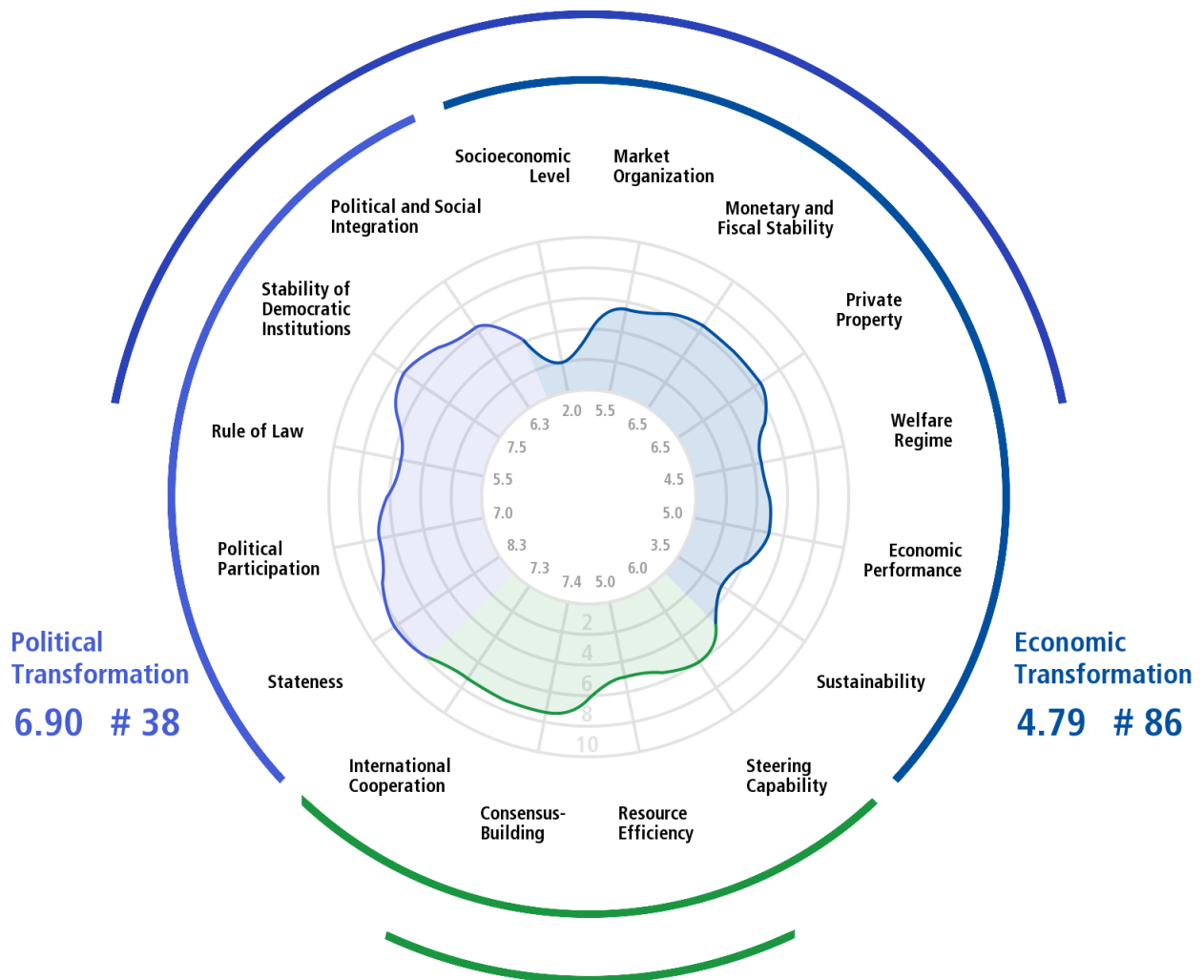


# Gambia

## Status Index

**5.84 # 60**

on 1-10 scale out of 137



**Political Transformation**  
**6.90 # 38**

**Economic Transformation**  
**4.79 # 86**

## Governance Index

**5.98 # 27**

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2020**. It covers the period from February 1, 2017 to January 31, 2019. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

Please cite as follows: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report – Gambia. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020.

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**Key Indicators**

Population	M	<b>2.3</b>	HDI	<b>0.466</b>	GDP p.c., PPP \$	<b>1706</b>
Pop. growth <sup>1</sup>	% p.a.	<b>2.9</b>	HDI rank of 189	<b>174</b>	Gini Index	<b>35.9</b>
Life expectancy	years	<b>61.4</b>	UN Education Index	<b>0.386</b>	Poverty <sup>3</sup>	% <b>37.8</b>
Urban population	%	<b>61.3</b>	Gender inequality <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.620</b>	Aid per capita \$	<b>121.8</b>

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2019 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2019. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.20 a day at 2011 international prices.

## Executive Summary

2017 marked a new beginning for the Gambia. The autocratic leader Yahya Jammeh, who had ruled the country since 1994 and had lost the 2016 election only to retract his concession of defeat in order to cling to power, was forced out of office and into exile by a coalition of opposition parties with the support of the Economic Community of West African States (the latter threatened military intervention if Jammeh did not honor the 2016 results).

The new government of Adama Barrow, the third president in Gambian history, has moved to address the dire legacy of the Jammeh era. Barrow inherited a virtually bankrupt country with a poorly functioning state apparatus and extensive corruption. The Gambia's international reputation had been marred by Jammeh's erratic leadership style. Under his rule, the country had experienced extensive human rights abuses such as torture and extrajudicial killings, and security services had operated with impunity.

The challenges facing the Gambia in 2017 were thus manifold and significant. There has been some positive economic news, particularly in terms of robust GDP growth, a rebound in the vital tourism industry, and significant pledges from bilateral partners. However, other factors weigh heavily on The Gambia's economic outlook. Its debt burden is unsustainable and there are significant structural obstacles, including a weak administrative apparatus in key areas, high unemployment, and a lack of appropriate human resources.

The political and legal developments under Barrow are arguably more promising. His government has not only ended or reverted some of the more egregious practices of the Jammeh era (e.g., the release of political prisoners) but has overseen the adoption of a sweeping transitional justice program. This opening up of the political climate in the Gambia is confirmed by limited public opinion polling, which suggests that Gambians feel considerably freer than under the Jammeh government. While the United Democratic Party associated with Barrow (he resigned from the

party before the 2016 election in order to represent the coalition) is dominant in the country's legislature, there is a greater diversity of political parties at both the national and local levels.

The consolidation of these democratic gains is undermined, however, by the continued existence of some of the more onerous laws from the Jammeh era. There have been several protests over environmental issues and service delivery to which the Barrow government has responded heavily-handedly. In one case, police officers killed three protesters and injured up to twenty others. The Barrow government has also not been immune to allegations of corruption and malfeasance, and a growing rift between Barrow and the United Democratic Party (UDP) threatens to undermine the governing coalition. Finally, while the Gambia has a history of ethno-religious harmony, there is lingering resentment between different groups, particularly directed against the Jola ethnic group to which the former president belonged.

## History and Characteristics of Transformation

The Gambia is a former British colony. After independence in 1965 it was initially governed by a liberal government with oligarchic tendencies under the leadership of Dawda Jawara. In 1994, junior military officers, led by Yahya Jammeh, seized control of the country. Jammeh oversaw the adoption of a new constitution and transformed himself into a nominally democratic leader through successive electoral wins. These elections were neither free nor fair, and the Jammeh era was characterized by widespread corruption and extensive human rights abuses including torture and extrajudicial killings. However, Jammeh did have some popular support as he made a priority of developing the country's previously neglected infrastructure. Under his government, the country received its first (and hitherto only) university and television station, while numerous schools and roads were built. To the outside world, Jammeh sought to cultivate The Gambia's reputation as "the smiling coast of Africa" to support the important tourism industry, even though his sometimes quixotic pronouncements – ranging from his self-declared ability to be able to cure HIV/AIDS to his sudden withdrawal from the Commonwealth – stirred anxieties both at home and abroad.

For most of the Jammeh era, the opposition splintered between different political parties and personalities. In 2016, however, all major opposition parties formed an alliance to contest for the presidency under the leadership of Adama Barrow (formerly of the United Democratic Party, the largest opposition party). To widespread surprise, the coalition was successful and Jammeh initially conceded the election, only to withdraw his concession a week later. This led to an almost two-month standoff during which Barrow and his associates were forced into exile in Senegal as Jammeh threatened to maintain his position with force. After Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) threatened to use force to compel Jammeh to honor the election, and accordingly mobilizing forces from Senegal, Nigeria and other countries, Jammeh agreed to step down and leave the country.

The Barrow government inherited an essentially bankrupt country with weak institutions. Under Jammeh, the state had been transformed into an extension of his persona, and clientelistic relations were the norm. While Jammeh broadly adhered to free market tenants, the efficiency of the economy was hampered by corruption and Jammeh leveraging the state's power to gain advantages for his personal enterprises. Today, just about every sector of the country is in need of some measure of reform. In addition, the government must find a way to reconcile the abuses of the Jammeh era without exacerbating the faultlines in Gambian society. The Gambia is a multiethnic and multi-religious society, though over 40% of the population are Mandinka (the other major ethnic groups include Fula, Serahuli, Wolof, Jola and Manjago) and around 95% of the population is Muslim (the remainder is mostly Christian; the population following other religions is very small). Although the Gambia does not have a history of intra-communal violence, during the waning years of the Jammeh era, as the opposition became more vocal, Jammeh sought to drum up anti-Mandinka sentiment to bolster his rule. Jammeh, a Jola, also displayed a preference for Jola appointments to critical positions (in the military, for example).

While the Gambia's economic situation today is relatively fragile, it has seen a surge of international aid from bilateral and multilateral partners. Some partners had frozen aid under the Jammeh government, other partners represented new relationships. Under Jammeh, the Gambia was close to reaching pariah status and the Barrow government has overseen a thaw in foreign relations, most critically with Senegal, which completely surrounds the country (save for the small Atlantic coastline). The new government has been less successful, however, in addressing the many environmental challenges facing the country, such as overfishing and beach erosion, some of which are caused by the very need to develop the Gambian economy. Indeed, environmental protests have turned out to be one of the major tests for the rule of law in the country, as police have killed protesters, prompting the Barrow government to establish inquiries into what occurred.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

## Transformation Status

### I. Political Transformation

#### 1 | Stateness

The Gambian state's monopoly on the use of force is largely uncontested across its territory. There are very sporadic incursions of insurgent groups from southern Senegal, but these do not pose a threat to the state. Similarly, while there are reports of organized groups engaging in illegal activity (such as cattle rustling), these groups do not control territory or pose a challenge to the Gambian government's monopoly on the use of force.

The Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) maintains a small peacekeeping force in the country (ECOMIG), at the request of the Gambian government. ECOMIG provides additional security and there have been isolated cases where they have used force against protesters. There has been concern expressed in local media that ECOMIG is usurping the authority of the Gambian Armed Forces (GAF). Such reports have been strongly denied by the Gambian government. There is thus no evidence to suggest that ECOMIG constitute a challenge to the Gambian state's monopoly on the use of force.

There are no separatist movements or other significant attempts to call into question the legitimacy of the state. While the previous government allegedly granted tacit support to the separatist movement in the Casamance region of Senegal, this movement does not call the Gambia as a state into question, nor is this tacit support given by the current government. There are no discriminatory restrictions on access to citizenship and naturalization.

Question  
Score

Monopoly on the  
use of force

9

'06 '20 10  
9

1

State identity

10

'06 '20 10  
10

1

Although the Gambia is technically a secular republic, Islam plays large role in public affairs. Gambians who are Muslim (approximately 95% of the population) are under the jurisdiction of Islamic law (Shariah) for personal matters such as divorce and inheritance. Disputes on these matters are heard by qadi courts, which are provided for in the Gambian constitution and are regulated by the state. The (secular) high courts have appellate jurisdiction over qadi courts. Criminal law is secular and based on English common law.

The Gambian Supreme Islamic Council (GSIC) – a quasi-governmental umbrella group - has sought to influence government policy with mixed results. For example, in 2018 it lobbied against the approval of a television license for the Ahmadiyya religious group (which the GSIC considers heretical). Its efforts were unsuccessful, however, suggesting that the Barrow administration is generally committed to being impartial in public affairs.

Furthermore, though Islam is the majority religion in the Gambia by a significant margin, the Christian community can practice its faith without prejudice or interference from the state or private actors. Christian holidays are recognized and there is no discrimination based on religion in matters such as employment (such discrimination is prohibited). Where there is tension between the faith communities, this is not sanctioned or supported by the state.

The Gambian state's administrative reach is circumscribed and erratic due to a lack of resources and corruption. Basic functions such as tax collection are conducted inconsistently, and tax evasion can occur. Essential infrastructure such as sanitation and health care is either uneven, subject to interruptions, or simply unavailable to parts of the population (especially in rural areas). For example, the Gambia's Upper River Region is home to over 230,000 individuals but it has only one hospital and its minor health centers are under-resourced, lacking pharmaceuticals, personnel, and beds. The Barrow administration has recognized the inadequacy of the primary health care system but major improvements have yet to be realized.

Progress on improving access to water has been made, however, as World Bank estimates suggest that 90% of Gambians now have access to water. There are other indications that the administrative effectiveness of the Gambian government is increasing. Tax collection, for example, has more than doubled since 2010, which was helped by the introduction of VAT (replacing the previous sales tax) with the goal of broadening the tax base.

In general, however, while the Gambian government's administrative reach clearly goes beyond the maintenance of law and order, it is in a somewhat inconsistent way.

No interference of religious dogmas

8



1

Basic administration

6



1

## 2 | Political Participation

Since Adama Barrow became president of the Gambia in early 2017 (after a contentious standoff in the wake of the 2016 elections that saw the losing incumbent step down only after the credible threat of an armed intervention by neighboring countries), there has been one parliamentary election (in 2017) and a local government election (in 2018). Both elections were widely considered free and fair, with only minor irregularities. Before the parliamentary election, a controversial provision from 2015 that had increased the required deposit for the electoral registration of parties to GMD 1,000,000 (approximately equivalent to €18,000) was waived. As a consequence, an unprecedented number of parties and independent candidates contested the election. In total 239 candidates vied for the 53 seats. The outcome of the election was respected by all parties.

There is no public financing for elections or campaigns. The electoral act prohibits candidates and parties from seeking funding from businesses and foreigners. However, there are no mechanisms to check this.

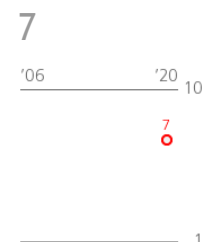
There are no specific actors that have veto power in the Gambia. As a highly indebted country, however, the Gambia is subject to external influence from its creditors and development partners, most notably the European Union. There is some limited evidence in Gambian media that these relationships have an impact on government policy in areas such as migration. For example, there have been reports that government ministers have accepted payments in return for accepting the repatriation of Gambians from abroad. The Gambian government has denied all such rumors.

Even though ECOWAS maintains a mission in the country, there is no evidence to suggest that they have de facto veto power over the Gambian government.

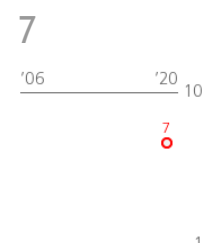
The Gambian constitution guarantees freedom of association and assembly. While these freedoms are broadly respected, there have been exceptions. There have also been instances where political groups are denied permits to hold rallies with little explanation: for example, the opposition party Gambia Democratic Congress was denied a permit to hold a rally in the large city of Brikama in August 2017.

There have been isolated incidents where Gambian security services have used force against protesters. For example, in June 2018, three anti-sand-mining protesters were killed by members of the police intervention unit. The Barrow government condemned these actions and launched an inquiry, though the results of this inquiry are yet to be published. Riot police were deployed against the Occupy Westfield movement, which originally had a permit for its activities to protest against electricity and water shortfalls.

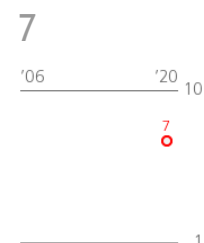
Free and fair elections



Effective power to govern



Association / assembly rights





Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Gambian constitution, though there are no specific corresponding freedom of information rights. Gambian media and individuals can generally exercise their right to free expression, but there have been isolated incidents of security services detaining or questioning journalists writing about issues deemed sensitive to national security. In one worrisome incident in early 2018, Ismaila Ceesay, a lecturer at the University of The Gambia, was detained by police after granting an interview to a local newspaper on the relationship between the military and the government. The police alleged that this article constituted incitement to violence, but, after protests, the charges were dropped and Ceesay was released.

The government's decision to grant a television license to the Ahmadiyya religious group despite objections by the influential and quasi-governmental Supreme Islamic Council is an encouraging sign of freedom of expression in the country.

While the Barrow government has lifted some of the more onerous restrictions on freedom of expression put into place by the previous government, controversially, others remain, including the use of sedition to cover criticism of the president.

Until recently, the media landscape did not represent a broad range of opinion. Under Jammeh, there was one state-owned television station and private print media and radio stations were routinely intimidated and in some cases physically attacked. The only consistently critical voices were online newspapers in the Gambian diaspora and the local newspaper Foroyaa, which is associated with the small socialist party, Peoples' Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism. Under the Barrow government, media has proliferated. There are now private television stations (plans for the launch of private television stations were adopted under Jammeh) and a wider range of newspapers and radio stations. While freedom of speech has improved dramatically, media – especially print media – still operate under perilous financial circumstances.

### 3 | Rule of Law

The Gambian government clearly delineates the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government and stipulates mutual checks between them, although the balance is generally in favor of a strong executive.

Under Jammeh, the separation of powers was largely for show as the National Assembly was dominated by the ruling party, APRC (Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction), and judges were intimidated or seemingly dismissed at will. Under the new government, the separation of powers is also de facto in place. The National Assembly is more diverse in terms of party representation although the United Democratic Party (UDP) is dominant. Other parties that were members of the winning coalition, such as the Peoples' Democratic Organization for Independence

Freedom of  
expression

7

'06 \_\_\_\_\_ '20 10

7

1

Separation of  
powers

6

'06 \_\_\_\_\_ '20 10

6

1

and Socialism (PDOIS), are frequent critics of the Barrow government. There has been a split between Barrow and Darboe (UDP leader), further increasing the independence of the UDP from Barrow.

The new government has also made efforts to professionalize the judiciary and recruit more Gambians to serve in it instead of foreign ones (often from Commonwealth countries). The executive respects the independence of the judiciary and interferes far less than the Jammeh government.

The Gambian judiciary under Barrow can be considered largely independent, not just constitutionally but also in terms of being free from government.

The judiciary has in part demonstrated its independence by deciding against the government in major cases, such as ruling that laws on false publication on the internet were unconstitutional. However, it should be noted that this case arose from a 2014 petition and thus predates the transition to democratic rule in 2017. In 2018, the Supreme Court had the opportunity to rule whether the commission of inquiry established by the Barrow government to investigate the financial crimes and corruption of the previous regime could be sued. The Supreme Court held that it could not on procedural grounds, in a decision that could be described as a win for the Barrow government. There are no indications that the Barrow government in any way sought to interfere with this ruling, nor did this decision preclude subsequent legal challenges.

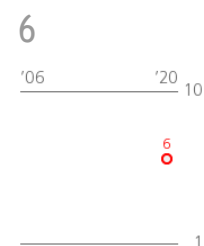
There has yet to be a significant test of the Gambian judiciary's independence. There has been no major legal case that challenges a policy of the Barrow regime.

The Barrow government has endeavored to improve the quality of the judiciary. One area of particular effort has been to end the reliance on foreign judges from other Commonwealth countries. While the Gambia has a long history of using foreign judges under bilateral technical cooperation agreements with countries such as Nigeria (in no small part due to the fact that The Gambia did not have a functioning law school until the 2000s), it was widely considered that Jammeh used such arrangements to install loyalist judges on the bench.

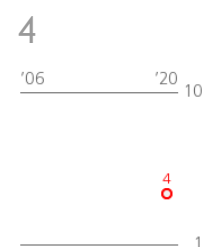
Under Jammeh the embezzlement of public funds and abuse of public office was common practice. The country is currently in the process of uncovering the extent of this.

There are ongoing prosecutions of officials who served in the Jammeh government and who abused their position, engaged in corruption, or violated human rights. Prosecution of officials under Barrow have occurred in the most egregious cases. For example, in 2018 five police officers were charged with murder after the death of environmental protesters in Faraba Banta, south of the capital.

Independent  
judiciary



Prosecution of  
office abuse



It is not clear if officials engaging in less egregious behaviors are prosecuted or otherwise sanctioned. The legal framework to enable such prosecutions is currently weak, as there is no comprehensive anti-corruption act, no whistleblower protection act, and no freedom of information act.

Given the ongoing investigations and reconfigurations of the institutional framework, it is difficult to draw a clear picture as to what extent public officeholders are held accountable for their misconduct.

According to the Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2018, 46% of respondents in The Gambia assessed the level of corruption as having decreased within the last year, while 32% observed an increase of corruption. 46% of Gambians thought that officials who commit crimes go unpunished, while 23% and 19% thought that this happens never or rarely respectively.

The Gambian constitution codifies civil rights, including, but not limited to, the right to life and security of the person, freedom from torture, equality before the law and non-discrimination. The non-discrimination clause recognizes discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, disability status, language and political opinion. It does not however recognize sexual orientation or gender expression. The right to privacy is provided for in the Gambian constitution but is extensively qualified by clawback clauses.

Under Jammeh, all these aforementioned rights were routinely violated with impunity. The frequency and intensity of violations have decreased dramatically under the Barrow government but there have been high-profile exceptions such as the Faraba Banta incident (death of environmental protesters in 2018) and a similar shooting incident at the former president's hometown (Kanilai) involving soldiers from ECOMIG. While the Barrow government has taken significant steps to improve civil rights, several of the more onerous laws (such as provisions of the public order act 1961) used by the Jammeh regime to circumvent the civil rights of Gambians remain on the books. In some cases, persons arrested under such laws have had their cases dismissed by magistrates.

There have been no changes regarding same-sex relations, which continue to be criminalized.

Civil rights

6

'06 \_\_\_\_\_ '20 10

6

1

#### 4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Since the Barrow government ascended to power in early 2017 and the ensuing opening up of civic and political space in the Gambia, democratic institutions have generally performed their function adequately. However, there is an institutional legacy of deference to the executive in the National Assembly, which was compounded by the de facto one-party state that existed under Jammeh. Despite the hollowing out of institutions under Jammeh, The Gambia has a legacy of democratic institutions going back to the Jawara era. In institutional terms, there was much continuity between the Jawara, Jammeh and Barrow governments.

The new National Assembly has proven itself much more willing to challenge the government, but there is no evidence to suggest that this constitutes counterproductive friction between the different institutions or levels of government. Where such friction has occurred, it is arguably in the interest of democracy and good governance (as in the case when the National Assembly rejected a supplementary budget in 2018).

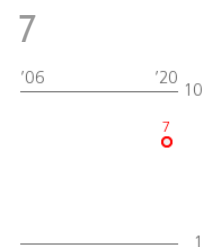
The democratic institutions of the Gambia are widely considered legitimate, even by those individuals or groups who might disagree with specific decisions or policies. Before Jammeh's rule, democratic institutions had been deep-rooted in Gambian society. There are no widespread or systematic attempts by any significant actors (such as political parties, the military, labor unions, or religious groups) to delegitimize democratic institutions. This is arguably a reflection of the unity of the former opposition parties to oust Jammeh through elections and the appreciation of the gains made through the transition of power from Jammeh to Barrow. In the administration – apart from the highest echelons – many officials continued their career after the transition and thus do not have incentives to question the legitimacy of the institutions.

#### 5 | Political and Social Integration

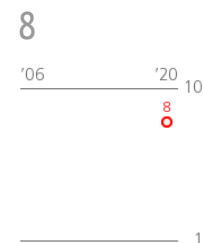
The Gambian party system has a few major parties that are somewhat stable, with several smaller parties that are largely centered on personalities or on ethnic groups (despite prohibitions on the latter).

Arguably the most dominant political party in the Gambia today is the United Democratic Party (UDP), which has a deep history and a well-established national organization. It was the largest and most significant opposition party during the Jammeh era. UDP constitutes the majority of the government as well as the National Assembly (31 out of 58 seats). Barrow was a member of the UDP prior to the 2016 election, but resigned so that he could be the candidate for the coalition of opposition parties that won (the coalition included UDP). Though technically, Barrow does not

Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system



belong to a political party, his establishment of a “Barrow Youth Movement” has resulted in criticism from media (which has noted parallels between this act and Jammeh’s establishment of a youth movement) as well as political figures such as the head of the UDP, Ousainou Darboe. There is thus considerable tension between the president and former member of the UDP (Barrow), and the leader of the UDP, the largest political party in the country (Darboe). This may have a polarizing effect in the future.

Other political parties are significantly smaller in terms of their membership and political influence. The former ruling party, Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction, is essentially a rump of a party limited in influence to the Foni area of the Gambia traditionally associated with the Jola ethnic group to which former president Jammeh belonged. The most ideologically distinct political party is the socialist Peoples’ Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialists, which is small and largely confined to a few constituencies in the urban area and far east of the country. Although they only have four seats in the National Assembly, they are arguably more influential than their numbers suggest due to the popularity and visibility of one of their leaders, Halifa Sallah.

No other political party has more than five seats in the National Assembly, and several political parties have none. Several of these political parties are led by seasoned politicians. Political groupings are largely differentiated by the personalities involved, as the spectrum of political options in The Gambia is generally narrow. All parties espouse broadly similar goals of development, democratization, and poverty alleviation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some parties do, however, draw their membership and voters from specific ethnic groups to a disproportionate extent. For example, the aforementioned APRC, the UDP that attracts votes from the Mandinkas and the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC), which is associated with the Fula. Gambian law prohibits explicitly ethnic parties and there is no firm data on the relationship between ethnicity and voting behavior.

There is a moderate range of interest groups in The Gambia. Organizations such as trade unions and civil society groups advocate for transitional justice and represent social interests. Gambian politics is not dominated by the interests of any particular group.

However, there is widespread discussion in Gambian media that young people are not adequately represented in the political system, at least in part due to the advanced age of many prominent politicians. There is no publicly available data on the intersection between age and party membership, but anecdotal evidence suggests that some parties, such as PDOIS, have proven more adept at capturing the attention of the youth, if not their vote.

There is no major constituency for LGBTQI rights and therefore these interests are rarely represented in the societal discourse.

Interest groups

6



'06 '20 10

6

1

There is very limited public opinion polling in the Gambia. However, Afrobarometer was able to conduct its survey in the Gambia for the first time in 2018. There is no other representative polling data for the country.

The results of the Afrobarometer generally indicate support of democratic norms and procedures, although this is somewhat inconsistent. In both urban and rural areas, a clear majority of respondents (66% and 70%, respectively) indicates a preference for a democratic system and an even larger majority indicate a need for citizens to have the ability to hold government accountable. Respondents expressed a strong disapproval of a one-party system (86% of respondents disapproved or strongly disapproved of a one-party system, while a slightly smaller percentage disapproved of military rule). 49% of Gambians are satisfied with how democracy works in their country.

The Afrobarometer results indicate that trust in different Gambian institutions is relatively high. The majority of Gambians trust essential institutions such as the presidency, the National Assembly, the police, and the army. However, it is important to note that traditional and religious authorities generally outscore state institutions on this count.

However, a majority of respondents (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that the government should have the right to restrict media if they deemed it harmful to society. When asked if they approved of a government being able to ban an organization on similar grounds, only 40% agreed).

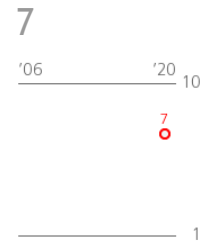
91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “it is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for,” suggesting a broad respect for the outcome of elections.

These results, though drawn from only one albeit recent survey, suggest that there is a fairly high approval of democratic norms in the Gambia.

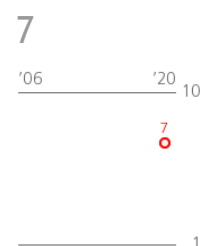
Arguably the most significant challenge to trust in the Gambia is the potential for division between different ethnic groups. The post-Jammeh period saw rising tensions, particularly in the Foni region between Jolas and Mandinkas, but these controversies concerned mostly political matters. Gambians are generally very tolerant toward other groups. In the Afrobarometer survey, respondents overwhelmingly report to not having been discriminated against based on ethnicity and are generally in favor of living in proximity with members of other ethnic groups. However, this data is not sufficiently representative to ascertain if deviations are clustered among particular ethnic (or other groups), which would suggest that some ethnic groups are less trustful or deemed less trustworthy than others.

Trust in the Gambia is encouraged by a number of mechanisms. Interethnic marriage, for example, is common, and there are cultural mechanisms such as joking kinship that can defuse tension and promote trust. Although Gambian civil society has been

Approval of  
democracy



Social capital



constrained, there are a number of robust non-state, non-kin-based groups active at local levels, ranging from unions, religious groups and various local development organizations.

## II. Economic Transformation

### 6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Social exclusion due to poverty and inequality is pronounced in The Gambia. Almost 40% of Gambians live in poverty and in 2017 the country is ranked 174 out of 189 countries in the HDI (0.460). The Gambia's score on the HDI is considerably lower due to inequality, suggesting that inequality is structurally ingrained. While inequality is not as extreme as in some other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, The Gambia has a Gini coefficient of 35.9 (2015). Social exclusion is exacerbated by gender inequality. The Gambia's score on the Gender Inequality Index was 0.623 in 2017 (ranked 149 out of 160 countries).

The Gambia does not fare much better on other indicators of economic development. The economy remains undiversified, there is a lack of skills and training opportunities, there is rapid population growth (3.0 % in 2017) and urbanization, which exacerbates existing shortcomings in employment and infrastructure, and a relatively underdeveloped private sector. While there has been some positive economic news under the Barrow government, such as the relative stability of the Gambian dalasi, poverty is likely to remain extensive and structurally ingrained in the short to medium term.

Economic indicators		2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP	\$ M	1394.1	1442.3	1489.5	<b>1624.5</b>
GDP growth	%	5.9	0.4	4.6	<b>6.6</b>
Inflation (CPI)	%	6.8	7.2	8.0	<b>6.5</b>
Unemployment	%	9.5	9.4	8.9	<b>8.9</b>

Question  
Score

Socioeconomic  
barriers

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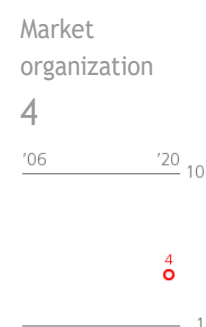
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Economic indicators		2015	2016	2017	2018
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	-0.1	-0.1	0.4	<b>1.8</b>
Export growth	%	-12.0	4.4	42.1	-
Import growth	%	6.4	0.2	27.9	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-99.2	-95.6	-110.8	-
Public debt	% of GDP	69.4	81.0	87.0	<b>86.6</b>
External debt	\$ M	532.9	516.0	653.6	<b>681.4</b>
Total debt service	\$ M	38.3	37.6	44.1	<b>45.1</b>
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	12.1	11.6	12.0	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	-	2.1	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.8	0.8	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.5	-	-	<b>1.1</b>

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

## 7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The Gambia has adopted an open regime for investments. There are no industries in which entry is specifically forbidden, except for defense, and most laws and regulations apply equally to Gambian and foreign companies. Key guarantees are offered under the law with regard to access to foreign exchange, land and foreign labor, and repatriation of funds and capital. The Gambia has a complete range of business regulation tools and laws are in line with best international practice. In recent years, the country has taken steps to improve the investment climate and to facilitate trade. The establishment of a single window facility for business establishment is a case in point. The Gambia also compares favorably in the region in terms of procedures for import and export and contract enforcement. Despite this progress, market competition in The Gambia is subject to a weak institutional framework. Effective access to capital is limited and the formal economy is dominated by a





handful of large companies. The key problems are often unclear regulations in competition and labor markets. The institutional capacities of Gambia are insufficient. Moreover, unforeseen and sudden policy changes increase uncertainty and affect the general business climate negatively. While the ease of doing business in The Gambia is slightly above average for sub-Saharan Africa, there are administrative barriers to entry that affect small and medium companies. Starting a business in Gambia takes 25 days and seven procedures with a cost of 120.9% of GNI per capita. The Starting a Business score amounts to 69.91 out of 100 (rank 169 out of 190 countries). These barriers are compounded by corruption and inefficiencies in areas such as tax collection. As a result, the informal sector plays a significant role in the Gambian economy. Employment in the informal sector amounts to 68.2% of total employment.

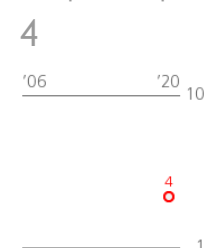
The Gambia's competition act was adopted in 2007, but its enforcement is limited. The objectives of the Gambia's competition act are to foster competitive markets and competitive business conduct. The country has established a competition commission and a competition regime that will control anti-competitive arrangements, monopoly situations and mergers with the aim of improving the well-being of consumers and the efficiency of businesses. However, the competition commission is unable to enforce the law due to a lack of resources and high workload.

In several key areas of the economy, such as tourism and agriculture, there are tacit agreements in place between large-scale – often international – incumbents, and local vendors, making market entry difficult. Anti-competitive practices such as price fixing occur and are only intermittently addressed by authorities. In some sectors of the economy, such as banking, a handful of companies dominate. In other sectors, such as the cement industry, a monopoly situation as defined by the competition act has arisen, primarily due to little or no regulation by the government.

The Gambia generally maintains a liberal trade and investment regime. The country is reliant on imports that stem mainly from the European Union, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Brazil and China. Imports greatly exceed exports. In January 2017, the Gambia adopted the five-band ECOWAS common external tariff (CET). This tariff system governs its relations with all trading partners and does not permit any exceptions or supplementary protection measures. The introduction of the CET has in practice meant a reduction of tariffs on imports. The Gambia had in 2010 a simple average applied MFN tariff rate of 14.1%, while the CET's average applied MFN tariff rate is 12.3%. Live animals, meat and clothes are subject to the highest tariffs.

There is no import licensing system in The Gambia, and imports/exports can generally proceed without formal legal obstacles. The Gambia does levy export taxes on a handful of goods, such as metal scrap and, on occasion, timber. The Gambia generally does not subsidize specific goods. Fuel subsidies were eliminated in 2014 and agricultural subsidies are limited to emergency measures.

#### Competition policy



#### Liberalization of foreign trade



The Gambian banking system is regulated by its central bank, which has sole authority over the banking sector. The domestic banking system is dominated by subsidiaries of foreign banks, primarily from Nigeria. There is one Islamic Bank in the country. There are also an assortment of microfinance institutions. The banking system is generally sound and oriented in principle to international standards. It experienced significant growth under Jammeh. The number of banks rose five in 2005 to 12 by 2015. Under Barrow, the banking system has remained sound and has improved according to metrics such as the ratio of non-performing loans (which saw a decrease from 5.9% to 4.7% over the course of 2018). In 2015, the bank capital to assets ratio stood at 14.8%, in comparison to 10.9% in 2007.

The Gambia's banking system does not have a preferential policy toward state economic enterprises but, in practice, Gambian banks are highly dependent upon the public sector. Gambian state-owned enterprises – particularly NAWEC (national water and electricity company) and GAMTEL/GAMCEL (the national telephone and mobile phone company) - have experienced financial difficulties and there is a potential for adverse effects for the banking sector.

Gambian banks are generally risk averse, with low loan exposure by regional standards. They have proven unable or unwilling to assume more credit risk through advancing more loans to the private sector. The underlying causes of this reluctance are several, including the lack of a robust credit reference system. There are also regulatory requirements, such as the single obligor limit of 25%, that make significant private sector credit more challenging. Gambian banks typically have stringent requirements for collateral (such as land), which makes access to finance more difficult for smaller enterprises and private citizens.

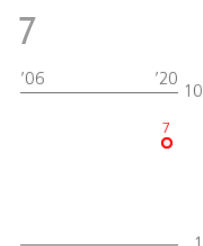
There is no stock exchange in The Gambia, though there are ongoing discussions over whether to establish one.

## 8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Gambian monetary policy is set by a monetary policy committee (MPC) of the central bank of the Gambia (CBG). It is independent of the executive branch and there has been no evidence of political influence under the Barrow government.

Monetary stability is an objective of economic policy and has been consistently followed under the Barrow government. The Gambian dalasi has stabilized, which is a departure from its dramatic swings under Jammeh (Jammeh periodically sought to interfere directly in monetary policy by, for example, ordering specific exchange rates for exchange bureaus). The World Bank estimated the real effective exchange rate index (REER) to have been 83.5 in 2013, 76.1 in 2015 and 92.2 in 2017.

### Banking system



### Monetary stability



The stability of the dalasi and overall moderate global food prices have contributed to decelerating inflation. According to the central bank of The Gambia, inflation fell to 6.5% in October 2018, compared to 7.4% in the previous year. The medium-term target for inflation is 5%, and the CBG expresses some confidence that this will be met.

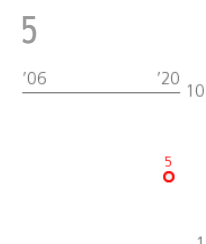
Fiscal policy-making has improved under the Barrow-government in that it is more transparent and less erratic. This is reflected in the country's improved fiscal balance, which has decreased from -9.7 % of GDP in 2016 to -3.9 % in 2017, according to the African Development Bank. The Gambia is saddled with significant public debt and low reserves from the Jammeh era. Public debt is considerably higher than in other countries in the region. In 2017, The Gambia's public debt was 112% of GDP, compared to 61% for its neighbor Senegal. The African Development Bank puts Gambia's debt at 130% of GDP for the same time period. In 2017, government consumption represented 12% of GDP, roughly equivalent to that of Mexico and, within the African region, Côte d'Ivoire. The current account deficit has been reduced to 19% of GDP, but remains large.

The Barrow government is open to addressing the severity of the country's debt problem. The continuing growth of the country's economy will alleviate, though by no means fully compensate for, the debt burden. While the Barrow government is saying and doing the right things to address its economic issues, it is not clear that these actions will be sufficient in the long term, especially in light of the structural conditions that hamper the Gambia's economy such as an erratic electricity supply and an undiversified economy.

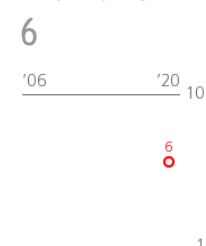
## 9 | Private Property

Property rights are in principle well-defined and regulated in The Gambia, but there are several areas of concern. First, some property matters, such as inheritance, are governed by Islamic law and the implementation thereof, particularly in rural areas, is not always carefully regulated and is arguably discriminatory based on gender. Second, under the previous government property rights, especially related to land, were not adequately respected and it remains to be seen if the new government will be able to safeguard these rights against abuse on a consistent basis. Third, the Gambia has historically had a problem with ambiguous land rights where competing authorities (state and local/traditional) have sought to regulate land acquisition and disposition in contradictory ways. The net effect is that while robust property rights exist on paper, they are not consistently and predictably enforced in all situations.

### Fiscal stability



### Property rights



Private companies are institutionally viewed as major engines of economic production and they are generally, and in principle, safeguarded against interference. The Barrow government has identified the private sector as a key implementation partner (and funder) of its national development plan. It is not clear how realistic this ambition is, however, as the formal economy is dominated by a few companies, primarily in the service industry. Smaller and medium sized private sector entities face difficulties accessing credit, which hampers expansion.

The legal framework relevant to the private sector, including the Gambia public procurement authority act of 2014, the competition act of 2007, and the consumer protection act of 2014, is generally in line with international standards. These laws are yet to be tested in a court of law under Barrow.

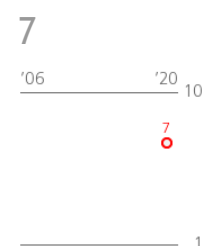
State-owned enterprises remain important in The Gambia, most notably the national water and electricity company (NAWEC). Efforts to privatize state-owned enterprises are intermittent, though there have been reforms to increase their efficiency (in the case of NAWEC for example, a switch to pre-paid meters, under Jammeh, led to an increase in revenue).

## 10 | Welfare Regime

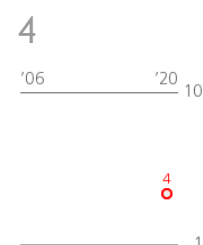
The Gambia's social safety net is weak. Retirement benefits are available only to a small percentage of the population (those with more than 10 years of employment in a government institution or participating private institution) and are funded by the employer and employee. Other social benefits, such as compensation for workplace injuries, unemployment insurance, or family leave are either not available at all or only available to a small subset of the population. Insofar as they exist, they are predominantly in the form of cash payments funded by the employer. Gambian government expenditure on health care has steadily increased over the last decade and most Gambians have, in principle, access to rudimentary public medical care (or medical care provided by a non-governmental organization), while those with means have access to private medical care in urban areas or abroad.

Gender equality, particularly in terms of education, has been a priority area for successive Gambian governments, but equality is yet to be achieved. The literacy rate gap between men and women is large (almost 20 percentage points in 2013), with a literacy rate of 51.4% for men and 33.6% for women. This figure is close to or better than many other neighboring countries. In 2017 school enrollment was equal between the genders at the primary level (GPI: 1.1) and secondary level (GPI: 1.0). However, female enrollment lags behind male enrollment at the tertiary level (GPI: 0.7). Gambian law prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, and other statuses but enforcement of these rules is generally inconsistent. Prevailing social norms generally favor men in many areas of political and economic life, and women are encouraged to marry and focus on their families. There are no indications that unequal participation in society is due to ethnicity or religion.

### Private enterprise



### Social safety nets



### Equal opportunity



## 11 | Economic Performance

The Gambia's economic performance is uneven. By measurements such as inflation, tax revenue, GDP per capita (2017: \$1,715), and unemployment, the Gambia underperforms in comparison to the already poor regional standards. GDP per capita growth was volatile in recent years but improved from -0.8% in 2016 to 0.4% in 2017. Public debt remains high. Assessment is hampered, however, by a lack of data, especially covering the review period. The Gambia suffered from years of economic mismanagement under the regime of Yahya Jammeh, which ended in early 2017. The tail end of his regime saw a significantly worsening economic climate due to political instability and the regional Ebola crisis, which while not directly affecting the country nonetheless had a negative impact on its tourism industry, which accounts for approximately 20% of both GDP and employment. The government of Adama Barrow has sought to address this unfavorable economic legacy with mixed results. Efforts are assisted by the release of development aid (primarily from the European Union) suspended during the Jammeh era and a resurgent tourism industry, but thus far major indicators of economic well-being have not shifted significantly.

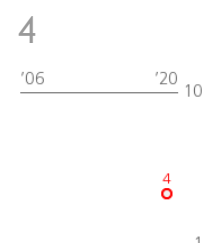
Output strength



## 12 | Sustainability

Environmental concerns have proven to be a major challenge for the Barrow government, in no small part due to well-publicized incidents of police violence against environmental protests and a concerted effort by both domestic and international civil society groups to highlight environmental issues. The national environment agency, under the ministry of environment, climate change, and natural resources, is tasked with ensuring that Gambian social and economic development takes adequate account of environmental concerns by conducting appropriate risk assessments and taking remedial action.

Environmental policy



However, environmental concerns do not appear to exert a particularly significant influence in policy-making. The most notable event where environmental concerns overrode a specific policy or program is when concerted protests over the destruction of the Bijilo Forest Park (in order to build a Chinese-funded convention center) led to a reduction in the area set aside for construction. It did not stop the destruction of forest, however, and it is arguable that the reduction was primarily due to concerns that the complete destruction of Bijilo would have had an adverse impact on tourism (Bijilo Forest Park is adjacent to several large hotels) rather than purely out of concerns for the environment.

Other environmental concerns are largely out of the hands of the Barrow government. Illicit fishing remains a major threat to the Gambia and Gambians livelihood, but much of this is carried out by non-Gambian vessels and the country lacks the maritime resources to adequately protect its waters.

The Gambia's educational system is deficient and research and development barely exists. The country is near the very bottom of the UN Education Index, just ahead of Senegal. Public expenditure on education is less than 3% of GDP (in 2013, the latest year for which figures are available). This figure is less than half the corresponding figures for Ghana and South Africa. R&D expenditure represents 0.1% of GDP (2011). The Gambia's literacy rate is 42%, which is about average (or slightly above average) for the sub-region and equivalent to that of Senegal.

While both the Jammeh and Barrow governments have emphasized education, particularly their desire to ensure equal access to primary education for boys and girls, there are substantial obstacles to the provision of quality education, even at the primary level. A 2009 World Bank study highlighted significant teacher absenteeism and lack of space as particular challenges. Although this report and its findings are 10 years old, there is no indication that circumstances have changed significantly. Double-shifting is reportedly common, particularly in rural areas, to address space needs. Another challenge identified by the World Bank study is inadequate record keeping, concerning both student records and financial records. Finally, student absenteeism, while variable across different parts of the country, is also high.

Education at the secondary and tertiary levels has similar issues. At the tertiary level, there is only one major university in the entire country, the publicly funded University of The Gambia (UTG). Prior to the establishment of the UTG, some tertiary training was provided by specific institutes such as The Gambia College, which provided teacher training. These have now been folded into the University of The Gambia. The UTG offers BA and MA degrees in social science and humanities, professional degrees in law and medicine, and doctorate degrees in biology and public administration. The quality of educational delivery is uneven across the units as university staff are underpaid and there are numerous anecdotal reports of instructional staff resigning mid-semester to pursue other opportunities, which disrupts student learning. Furthermore, facilities remain substandard. For instance, students in the natural sciences are rarely exposed to lab practicals as there are no facilities at the UTG.

Students who do manage to finish their degrees face an uncertain employment future as the government is the largest employer of university graduates and the current economic circumstances are such that it will not be able to hire all graduates. There is also a mismatch between the hiring needs of the government and the private sector, and the degrees awarded.

In addition to the UTG, there are a handful of private, specialized, tertiary institutions in the country offering courses in medicine and law, among other fields.

Education policy /  
R&D



## Governance

### I. Level of Difficulty

The structural constraints on the Gambian government's ability to exercise its leadership are considerable. First among these is arguably poverty and the lack of human development. In the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report, the Gambia is one of the lowest-ranked countries in terms of human development, scoring below the continental average in educational outcomes and the HDI. The Gambia's increase in HDI between 1990 and 2018 is below the regional average. Despite efforts to address it, unemployment – especially among young people – remains stubbornly high.

There is a historical shortage of domestically trained (to an appropriate level) civil servants and a lack of consistent professional training opportunities. Tertiary education in the Gambia is weak, with the University of The Gambia (the country's only university) only formally launched in 1999. Studies of education and the Gambian labor market suggest a mismatch between what the educational system is able to offer and the human capacity needs of the country, with significant shortfalls in fields like medicine, education and economics.

The constraints are exacerbated by over two decades of mismanagement of the civil service under the regime of Yahya Jammeh. Under Jammeh, the civil service was politicized, with plum positions given to political allies and senior civil servants dismissed seemingly on a whim. Civil service compensation is low, leading to additional turnover. Finally, a 2010 World Bank study of the Gambian civil service found that the uniformed services were relatively large, to the detriment of economic services. Civil service reform has been a priority for the new government, who are looking to strengthen the civil service's capability and accountability.

Beyond the civil service, the Gambian government's capacity is further constrained by significant external debt. Even though the new government has worked, with some success, to shore-up confidence in the Gambian economy and promote investment, the country's debt vulnerability is increasing, with the IMF considering the Gambia's public debt unsustainable (as of 2018).

Structural  
constraints

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Any discussion of The Gambia's civil society must be considered against the backdrop of the 22 years of autocratic rule by Yahya Jammeh. Under Jammeh, civil society organizations were cowed and in some cases banned. Participation in public life by civic organization was largely limited to topics deemed safe by the government, such as literacy programs and sustainable tourism. While there were unions for various sectors of the economy, including relatively high-profile ones like the Gambia Press Union (GPU) and the Gambia Teachers Union' (GTU), these were routinely marginalized and intimidated.

The transition to a new government has seen a resurgence of civil society. In fact, the opposition's electoral win in 2016 that precipitated the transition is also attributable to growing civil society activism. Gambian civil society today consists both of established groups (such as the previously mentioned GPU and GTU) as well as new entrants, many of whom are engaging specifically with the legacy of the Jammeh regime (such as the Gambia center for victims of human rights violations). An umbrella group, the association of NGOs (TANGO), which was largely ineffectual under the Jammeh regime, has also experienced a resurgence in influence and profile.

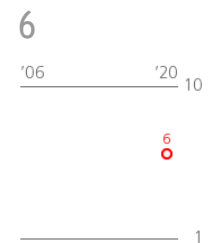
Insofar as Gambian civil society is to be measured by the activity of NGOs, it is worth noting that Gambian NGOs are typically heavily dependent on international funding, whether that is from development partners such as the European Union or private donations from the Gambian diaspora or other persons with an interest in Gambian issues.

Beyond NGOs, much of Gambian civic and public life is channeled through religious institutions (mosques and churches). These organizations are generally allowed to operate without restrictions and relations between different denominations are generally good, though there have been some episodes of inter-communal tension over the last several years, focusing on issues such as access to burial grounds.

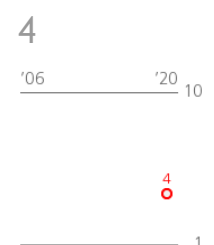
The Gambia today is relatively peaceful, which in and of itself is a considerable achievement due to its recent history. There have been a handful of violent incidents along ethnic or religious lines. Ethnic incidents are linked to the status of the Jola minority ethnic group, which some Gambians blame for Jammeh (Jammeh was a Jola). There have also been a handful of violent incidents between followers of different religions, including between different Islamic denominations.

Today, the Gambian political establishment largely eschews the idea of mobilizing support through appeals to religion or ethnicity. This is in contrast to Jammeh who, in his final years, sought to use anti-Mandinka (the Mandinka being the majority ethnic group in the country) rhetoric to unite the other ethnic groups on his side (there is no evidence that these appeals were successful, however). Indeed, in current Gambian political life to accuse an opponent of being biased in favor of a particular ethnic group (to be "tribalist") is a delegitimizing strategy. That said, several of the political parties have a decidedly ethnic bent to their membership. For example, the

Civil society traditions



Conflict intensity





former ruling party APRC is, in essence, a Jola party, while the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) reportedly has disproportionately strong support among the Fula. The United Democratic Party (UDP) is perceived to be a Mandinka dominant party.

## II. Governance Performance

### 14 | Steering Capability

The Gambian government routinely sets strategic priorities and plans over extended periods and often for specific sectors (e.g., health, education, poverty alleviation). Some of these priorities and plans are inherited from the previous government, while others are newly developed. At the present time, the most far-reaching and potentially consequential of these plans is the national development plan for 2018 – 2021. It is premature to assess whether the government will be able to execute this plan.

Historically, and particularly under the Jammeh regime, such strategic plans were not executed in a consistent or coherent way. On a practical level, strategies were generally ad hoc and subject to the whims of the presidency. The new government has undertaken measures to ensure adherence with the current strategic plan and to promote transparency in its implementation. These measures include, for example, a website to allow citizens to track the fulfillment of various development goals. This website does not appear to be updated on a consistent basis, however.

In sum, the current government of the Gambia does set strategic priorities but it is not entirely clear if implementation is effective and consistent.

The Gambian government has identified several strategies areas for 2018 to 2021. These areas include: governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights; decentralization; improvement of fisheries and agriculture; education; health and sanitation; social protection; energy and petroleum; transport; public works. The area that has seen the most visible progress is governance, rule of law, and human rights. Here, the Barrow government has made a dramatic break with its predecessor (indeed, this break is arguably the reason for the Barrow government's existence in the first place). It has sought to increase civilian oversight over the security services, reform the judiciary, released political prisoners and created a new human rights unit within the police force. It has also overseen a sweeping transitional justice program that includes a truth, reconciliation, and reparations commission to assess (and offer reparations for) the abuses of the Jammeh era.

Other notable achievements include the inauguration of the Trans-Gambian bridge in early 2019, which will offer more consistent and convenient road connections between the northern and southern parts of the country as well as with Senegal. There

Question  
Score

Prioritization

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Implementation

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have also been efforts to improve the erratic energy supply of the country, including acquiring (with World Bank support) new generators for key power stations in Kotu and Brikama.

These successes notwithstanding, many of the strategic goals of the Barrow government are contingent upon circumstances beyond their control. While the Gambian fisheries industry is limited by domestic challenges (e.g., lack of sophisticated equipment and processing plants), it is also confronted with the regional trends of overfishing and illegal fishing.

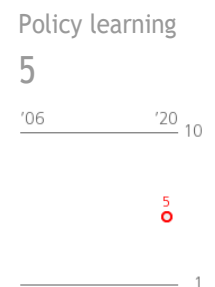
The Barrow government's ability to implement its policies is unclear. It has achieved some successes, but there are other areas where success is difficult to come by and is dependent on factors beyond the Gambian government's control.

The Barrow government is in an unusual position in that it inherited a civil service with areas of competence but a history of being subject to interference by an erratic and often mercurial executive. Thus, much of its learning appears to consist of simply endeavoring not to repeat the mistakes of the previous government, and it is not entirely clear that the Barrow government has been successful so far in this area. For example, though the government is only two years old, there have been multiple cabinet reshuffles and it has been dogged with questions about corruption in public procurement and its decision to honor or renew contracts signed by the previous government. An example of this is the controversial contract with Semlex, a Belgian company, to provide identification cards for the country.

The Barrow government's ability to develop policy is hampered by its reliance on external experts and consultants, which in turn is a reflection of the poor state of tertiary education in the country.

The national development plan adopted in 2018 does include a mechanism to learn from past experiences and to assess the effectiveness of any policy initiative. However, much of the data needed is yet to be made publicly available or in some cases even generated. This reflects the generally poor state of data collection in the Gambia and the difficulty for government agencies to gain useful accurate information. A case in point is the Gambia bureau of statistics' Gambia data portal, which features incomplete or outdated data.

In short, the Barrow government's capacity for policy learning is circumscribed by the generally inadequate state of educational resources in the country. There is also the possibility that the government is relying on the popularity of it not being the Jammeh government and has not yet felt compelled to a flexible and innovative approach to policy-making.



## 15 | Resource Efficiency

The Gambia is a highly indebted country (public debt stood at 112.7% of GDP in 2017) whose debt burden is, according to the IMF, unsustainable even though the economic outlook is generally positive. It appears likely that economic growth will be outpaced by the growing debt burden.

Under Barrow, transparency and oversight in budgeting has increased, helped by a more assertive National Assembly and media. The auditing of the accounts of different government organizations remains inconsistent, however. There have also been reports of mismanagement of funds in the ministry of foreign affairs, the ministry of agriculture, the judiciary, and other parts of the government.

Proposed changes to the civil service, including significant pay increases, are projected to have an adverse impact in the short term but will presumably increase the efficiency of the public administration in the long term as it will lead to reduced turnover and attract more qualified personnel.

The Barrow government has sought to improve transparency in public procurement. The Gambia public procurement authority act 2014 was adopted under Jammeh but was not adhered to on a consistent basis. However, a worrying development under Barrow has been the disbandment of the public tender board.

In general terms, policy in the Gambia is led by the president's office and there are mechanisms in place to coordinate activities between different ministries, agencies, and other stakeholders to avoid redundancies and friction. For example, in early 2018 the Barrow government established a Gambian diaspora directorate to coordinate the activities between the ministry of foreign affairs, the ministry of finance and economic affairs, and other stakeholders. Such interagency task forces and organizations are a common occurrence in The Gambia, but the extent to which they are operational and appropriately resourced vary significantly.

The Barrow government has promised to address and contain corruption in The Gambia, but its record thus far is mixed. The government initiated a commission of inquiry to address corruption under the previous regime, but it has yet to address the shortcomings in the legal framework it inherited from the previous government. It has promised an anti-corruption act and a freedom of information act, but neither has yet materialized.

Afrobarometer data collected in the Gambia suggests that the Barrow government is better at preventing and addressing corruption than its predecessor. This positive development has been marred, however, by allegations of corruption concerning a foundation linked to one of Barrow's wives, which led to an inquiry by the National Assembly.

Efficient use of assets

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Policy coordination

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Anti-corruption policy

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## 16 | Consensus-Building

All major political actors in the Gambia are in broad agreement that democracy must be consolidated. Disputes between political groups have less to do with democracy as such and more to do with the nature of the body politic, equality within it, and the impact of the transition from the rule of Yahya Jammeh. For example, members of the APRC, the former ruling party which now occupies only five seats in the National Assembly and whose strength is limited to the Jola-heartland of Foni, sometimes accuse the new government of being anti-Jola or generally unfairly vindictive against people in some way associated with the Jammeh regime. Outside of political parties, religious groups exercise a considerable influence on Gambian affairs but none of these are in substantial disagreement over the need for and desirability of democratic consolidation. There have been some incidents where religious minority groups have been targeted with vitriol suggesting that they are not to be considered full members of the Gambian community. For example, conservative Imams, including members of the quasi-governmental supreme Islamic council, have vilified the Ahmadiyya religious group as untrustworthy members of the body politic.

All major political actors in the Gambia are in broad agreement that the market economy should be strengthened. The only (partial) exception to this claim is the numerically small but high-profile political party Peoples' Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS). Spokespersons for PDOIS have repeatedly called for the Gambia to adopt more of a socialist economy, though there is no evidence that they will be able to convince other parties of this course of action nor achieve sufficient influence to effect it (they currently hold four out of 58 seats in the National Assembly). Other political actors may have disagreements on specific policies or budget allocations, but there is no concerted push to deviate from the general pro-market economy path adopted by the current government.

There are no significant anti-democratic actors in The Gambia. However, there are lingering public concerns over the loyalty of the military to the new government, especially as the previous regime sought to pack the military with loyalists. The Barrow government's extension of ECOMIG's mandate in the Gambia is indicative of these worries. There have, however, been no specific anti-democratic statements by the military or any other reason to suggest that anti-democratic beliefs have a significant foothold within the military or that they will be acted upon.

A second interest group with potentially anti-democratic interests are some of the conservative Islamic groups in the country. The most relevant evidence of this were efforts by prominent Imams to lobby against the granting of a television license to the Ahmadiyya religious group. Their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, however, suggesting that their influence is rather limited.

Consensus on goals

9

'06 \_\_\_\_\_ '20 10  
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Anti-democratic actors

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Finally, there have been some allegations by public officials that members of the Jola ethnic group are sheltering would-be rebels. These allegations have not been substantiated.

Up to the present day, there is no evidence to suggest that the Barrow government is unable to co-opt or exclude actors with anti-democratic interests.

The Gambia’s political leadership largely refrains from overt polarization of society along ethnic, class, religious, or other lines. Politically influential members of society routinely decry what they perceive as “tribalist” attitudes and behaviors. There is a strong institutional as well as cultural bias in favor of consensus-building.

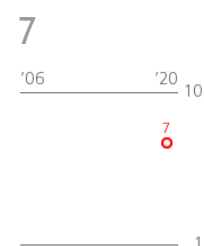
There are, however, latent and potential cleavages that could be mobilized by political actors in the future. The status of the Jola ethnic group remains somewhat unsettled, especially as some members of this community feel that they are unfairly blamed for Jammeh. Though the APRC today does not present itself as an ethnic party, it functions as one in practice.

A second potential cleavage for the Gambia is class and age, based primarily on the intersection of migration and youth unemployment. There have been isolated incidents of returning migrants engaging in violence against property in protests over their lack of (promised) opportunities at home. There is a broad consensus among the political parties that this is an issue that must be addressed, and thus far no single political actor has sought to exploit this incipient cleavage. There are deliberate attempts to include young people and migrants in the decision-making process to help forestall polarization.

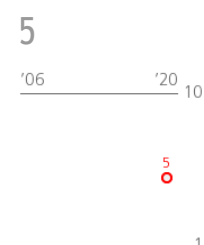
As of January 2019, the Gambia is in the midst of public hearings of the truth, reconciliation, and reparations commission, and it is not inconceivable that these hearings will highlight and accentuate some cleavages, in particular that of ethnicity.

The influence of civil society organizations has increased under Barrow. They now experience fewer legal and political constraints. An assessment by CIVICUS: world alliance for citizen participation finds that Gambian civil society now operates in an “obstructed” rather than “repressed” environment. It is unclear if this relative increase in freedom translates into meaningful civil society participation in the policy process. While civil society organizations are frequently included in workshops and invoked as key partners and stakeholders in government statements, the actual influence of civil society appears somewhat limited. There are some areas, such as transitional justice and legal reform, where civil society organizations appear to be more influential. In other areas, such as environmental issues, civil society organizations are not simply excluded from the policy process but actively marginalized.

Cleavage /  
conflict  
management



Civil society  
participation



The Gambia is currently in the midst of a potentially far-reaching reconciliation process to address the human rights abuses and corruption of the Yahya Jammeh era. The centerpiece of this process is the truth, reconciliation, and reparations commission (TRRC) but other initiatives important to this process include the commission of inquiry into the financial actions of the past government.

As this process is underway, it is fair to say that the political leadership is very much in favor of some kind of reconciliation, but it is not yet a settled question as to whether the reconciliation will be successful or whether the kind of reconciliation ultimately achieved will be accepted by all relevant stakeholders.

There are specific areas in the reconciliation framework that have occasioned public disputes and disagreement. The most important question, yet to be decisively answered, is what to do about Yahya Jammeh himself. Jammeh currently lives in exile in Equatorial Guinea and the Barrow government has largely demurred on the question of whether there will ever be some kind of prosecution of Jammeh. Both Afrobarometer data and journalistic reporting shows that there would be considerable support in the Gambia for a trial of some sort. A majority of Afrobarometer respondents support a trial in all regions of the country. What this trial would look like, if it ever happens, is not settled. One frequently invoked model is the extraordinary African chamber that tried the former dictator of Chad in Senegal, and some Gambian civil society organizations are working with international partners to realize this goal (the Afrobarometer data does not cover Gambian's preference for specific kinds of arrangements). Other Gambians appear to be willing to move on and do not seek a trial of the former president, while others – predominantly from the Jola region – have expressed a wish for Jammeh to return to the country.

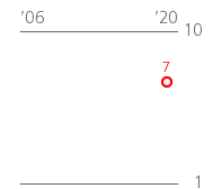
Another issue of concern is the role of amnesty in the reconciliation process. The Barrow government received some criticism from international human rights groups for the inclusion of an amnesty provision in the truth, reconciliation and reparations commission act (2017). It remains to be seen whether amnesties will be extensively granted and how that will be received by the public at large.

Furthermore, the role of ethnicity in the reconciliation process is ambiguous. The Jammeh regime was not an explicitly ethnic regime (of the sort found in apartheid-era South Africa, for example), but many Gambians view the Jolas as having disproportionately benefited from his rule. Discussions of ethnicity or “tribe” in local parlance are relatively frequent in Gambian political discourse, yet the TRRC is not explicitly tasked to address this issue. It is therefore possible that the reconciliation will in effect sideline incipient ethnic grievances and thereby accentuate them.

Finally, it is clear that an overarching priority for many Gambians is economic development, service delivery and employment. Any success in the reconciliation process will be tempered by the Barrow government's ability to address these important economic issues.

Reconciliation

7



## 17 | International Cooperation

International assistance is a significant and essential component of the Gambian government's development agenda. This assistance constitutes both project grants and budget support, financed primarily by the World Bank and the European Union. Project grants are largely aimed at funding specific goals of the national development policy, although there has been some criticism (both internal and external) that this policy is vague in key details or too aspirational. For example, one goal is to reduce unemployment from 35% to 25%, but the plan to accomplish this is vague on details beyond established, and hitherto mostly ineffectual, strategies such as vocational training schemes. It is thus not entirely clear if international assistance is effective, despite the existence of long-term plans.

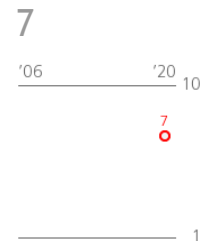
The Barrow government benefits from a significant amount of international (and domestic) good will by virtue of the fact that it is not the Jammeh government. The latter, particularly in its final years, had proven itself to be a contentious, erratic, and not credible partner. This was not only because of its persistent human rights abuses and corruption, but also due to its decisions to withdraw from the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court, the abrupt diplomatic recognition of the Peoples' Republic of China and the attendant severance of ties with Taiwan, and the unconstitutional renaming of the Gambia as the Islamic Republic of The Gambia.

The Barrow government quickly moved to reverse some of these decisions (rejoining the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court). These actions, coupled with the overall improvement in human rights and efforts to combat corruption (even if these have not been entirely successful), have improved the Gambia's reputation considerably.

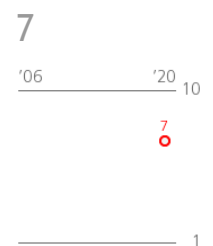
The Gambian government has signed most major international and regional human rights treaties, though the majority of these ratifications took place during the Jammeh or Jawara governments. It has not accepted most individual complaints procedures, however, and it is has fallen behind on many reporting requirements (the Barrow government cannot be put at fault for this, however, as these lags mostly stem from the Jammeh era). There are also several pertinent African Union treaties that the Gambia has signed (under Jammeh) but never ratified, including the African charter on democracy, elections and governance and the African charter on values and principles of public service and administration.

The Barrow government has shown some commitment to international legal treaties by complying with a decision against it issued by the ECOWAS community court of justice (in a case from the Jammeh era) and pledged to pay the prescribed damages.

Effective use of support



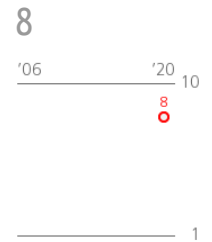
Credibility



The Gambia's relationships with its neighbors have improved significantly since Barrow became president in early 2017. The most important bilateral relationship for the Gambia is arguably Senegal (its only immediate neighbor), and this relationship is at a high point, as evidenced by the 2019 inauguration of the Trans-Gambia Bridge (which represents a long-running sticking point between the countries). Senegal was instrumental in forcing Jammeh to honor the results of the 2016 election and Barrow being brought to power. During the post-election standoff, Barrow and his associates stayed in Senegal, and Senegal was a major proponent of, and the largest troop contributor to, the ECOWAS mission to the Gambia. The two countries have established a Senegal-Gambia presidential council to strengthen collaboration between them.

The Gambia maintains generally positive bilateral relationship with other countries in the region and, under Barrow, has fully cooperated with ECOWAS and the African Union.

Regional  
cooperation





## Strategic Outlook

The Gambia faces considerable economic challenges in the future. Despite an economic rebound after the democratic transition, external debt and other economic factors may constrain the Barrow government's ability to address the needs of the country. Weakness in the labor market, particularly among young people, and a mismatch with economic opportunities will be an ongoing challenge.

While The Gambia's political transition is regularly and accurately lauded, there are factors that may undermine democratic consolidation, including weakness in public administration, fitful efforts to combat corruption, and uncertainty around the ability of the transitional justice process to adequately address the needs and concerns of all segments of the population.

The Barrow government's actions to address these and other issues are generally sound but there are specific areas that merit additional consideration.

The anti-corruption framework is long overdue and should be adopted promptly. It should be matched with appropriate training for civil servants and complementary legislation to protect citizens seeking to address corruption (such as a whistleblower protection act of the sort adopted in Ghana, for example).

While the likelihood of sustained ethno-religious conflict in the Gambia is relatively low, it is nonetheless the case that ethnicity and religion are socially salient cleavages in modern Gambia and the government should take steps to ensure that concerns stemming from these cleavages are considered and not ignored or marginalized.

It is unclear whether the Barrow government has an actionable and realistic plan to address the environmental challenges facing the country and which have led to major protests. Protests against sand-mining, pollution from a Chinese owned fish meal factory, and the destruction of a nature preserve (to build a convention center) have all led to tense situations and in some cases violence. These problems have a direct impact on the livelihood of local communities.

The Mediterranean migrant crisis continues to loom large in the Gambia. During the 2016 campaign, the opposition parties that comprised the winning coalition all made addressing migration a priority. The Gambia is disproportionately represented, in relation to its population, in the migrant population and anecdotal evidence suggests that some communities in the Gambia lack any young men, who have undertaken the perilous journey through the Sahel and the Sahara to cross the Mediterranean. The new government has sought to address youth employment (and there is no doubt that by virtue of the opening up of political space, one "push factor" behind out-migration under Jammeh has been neutralized. While migration has generally decreased, it remains a destabilizing factor for Gambian communities and a potential source of tension.

Finally, while the Barrow government overall has proven to be competent and respectful of the rule of law, its progress in this area is partially undermined by a lack of clarity about Barrow's intentions to resign after three years – which he initially promised, as part of a transitional process – or whether he will seek to remain in power for the regular five year term. There is a growing sentiment in the Gambia that Barrow is consolidating power in subtle ways (e.g., by launching the Barrow Youth Movement) and while this is not to say that he is a Jammeh-in-the-making, greater clarity on his intentions, coupled with an accelerated effort to redraft the 1997 constitution as promised, would no doubt address some of these concerns.