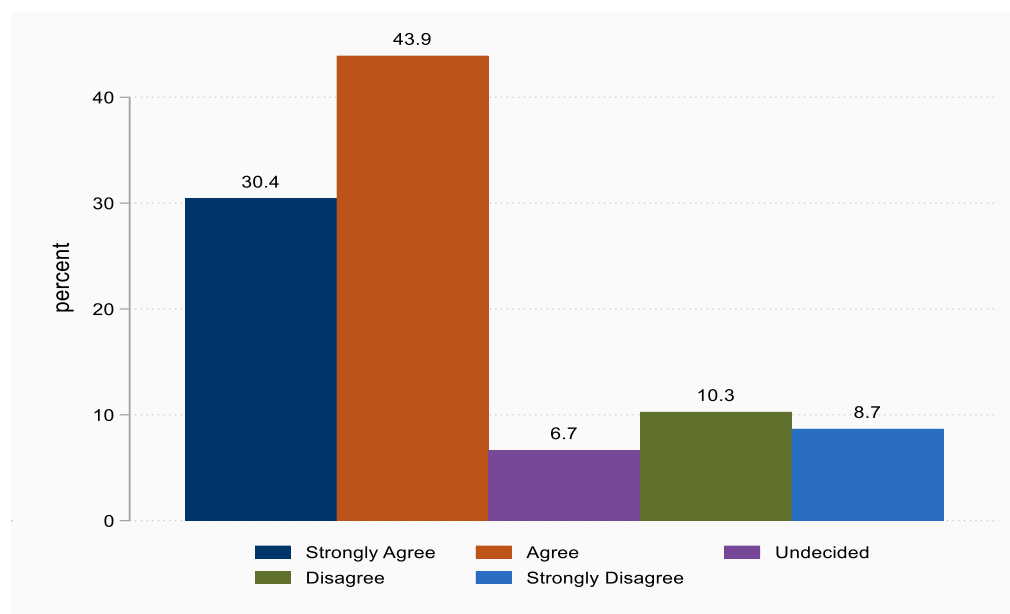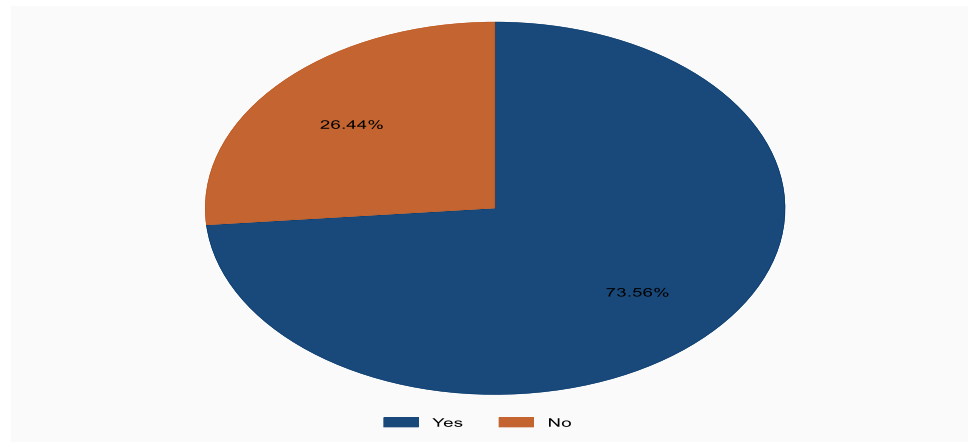

Figure 8: Trust the Independent Electoral Commission

4.10 Multi-Party System and Threat to Peaceful Coexistence in the society

Respondents were asked about the threat of a multi-party system to peaceful coexistence in society; that is if having different political parties contesting for election could affect peaceful coexistence in society. The finding reveals that majority of the respondent (about 49%) cumulatively agree that it is a threat to peaceful coexistence in society while cumulative also about 38% of the respondent disagree with the statement.

TABLE 7: Multi-party System and Threat to Peaceful coexistence in society

	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Strongly Agree	84	11.21	11.21
Agree	286	38.18	49.40
Undecided	93	12.42	61.82
Disagree	244	32.58	94.39
Strongly Disagree	42	5.61	100.00
Total	749	100.00	

4.11 Political Tolerance in The Gambia

Respondents' perception of political tolerance in The Gambia was sounded during the study. Political tolerance here has to do with respecting other people's rights to association, diverse individual views and freedom of people in a democratic country. Interestingly, majority of the respondents (about 74%) cumulatively agreed that political tolerance is high in The Gambia while

cumulatively about 19% disagreed with the statement.

TABLE 8: Political Tolerance in The Gambia

.	Freq.	Per cent	Cum.
Strongly Agree	95	12.70	12.70
Agree	459	61.36	74.06
Undecided	54	7.22	81.28
Disagree	125	16.71	97.99
Strongly Disagree	15	2.01	100.00
Total	748	100.00	

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the Impact of the 2021 Presidential Election on the Peaceful Co-existence of People in The Gambia. The sampling was done using the Gambia Bureau of Statistic Integrated Household Survey (IHS) 2015/2016. The study adopted descriptive statistics to analyze the findings. The findings reveal that there was peaceful co-existence among people in The Gambia after the presidential election. A 1 to 10-point scale was used to determine this with 1 being the worst and 10 the best; and the mean response is 8 which is closed to 10 points. The majority of the people (about 49%) on a cumulative basis agreed that multi-party system is a threat to the peaceful coexistence of society. Also, about 73% agreed on cumulative basis that the presidential election was free, fair and transparent which attributed to spot counting while 73.56% trust the IEC. Finally, the majority of the respondent on a cumulative basis agree to that political tolerance is high in The Gambia as which demonstrates the respect of other people's right to association, diverse individual views, and freedom.

5.2 Policy Recommendation

1. Political rhetoric in the form of ethnic and religious tools to divide electorates should be considered a punitive misconduct amongst political leaders.

2. The media should be sanitized, especially during electoral periods to deter the dissemination of ill-intent and device messages in order to safeguard communities.

3. There should be a comprehensive fact-checking programme to counter mis and dis-information and ensure that politicians do not mislead electorate for it has the potential to incite violence.

4. Political debates should be made mandatory in elections as a means of averting unhealthy political platforms that are intended to divide electorates.

5. There is still a good proportion of the respondent who believes that multi-party system is a threat to peaceful existence. This could also be associated with fears of tolerance. As a result, it is crucial to sensitize communities on the importance of diversity, political tolerance and multi-party system, especially in a country consolidating its democracy.

6. There is need to train influential community leaders such as religious leaders and cultural groups to conduct sensitizations around peaceful coexistence and tolerance.

7. To consolidate The Gambia's democracy, there is need to better inform communities about what democracy in itself means because without it, there is always potential for violence.

8. The government of the Gambia should empower the National Council for Civic Education (NCCA) by enough allocation resources for the effective and efficient execution of their mandates of educating and sensitizing the citizenry on their political rights and electoral laws of the land.

9. Civic Education should be incorporated in the education curriculum of the Gambia across all levels, especially at the elementary level in order to introduce pupils to the essence of politics, peaceful co-existence, and moral values in politics in order to promote political decency.

10. Political party heads should be enlightened and checked to practice decent politics and desist from profanity and rhetoric that have potentials of undermining the peace and tranquility of the Gambia; thus, compromising the free, fair, and credible elections.

11. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should be further capacitated to effectively and efficiently carryout its mandates in line with the electoral laws and the constitution of the Gambia.

12. Community leaders such as district chiefs, village heads, youth leaders, and heads of women groups, mosque leaders and church leaders should be enlightened on political issues and empowered to preach and communicate peaceful co-existence in their respective jurisdictions.

13. Civil Society Organization, especially The Peace Ambassadors, Peace Hub-the Gambia, Activista and others should redouble efforts towards enhancing awareness on political happenings and the peaceful co-existence in the Gambia.

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