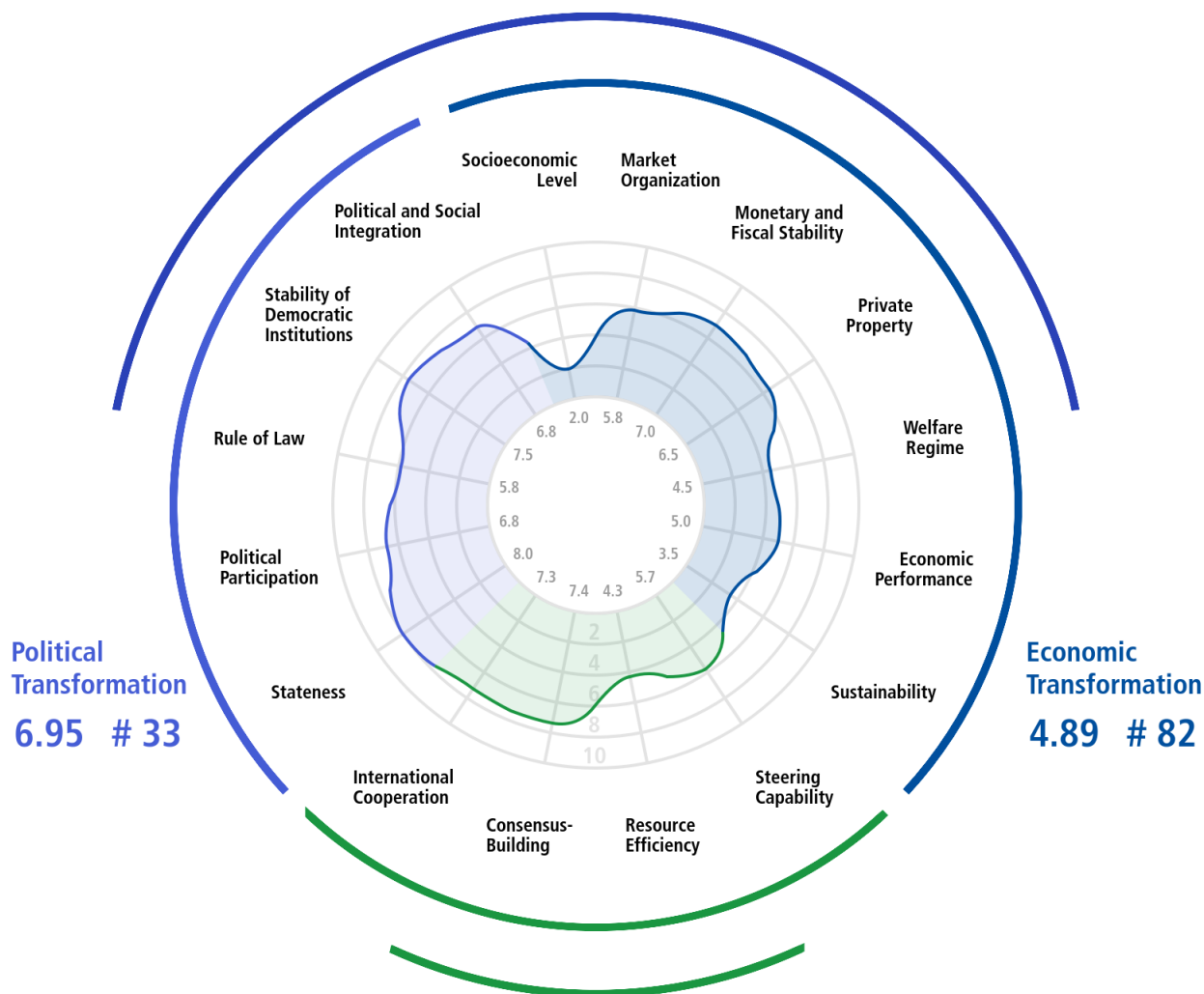


Gambia

Status Index

5.92 # 55

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
6.95 # 33

Economic Transformation
4.89 # 82

Governance Index

5.73 # 34

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022**. It covers the period from February 1, 2019 to January 31, 2021. 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>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	2.4	HDI	0.496	GDP p.c., PPP \$	2278
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.9	HDI rank of 189	172	Gini Index	35.9
Life expectancy	years	62.1	UN Education Index	0.406	Poverty ³	% 38.4
Urban population	%	62.6	Gender inequality ²	0.612	Aid per capita \$	82.7

Sources (as of December 2021): The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2021 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2020. 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

The Gambia's situation is one of an incomplete transition from the autocratic rule of Yahya Jammeh to the democratic rule of his successor, Adama Barrow, that began with the last presidential election in 2016. Under Barrow, the Gambia experienced marked improvements in the respect of civil and political rights overall, although there have been worrisome developments that include a heavy-handed response to the Three Years Jotna movement in 2020. The Three Years Jotna movement argues that Barrow should serve for only a three-year transitional term and not the constitutionally mandated five-year term. There are also episodes of intercommunal violence, usually occasioned by disputes over land.

Among the many transitional initiatives the Barrow government adopted, the arguably highest profile one has been the Truth, Reparations and Reconciliation Commission. Its final report is scheduled to be released in 2021 and Gambians have been enraptured by its public hearings that have shed light upon the many abuses during the Jammeh era. Other promised reforms under Barrow have yet to materialize or sputtered to a premature death. The efforts to establish an anti-corruption commission and adopt a freedom of information act have not yielded results and it is unclear if either of these initiatives enjoy much government support. The efforts to adopt a new constitution, which would have meant a sharp break with the Jammeh era, failed after pro-Barrow members of the Gambia's National Assembly voted against a procedural move, effectively killing the draft for the present.

Jammeh bequeathed a largely hollowed-out state apparatus to Barrow, with a bloated security sector, an inefficient civil service, a browbeaten judiciary, and severe funding and resource constraints in just about every sector. The Barrow government has taken steps to address these constraints, with mixed results. Efforts to increase and Gambianize the judiciary have largely been successful, and civil service reform is ongoing. The fate of the security sector reform program is still uncertain. There have been modest changes, such as renaming the National Intelligence Agency and forming a human rights unit in the Gambia police force.

Economic governance has largely improved under Barrow and, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gambian economy was predicted to grow at a brisk pace of 6% in 2020, fueled by an increase in foreign direct investment, as well as domestic demand. Poverty has nonetheless increased, except in urban areas. The Gambia is also heavily reliant on agriculture and fishing, which creates vulnerability to climate shocks and commodity price fluctuations. These have a disproportionate impact on the country's most vulnerable. Corruption remains a serious concern and reports of government civil servants accepting kickbacks to ignore regulations frequently break in Gambian media.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decrease in economic activity, although the economy is still expected to grow at half the estimated rate. About a quarter of the Gambia's GDP comes from international tourism, which has largely stopped during the pandemic. However, according to IMF, the Gambia's remittances increased by 78%, to a point where they will offset the loss of revenue due to the interruption in tourism. While the Gambia remains a highly indebted country, the economic impact of the pandemic will not be quite as dire as initially feared. The human cost of the pandemic has similarly not met dire predictions. Just over 5,000 Gambians have tested positive for the virus, with under 200 deaths. The Gambian government acted decisively with regard to the pandemic, including shutting the border with Senegal during the initial surge, limiting the number of people allowed in places of worship, declaring a curfew and closing schools.

The Gambian situation thus remains in flux. While the Barrow government has undertaken successful measures to stabilize the Gambian economy, bring it out of its Jammeh-era doldrums and generally improved the human rights climate, the transition remains a work in progress. Disregarding the profound impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the Barrow government's ability and willingness to tackle some of the problems entrenched in Gambian society appear limited.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The Gambia is a former British colony that became an independent democratic country in 1965. The Gambia was led by Dawda Jawara from independence until 1994, when he was deposed in a military coup. Under Jawara, The Gambia generally adhered to free-market principles and was a consistent supporter of human rights, including successfully lobbying to host the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Domestically, Jawara co-opted much of the domestic opposition and failed to stamp out corruption. In 1981, a failed uprising in Banjul was only suppressed with the intervention of Senegalese forces, prompting the creation of a short-lived Senegambia Confederation. In 1994, junior officers in the Gambia's armed forces, led by Yahya Jammeh, seized power. Jammeh oversaw the adoption of a new constitution and transformed himself into a nominally democratic leader through successive electoral wins. These elections were of a mixed character, with the domestic opposition alleging that they were neither free nor fair. 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 and he could point to concrete landmarks such as the establishment of the country's first university and television station under his watch. 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 the launching of a witch hunt in 2009 that imprisoned almost 1,000 Gambians, stirred anxieties both at home and abroad. In the early 2010s, Jammeh became increasingly critical of the West, withdrawing the country from both the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court, and declared the country an Islamic Republic in violation of the Gambian constitution.

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 who was the leader of the United Democratic Party, UDP, the largest opposition party. 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 the 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 tenets, the efficiency of the economy was hampered by corruption and Jammeh leveraging the state's power to gain advantages for his personal enterprises. The Barrow government has undertaken some measures to address these and, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the country had experienced robust economic growth, although the need for significant structural challenges remained.

The Gambia is a multiethnic and multi-religious society, though over 30% 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 and the percentage of people adhering to other religions is very small. 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. Under Barrow, allegations of "tribalism" are frequent in local media, often used to discredit opposing viewpoints.

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 generally uncontested throughout the country. There is no organized competition to the state's claim on the monopoly on the use of force, with only two exceptions.

First, organized village groups, typically led by youth, sometimes engage in what they perceive as enforcement or defensive action in land disputes. Some of these incidents have led to injuries, destruction of property and deaths. Although Gambian law enforcement has generally responded swiftly to these disputes, local observers have argued that the disputes are exacerbated by the government's inability to address land issues.

Second, the intervention force (ECOMIG), deployed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) after the standoff following the 2016 presidential election, remains in the country at the request of the Gambian government. ECOMIG's presence in the Gambia is controversial for a number of reasons. These include the perception that having a contingent of Senegalese troops (ECOMIG soldiers are Senegalese) in the country is a violation of Gambian sovereignty. There has also been at least one incident where ECOMIG engaged in routine law enforcement activities normally the responsibility of Gambian law enforcement. According to Afrobarometer, half of the surveyed Gambians believe ECOMIG should leave. ECOMIG soldiers have been arrested for violating the curfew the government implemented to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is an allegation that an ECOMIG soldier committed sexual assault.

Neither of these phenomena rise to the level of a significant threat to the state's monopoly on the use of force. In the former case, these incidents are widely considered illegitimate, if understandable, by Gambians and speak more to the ineffectiveness of law enforcement and the land tenure system than a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the state. In the latter case, ECOMIG's presence

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

9

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9 10

1

stems from the consent and request of the Gambian government, and while ECOMIG's "mission creep" into law enforcement is controversial, it merely ratifies the Gambian government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force (and the ability to delegate this as it sees fit).

There are no significant groups that challenge the legitimacy of the Gambian nation-state. Citizenship and naturalization are not restricted to specific groups on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or other attributes.

The legal status of the Gambian diaspora, especially vis-a-vis the electoral system is controversial in the Gambia since members of diaspora cannot currently vote. The dormant draft constitution included provisions to remedy this. But even the most strident proponents of diaspora-voting fall well short of impugning the Gambian state's legitimacy due to the lack of this right.

The Gambia is constitutionally a secular republic. In September 2020, the Gambia's National Assembly rejected a draft of a new constitution. This draft did not include a secularism clause, although it included freedom of religion and non-discrimination based on religion, which was widely criticized by the Gambia's Christian community.

The Gambia is around 95% Muslim and Muslim groups do have a considerable influence on Gambian laws and politics. The Gambia Supreme Islamic Council (GSIC) has been criticized for its disproportionate influence on Gambian public affairs, particularly under the previous government. GSIC is an umbrella organization for Gambian Muslims; it is independent of the government but has enjoyed government support since its establishment under Jawara. Under Jammeh, GSIC called the minority Muslim group, the Ahmadiyya, non-Islamic and lobbied against the group receiving a television license. The license was eventually granted. Islamic law governs family matters (marriage, divorce, inheritance) for Gambians who are Muslim. Islamic groups are generally outspoken on issues concerning sexuality and other issues deemed central to public morality, including homosexuality, which is illegal in the Gambia.

The Gambian government's basic administrative structures are unevenly distributed across the country, with more effective administration generally in urban and coastal areas. Some 60% and 90% of Gambians have access to sanitation and water, respectively, which is comparatively high by regional standards. Communication facilities are also unevenly distributed. For example, according to the 2013 census, while over 80% of urban Gambians (mainly in the coastal area) have access to television, only around 40% of rural Gambians have access to one. A clear discrepancy is seen in connections to the national electricity grid, with 90% of households in Banjul connected compared to 10% in Kuntaur (the most rural local administrative unit). A 2019 USAID assessment of The Gambia's health sector found that 40% of rural villages lack a community health worker and large health facilities are limited to the greater Banjul area and a few others, such as Bansang Hospital in Janjanbureh.

State identity

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No interference of religious dogmas

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Basic administration

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In 2017, a joint report by the World Bank and the African Development Bank found that the administrative capacity of the Gambian state had declined in the previous years, trending in the opposite direction of most of the subregion. Among the reasons cited for this decline were, inter alia, excessive centralization of administrative power in the Office of the President, widespread corruption, absenteeism, and the departure of qualified civil servants due to low pay and erratic management. While this report concerns the tail end of the Jammeh era, it is not yet clear if public administration has significantly improved under Barrow. Though political interference in public administration has arguably declined, corruption and rapid turnover of civil servants remain. The Barrow government has introduced civil reform measures, such as the use of score cards to rate civil servants, and changes to the pay and grading systems.

While the coronavirus pandemic was disruptive to many sectors of Gambian society, as it was elsewhere, there is no evidence of service disruptions specifically due to the pandemic. Service disruptions, especially of electricity, are common in the Gambia regardless.

2 | Political Participation

Since the 2016 elections that ultimately led to Jammeh's departure and Barrow in office, the Gambia has held legislative elections (in 2017) and local elections (in 2018). These are generally described as free and fair, without any interference ballot casting.

A by-election scheduled for a vacant National Assembly seat (after the occupant's death) was originally scheduled for March 2020 but did not take place until November due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the interim, the party of the deceased parliamentarian, the Gambia Democratic Congress, raised concerns that this delay disenfranchised the constituency served by that member of parliament. A member of Barrow's National People's Party ultimately won the seat.

In 2020, the Gambia's Independent Electoral Commission announced plans to switch the voting system for future elections from the distinctive marble system to paper ballots. This caused controversy. Some Gambians described this as an overdue switch, referring to the previous system as expensive and cumbersome, and others expressed worry that this switch might confuse people and thus depress voter turnout, especially among illiterate Gambians.

Also in late 2020, the Gambian National Assembly began debate on an election bill that would, among other things, demarcate new constituency boundaries and combine some districts, which created confusion about the continuation of the practice of on-the-spot counting of votes due to inconsistent wording. The future of this bill is unclear.

Free and fair elections

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In early 2021, the Gambia’s Supreme Court held that the prohibition on members of the diaspora voting in elections and that a provision of the 2015 Elections (Amendment) Act that required all members of a political party’s executive to be residents of the Gambia were both inconsistent with the Gambian constitution. These rules are widely believed to have been put into place by the Jammeh regime to defang the politicized diaspora during his rule.

While, on balance, these changes arguably serve to further expand and entrench the franchise among Gambians, there are concerns that the financial cost of politics, the lack of adequate party structures and the absence of public funding skew the political process in favor of the very well rich and well connected. There is no public financing for elections or campaigns. While the electoral act prohibits candidates and parties from seeking funding from businesses and foreigners, there are no mechanisms in place to monitor this. A 2020 report by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy found, for example, that the real cost of running for the National Assembly increased almost tenfold between 2012 and 2017, considering all the fees plus the expense of running a campaign as highly “transactional.”

There are no specific actors that have veto power in The Gambia. The influence of the military has arguably decreased under Barrow. There are no corporate interests with de facto or de jure veto powers in the Gambia at the present time. While external donors and religious groups have considerable sway over public life and, at times, the direction of policies, they cannot be considered veto players who significantly limit elected representatives’ effective power to govern.

Effective power to govern

7

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The Gambian constitution guarantees freedom of association and assembly. Under Jammeh, freedom of association was routinely violated. The Barrow government has pledged to uphold this freedom. It has failed to do so on a consistent basis, however.

Association / assembly rights

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The most serious challenge to freedom of assembly in the Gambia is arguably the Barrow government’s heavy-handed response to the Three Years Jotna (3YJ) movement. The central concern of this movement is to hold Barrow to the pledge, made prior to the 2016 election, to serve only for a transitional three-year period. In early 2020, protests by the movement were met by a robust police presence, leading to injuries and over 130 arrests. Two radio stations were also suspended for allegedly inciting violence and 3YJ itself was banned, although as the group was not formally registered, it remains unclear what this ban means.

There have also been protests over service delivery interruptions and environmental concerns that have been met with a heavy-handed response from security forces. There are, however, no formal legal restrictions on such protests.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Gambian government declared a state of emergency, which was renewed multiple times, and, among other things, prohibited nonessential public gatherings such as sports events and limited the number of people allowed at religious gatherings. There was also a nightly curfew. Gambian authorities arrested and issued fines to individuals found in violation of the curfew, including members of the armed forces, and two ECOMIG soldiers were expelled from the mission for curfew violations. These restrictions may have had an indirect dampening effect on freedom of assembly, but the coronavirus-induced measures were not intended as a fig leaf covering up restrictions on the right to assemble freely per se. Most of these restrictions were lifted or softened after the state of emergency expired in September 2020.

Like freedom of assembly, freedom of expression was directly and indirectly (through self-censorship) limited during the Jammeh era. Under Barrow, the climate has improved significantly. There has been a profusion of media houses and political parties, but obstacles remain. Relations between journalists and security services are often thorny and reports of harassment not infrequent. Key figures have also been “invited for questioning” by the security services, including the opposition politician, Mama Kandeh, in 2017 and Seedy Njie of the former ruling party in 2018. The government’s response to the 3YJ movement (see 2.3) entailed arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression.

In 2019, in a move that media houses argued would promote freedom of expression, print media was declared exempt from the National Education and Technical Levy.

In July 2020, the National Assembly approved subsidies for print media and radio stations to cope with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. This is the first such subsidy since independence.

A promised Freedom of Information Act, which was heavily promoted by Barrow’s first Attorney General, has yet to materialize. A draft bill was produced in 2019 and found to be generally in line with international standards in an evaluation by the Canada-based Centre for Law and Democracy. The process of adopting it appears to have largely stalled, however.

The Barrow government has also signaled that it will comply with an adverse judgment from the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice concerning the Jammeh regime’s treatment of journalists. The Barrow government made the initial compensatory payments the court stipulated in 2018.

Freedom of
expression

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3 | Rule of Law

Under Barrow, the Gambian executive remains strong. The rejected draft constitution would arguably have weakened the executive in relation to the legislature, but with its rejection, the formal framework of government is essentially the same as it was under Jammeh.

That said, there are indications that the separation of powers is increasing de facto, if not de jure. The increased diversity in political parties in the Gambia's National Assembly has created a situation where the legislature is less of a rubber-stamping body than previously and, at least at times, an effective counterweight to the executive.

The Barrow government has also made an effort to shore up the judiciary, including terminating the use of the foreign "contract judges" Jammeh deployed. Critics argue that the use of such judges effectively made them dependent upon Jammeh. Despite some criticism from donors about the slow pace of judicial reform, Barrow has overseen improvements such as reinvigorating the Judicial Services Commission.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Barrow government suspended public hearings of the National Assembly. In May 2020, the Barrow government extended the coronavirus-prompted state of emergency for 21 days as permitted by the constitution without National Assembly approval. Previously, the National Assembly had rejected a longer extension, citing economic concerns and the disruption of religious activities. Since then, most of the restrictions have been lifted.

There have been tangible improvements in the independence of the judiciary under Barrow, even if these improvements are not as sweeping or as fast-paced as outside donors and some domestic commentators would like. While the Judicial Services Commission still only has an advisory function and the ultimate responsibility for the appointment and termination of judges rests with the president, Barrow has shown that he is willing to abide by its recommendations in the appointment of Supreme Court justices, for example. Superior courts have also decided against the government in prominent cases, including, for example, acquitting eight soldiers accused of treason. The soldiers had been accused by the previous government, but the Barrow government continued the case.

There are other factors that undermine the judiciary's independence, however, that have not been changed since the Jammeh era. For example, the National Assembly determines judges' pay, instead of an independent commission, creating the possibility that a dominant political party may penalize judges for adverse decisions.

Separation of powers

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Independent judiciary

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The Barrow government's phasing out of the practice of recruiting judges from abroad, most notably other Commonwealth countries like Nigeria, is arguably a boon for judicial independence. However, proponents of the practice have argued that there is a benefit to having outside judges, as they are less likely to be motivated by concerns of kin, ethnicity, party or other loyalties.

Officeholders who break the law or engage in corrupt practices are only rarely prosecuted in the Gambia. In fact, efforts to establish an anti-corruption commission have largely stalled under Barrow, to heavy criticism from civil society. There are multiple media reports of corrupt behavior by government officials. In one high-profile incident, the Minister of Health divulged extensive corruption in the disbursement of COVID-19 related funds and allowances, including the use of "ghost names."

There are ongoing, though limited, prosecutions of senior officials who served the Jammeh regime, most notably Yankuba Touray, over his alleged involvement in the killing of former Finance Minister Koro Ceesay. In other cases, however, the Gambian government has declined to prosecute individuals accused of committing crimes during the Jammeh era, citing a lack of admissible evidence.

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.

The Gambia's civil rights situation has markedly improved under Barrow, compared to his predecessor. While there have been few legal changes as such, security forces' routine abuse of freedom of expression and assembly have decreased significantly, even though episodes of heavy-handed abuse occur, such as in response to Three Years Jotna.

Media reports of alleged discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or caste are more frequent under Barrow, but it is difficult to assess whether there is an actual increase in occurrences or that the reporting simply reflects a less hostile environment than previously, in which the media can more freely report such incidents. Furthermore, the judiciary and other institutions relevant to the protection of civil rights, such as the Ombudsman, operate with greater independence from the executive than they did under Jammeh – although significant resource and personnel constraints remain nonetheless.

Finally, public opinion polling by groups such as Afrobarometer broadly conclude that Gambians experience improved civil rights.

Prosecution of office abuse

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Civil rights

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4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

The 2017 change in government has had a significant impact on The Gambia's democratic institutions. The local elections held since then involved genuine competition in several races and the makeup of the National Assembly is more diverse in terms of political party representation than it was under Jammeh. As a result, the National Assembly is less of a rubber-stamping body than it previously was, although the Office of the President remains very powerful in setting the public agenda.

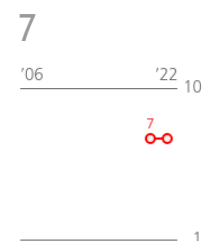
One unanticipated factor behind increased oversight of the presidency by the National Assembly is the split within the United Democratic Party (UDP). After the 2017 National Elections, UDP was the largest party, winning 31 of 53 seats. Since then, eight UDP members were expelled from the party over their support for President Barrow's plan to serve for the full five-year term, as opposed to the three-year transitional term the winning coalition had pledged in the leadup to the 2016 elections.

This split within the UDP caucus also explains the National Assembly's 2020 rejection of the draft of a new constitution. A new constitution was a much-anticipated part of The Gambia's transitional process. The Constitutional Review Commission engaged in a national consultative process and generally enjoyed popular legitimacy and support. The breakaway pro-Barrow faction and several small parties voted against the draft, effectively ending the process for the present. This vote was widely decried in the media.

Local governments mostly function adequately, although they are hamstrung by funding shortfalls and the general economic weaknesses from which the Gambia suffers. There have been sporadic reports of corruption in various local governments. These are inconsistently addressed.

There are no significant challenges to the presence of the Gambia's democratic institutions. All major segments of Gambian society accept the legitimacy of democratic institutions, even if they disagree with particular policies. Research by Afrobarometer released in early 2020 states that almost 90% of Gambians prefer a democratically elected government, and a significant majority report valuing efficiency less than accountability. In other words, enthusiasm for democratic institutions, even if they are imperfect, is high in post-Jammeh Gambia. It is unlikely there will be a credible challenge to this state of affairs in the near future.

Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



5 | Political and Social Integration

Since the 2017 change in government, The Gambia has experienced the creation of several new political parties, a dramatic reduction in the influence of and membership in the former ruling party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), and a split in the major party in the coalition government, the United Democratic Party (UDP). The latter was occasioned by President Barrow retreating from an initial pledge that he would only serve a transitional three-year term instead of the constitutional five-year term. Barrow, who used to be in the UDP's leadership, but had to leave the party to run in the 2016 election, has secured several small parties' support for his plan to stay in power for the full five-year term and to run in the upcoming 2021 presidential election. Eight UDP National Assembly members who supported Barrow's plan were expelled from the party.

While some political parties in the Gambia, such as the numerically small, but culturally significant People's Democratic Organization for Socialism and Independence (PDOIS), have a clearly articulated, distinct political program and stable membership, other political parties are unstable. In some cases, they appear to be little more than the vanity projects of individual politicians. Other political parties are in practice thinly veiled ethnic parties, even though these are not permitted under Gambian law. The APRC, in particular, is in practice a Jola party. Former President Yahya Jammeh belonged to the Jola ethnic group and the APRC's only area of strength is in the Jola-dominated region of Foni, Jammeh's homeland. Another party, the Gambia Democratic Congress, is widely considered to be particularly influenced by the Fulani ethnic group. Some Gambian commentators and politicians have intimated that the UDP is beholden to the Mandinka ethnic group, which is the single largest ethnic group in the Gambia, making up over a third of the population, suggesting that Barrow is forming an anti-UDP/anti-Mandinka coalition. Other Gambian observers vehemently condemn such "tribalism." In general, while ethnicity appears to be a factor in party membership, no political party adopts an overt ethnic stance and ethnicity is mostly an accusation leveled against other parties, implying that they only care about a narrow segment of the Gambian population and do not have the country's best interests in mind.

Party system

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The Gambia is home to an extensive network of social and political organizations of varying degrees of formality and effectiveness. These include labor, trade and professional associations (e.g., the Gambia Press Union and the Gambia Teachers Union), as well as localized groups, such as village development committees. Fraternal associations such as Rotary clubs play an active role in urban areas, in particular. Mosques and churches play an important role in mediating between society and the political system.

There are no significant social interests that do not have some level of representation. There is, however, somewhat of a gerontocratic bias and strong advantage to incumbents, in that senior leadership in many organizations is not only elderly, but likely to hold on to leadership roles. As a result, there is fairly widespread dissatisfaction among Gambian youth about their level of influence – a dissatisfaction arguably compounded by promises of a transition to full-fledged democratic rule under Jammeh.

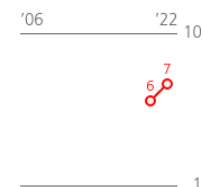
Gambians are appreciative of their democratic gains over the last several years. According to recent Afrobarometer data, almost 90% of Gambians state that they prefer democracy over other systems, and over 70% say that they value governmental accountability over other measurements of government success, such as efficiency.

There is no available data suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic has positively or negatively affected Gambians' approval of democracy and, unlike other countries, there have been no significant protests against coronavirus measures.

Gambians exhibit a high level of engagement in voluntary and self-organized groups. According to Afrobarometer, over half of all Gambians feel close to a political party, though this number declines somewhat for young, educated Gambians. A clear majority of Gambians also report that they participate in religious or community groups. These data suggest a reasonably high level of trust among Gambians, and that civic self-organization is relatively developed. It needs to be noted, however, that the latter is often dependent on fluctuating funding from external donors (either private individuals or NGOs), which limits their effectiveness and longevity. Gambians also rely on their extended kin and established practices like kafo (a labor and risk pooling system) for mutual support.

Interest groups

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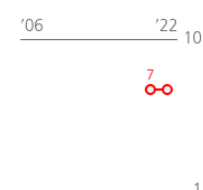
Approval of democracy

8



Social capital

7



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

The Gambia is a poor country and, as measured by the Human Development Index (2019: 0.496, rank 172), in the bottom tier of countries in sub-Saharan Africa (almost all countries ranked below the Gambia have experienced significant conflict in the previous two decades). The amount of HDI loss attributable to inequality is also high (2018: 32.5%), in the upper third of African countries. Of the population 38.5% lives on less than \$3.20 a day (2015). Poverty is more pronounced among the rural population and those with less education than among the urban or educated. The Gambia is more equal, as expressed in its Gini index (2015: 35.9), than most of the region and about on par with several countries in Eastern Europe. The Gender Inequality Index was 0.612 in 2019.

A key driver of economic inequality is access to land, which itself is driven by established traditions and kinship structures. Gambian banks, for example, typically require land as collateral, effectively locking the landless out of means for financing business and educational opportunities.

The Gambia's economy is undiversified and heavily dependent on imports, remittances and tourism. These have all been hampered by the coronavirus pandemic, but the quantitative effect of the pandemic is not yet known. The United Nations Development Program has warned that for the almost 50% of Gambians whom it recognizes as living below the poverty line, the economic impact of the pandemic may be dire. This is especially true for women and children. The UNDP also calculates unemployment to be over 35% (considerably higher than official figures) and this is likely to increase due to the pandemic, with, once again, women and youth disproportionately affected.

Economic indicators		2017	2018	2019	2020
GDP	\$ M	1504.9	1670.7	1826.1	1901.9
GDP growth	%	4.8	7.2	6.1	0.0
Inflation (CPI)	%	8.0	6.5	7.1	5.9
Unemployment	%	9.1	9.0	8.9	9.6

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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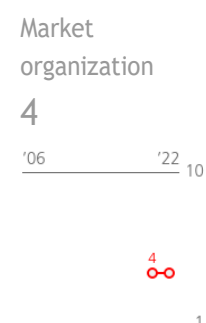
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Economic indicators		2017	2018	2019	2020
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	4.3	4.9	3.9	-
Export growth	%	9.6	44.2	-1.2	-
Import growth	%	19.1	17.6	3.1	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-110.8	-78.6	-	-
Public debt	% of GDP	87.0	83.6	83.0	83.5
External debt	\$ M	660.9	687.8	712.5	775.7
Total debt service	\$ M	44.5	47.4	47.6	32.7
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	7.9	6.8	8.2	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	2.5	2.4	2.9	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.1	0.9	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	0.1	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	-	0.7	0.8	0.8

Sources (as of December 2021): 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 Gambian government generally encourages the free market and endeavors to provide a robust regulatory framework to enable it to flourish. The Barrow government has taken steps to reduce the complexity of starting a new business, making the process faster than it was previously. In 2019, it took eight days (2018: 25 days) and six procedures (2018: seven) to start a business. The cost of the process has also diminished significantly though it is still somewhat costlier than in most neighboring countries. Between 2018 and 2019, the cost of starting a business as measured in percentage of GNI per capita fell from over 120 to just 50 –however, that is significantly higher than Guinea (33), Senegal (22), Ghana (20) and Liberia (6).



Aside from relatively modest registration fees, there are no significant barriers to market activity in the Gambia. There are no laws discriminating against foreign investors. Enforcement of laws is uneven and other aspects of the regulatory machinery are either absent or underdeveloped (insolvency law and credit reporting are two areas that have been identified by the World Bank as in need of improvement to adhere to international standards).

The Gambia's State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are important financial actors and, in many cases, the sole occupant of a specific market niche. In a few cases, the SOE has private competition. For example, the SOE GamCel competes with three privately owned mobile phone companies.

The informal economy is a major part of the Gambia's total economy. According to the International Labor Organization, over 80% of adult Gambian women are employed in the informal sector, and over 75% of Gambian men (as of 2018). Workers in the informal sector are more likely to experience hardship due to the coronavirus and other shocks. One factor behind the high percentage of informal workers in The Gambia is the high ratio of workers in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, where informal employment is the norm. Formal employment opportunities are limited to the government, large private companies and specific sectors, such as tourism (accounting for 30% of all formal employment opportunities according to the ILO). These are concentrated in urban and coastal areas.

The Gambia is one of the few countries in West Africa with competition legislation in place. The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection (GCCP; previously the Gambia Competition Commission) is tasked with ensuring that the Competition Protection Act of 2007 and the Consumer Protection Act of 2014 are followed (other government entities, such as the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, also play a role). The GCCP's focus has been on anti-competitive practices in consumer-facing markets such as those for cement, petroleum and rice. In its investigations it has found price fixing, predatory pricing and tie-ins and that key markets are dominated by a handful of enterprises but that, in general, these markets are subject to fair competition.

Mergers are subject to the Competition of Act of 2007 and can be reviewed by the GCCP. But there is an absence of required regulations and the GCCP therefore does not conduct merger reviews (the main concern in Gambian merger control rules is market share). In the absence of such regulation, mergers are governed by the Companies Act. Enforcement actions such as dawn raids do not occur in the Gambia and criminal charges are rarely pressed.

The Gambian government provides tax and other incentives for private companies in specific sectors deemed critical to national development, such as tourism and petroleum. These are not prima facie clientelistic in conceptualization or practice.

Competition policy

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The Gambia employs a liberal trade policy. It aims to make the country a competitive and export-oriented economy, although exports have declined over the last few years. It participates in market access schemes such as the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act and the EU's Everything but Arms scheme although, according to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, it is unable to take full advantage of these due to supply-side constraints.

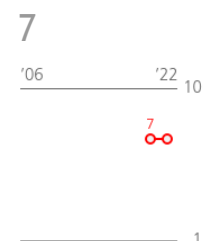
There are no discriminatory barriers to foreign investment in The Gambia. The government has identified several key areas for which special incentives such as duty waivers and tax holidays are offered. These include tourism, fisheries, agriculture, and the information, communications and technology sectors. The Gambia has implemented the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (as of 2017), which sets tariffs for certain goods. The Gambia has excised the option to reduce the import duty on rice to 0%, however. The country's simple average of MFN applied tariff was at 12.1% in 2019.

There are 14 banks operating in The Gambia, one of which is an Islamic bank (Arab Gambia Islamic Bank). Most banks are subsidiaries of Nigerian banks. There are also a handful of microfinance institutions. The banking sector is supervised by the Central Bank of the Gambia (CBG) under the Banking Act of 2009, the Non-Bank Financial Institutions Act of 2016 and the Central Bank of the Gambia Act of 2018. The minimum capital adequacy ratio for banks is 10%. In 2017, the CBG increased this ratio for other financial institutions to 20%. All Gambian banks meet this requirement. According to the IMF, the Gambian banking sector as a whole is healthy but not without vulnerabilities, including high exposure to SOEs.

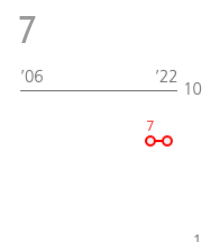
Non-performing loans (NPL) account for 4.5% of all loans held by private banks, which is a significant improvement from a high of 14.5% in 2010. According to the IMF, in 2017, almost 20% of NPLs are to SOEs (and most of this figure is accounted for by NAWEC), though the same report notes that misclassification probably leads to an underestimation of the ratio of SOE to no-SOE NPLs. SOEs have been in continuous financial distress for several years, exposing the banking sector to heightened risk. Credit to the private sector has declined in real terms since 2010. Banks mostly engage in the foreign exchange market and short-term trade financing beyond investment in government debt. Private-sector credit remains below the subregional average, though it is rapidly growing (annual average of 28% at the end of September 2019).

There is no stock market in The Gambia. Discussions concerning establishing one have been ongoing for well over a decade. There is a credit referencing bureau in the CBG, but it is unclear whether it is fully functional. There are no consumer protection mechanisms in the financial sector as the Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission does normally not address financial consumer protection.

Liberalization of foreign trade



Banking system



COVID-19 has placed additional stress on private banks in the Gambia, as savings rates are falling, though the resulting decrease in deposits may be offset by an increased need for government borrowing.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Monetary policy is set by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the CBG. It is largely independent of political authority, in contrast to the situation under Jammeh's rule. He sought to apply extralegal pressure to affect exchange rates. Today the CBG is arguably one of the most competent, transparent, and independent government entities in the Gambia.

The Gambian dalasi is not pegged to a foreign currency or basket of currency and the MPC successfully employs a flexible monetary policy to ensure a broadly stable exchange rate. Over the last several years, despite the collapse of tour operator Thomas Cook UK (a major foreign exchange earner in the Gambia) and the COVID-19 pandemic, the dalasi has not suffered from extreme fluctuations in exchange value. During 2020, the dalasi depreciated against the U.S. dollar by 1.4%, the euro by 6.3% and the pound sterling by 1.1%.

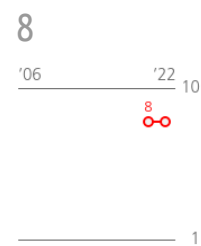
Inflation in 2019 was 7.1%, which is lower than in several subregional neighbors. In 2020, non-food inflation decelerated to 4.3% for non-food items and 6.6% for food items. Inflation has been subdued due to weak demand, exchange rate stability and the comparatively low global petroleum prices.

The Gambian government is on the whole pursuing fiscal stability but has to contend with the sorry state in which the former president left the economy. There is also a lack of transparency in the budgeting process and, arguably, some budget decisions reflect short-term political gains rather than long-term stability.

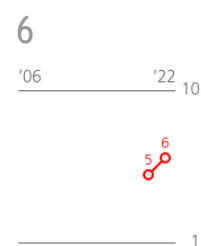
The Gambia's current account deficit is significant, \$-78.6 million in 2018. In absolute terms, this nonetheless compares favorably to other countries in the region, whose negative account balances are larger. Public debt is nonetheless among the highest in the world, 80% of GDP in 2019. Total debt services comprise almost 50% of GDP, which is a sharp increase from the early 2010s (in 2013, it was at 29.6%, climbing to 49.6% in 2014, under Jammeh's rule, and remained between 40% and 50% since then). Government consumption is low by regional standards, at 13.4%, but this is also an increase over the last decade.

Budgetary policy is not always transparent and includes significant sums allocated to the offices of the president and vice president. While these offices include important policy-implementation units, critics argue that the appropriations are too high and liable to ad hoc initiatives without legislative input. In 2020, the National Assembly demanded cuts to these units.

Monetary stability



Fiscal stability



The Gambia participates in the World Bank’s Debt Service Suspension Initiative to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has launched multiple efforts to combat the effects of the coronavirus, including student relief programs, distribution of fertilizer to farmers, relief to municipal councils and so on. Support for these initiatives has been provided by the World Food Program, the Food and Agricultural Organization, UNICEF and others.

9 | Private Property

Property rights in the Gambia are on the whole protected by law, although there are concerns that this protection is not adequate for women and those deemed lower “caste” (a practice illegal in the Gambia that nonetheless remains), particularly in rural areas. Matters such as inheritance are governed by Islamic law for Gambians who adhere to Islam (around 95% of the country). Intellectual property is protected by law, but there is no history of intellectual property litigation and no evidence of seizures of counterfeit goods, despite their prevalence.

There are numerous disputes over land property rights that the government has yet to thoroughly and systematically address. In some cases, intercommunal disputes over land have led to violence and even deaths. These disputes are generally caused by unclear land titling, compounded by the coexistence of traditional and formal state authorities. According to the Local Government Act adopted in 2002, government-appointed local and district chiefs are expected to largely replicate traditional lines of authority, but ambiguity and lack of clarity remain, leading to situations in which competing authorities issue contradictory land titles.

There have also been numerous reports of the previous government obtaining property, including land, through coercive, corrupt means. The Gambia’s transitional mechanisms did not address the land issue, to some public dismay. Allegations of questionable land acquisition by senior politicians still occur, though they are less frequent than previously.

Enforcement of property rights is inconsistent. Access to the courts and effective representation depends on financial resources. While there is a legal aid program, it primarily pertains to violent crimes and is not a reliable resource for ordinary Gambians who allege property rights violations. The government also has a history of turning a blind eye to the pollution which may impact individuals’ property rights, which were carried out by powerful commercial interests.

Property rights

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The Barrow government has made the private sector a centerpiece of its National Development Plan. In general terms, there are few restrictions on private commercial activity. A few sectors of the economy, such as energy, are dominated by SOEs with no indication that these will be privatized in the near future. The government's policy is to promote investment, whether foreign or domestic. It creates few obstacles to investment, on security or other grounds.

The legal framework is generally adequate, though there are shortcomings in specific areas. Land record keeping (important for facility construction) is generally subpar in that there is no comprehensive computerized database. There is no credit information index. The rules governing insolvencies have shortcomings (for example, secured creditors have no guarantee of being paid first in case of insolvency). Commercial contracts are generally enforced, including when one of the parties is a government entity, although the process to compel courts to enforce contracts is cumbersome, due to lack of computerization (according to the World Bank's Doing Business ranking, the Gambia is ranked 129 in the world with a score above the regional average).

10 | Welfare Regime

The Gambia's formal social welfare net is limited. Many Gambians are reliant on whatever support they can receive informally through their extended kin or the kafo system. Pensions are provided to government civil servants. The Gambia's Social Security & Housing Finance Corporation (SSHFC) provides an additional pension scheme, which is limited to employees of public or quasi-public entities. Private retirement benefits are rare. SSHFC also runs a fund for compensating industrial injuries and offers fixed rate mortgages. SSHFC has been dogged by allegations of financial impropriety.

In 2016, the Gambian government launched a UNICEF-supported social protection program aimed at children and the poorest Gambians to improve food security, education and resilience to transitory shocks. However, it has yet to yield concrete and far-reaching success as its funding mechanism remains unclear.

The Gambian government is committed to equitable access to health. Health care is available to Gambians provided they can pay relatively modest fees at the time of service. Overall, Gambian government health expenditures make up around 8% of the government budget according to a 2019 USAID study, compared to a mean of 10% for the region.

Major non-governmental organizations and relief organizations provide ad hoc social services. These include a cash transfer program and targeted health care interventions, which are however vulnerable to the exigencies of external funding.

Private enterprise

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Social safety nets

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gambian government took measures to alleviate some of the economic and human impact, including collaborating with UNICEF to provide cash payments and essentials such as rice to some vulnerable families with children. It also extended certain tax payments.

Gambian life expectancy at birth is just over 61 years, putting it in the middle of the West African region.

Although successive Gambian governments have made gender equitable access to education and other opportunities a priority, inequities remain. Female literacy is at just over 40%, compared to just over 60% for men. While more girls than boys are enrolled in school at the primary level (Gender Parity Index (GPI): 1.1), this advantage tapers off with age and more males are enrolled in tertiary education than females (GPI: 0.7). The gross enrollment ratio is 101.7% for primary, 50.1% for secondary and 2.7% for tertiary education.

Women make up around 44% of the labor force, a figure that has remained more or less the same since 2010. Women suffer additional structural disadvantages, as, particularly in the rural areas, young women are expected to have families and focus on child rearing, as opposed to pursuing careers. That said, there are prominent Gambian women in government, including the vice president and the speaker of the National Assembly, and in sectors such as law.

Other factors that impinge upon Gambians' equality of opportunity may include sexual orientation, ethnicity and caste. Same-sex relations remain illegal in the Gambia and there are no known public LGTBQ figures. While ethno-religious discrimination is rare, certain minority Islamic groups such as the Ahmadiyya have been castigated by government officials and powerful Imams. The caste system, though not sanctioned in law, remains salient in parts of rural Gambia. The Gambia's National Human Rights Commission has conducted factfinding missions to the Upper River Region and found that de facto indentured servitude exists in some communities.

The Gambian constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, language, religion, political or social origin, property or birth status. It does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender expression.

Equal opportunity

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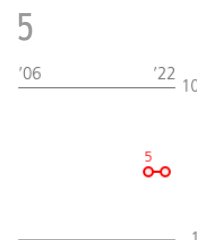
11 | Economic Performance

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the Gambia enjoyed something of an economic rebound after the transition from Jammeh's to Barrow's presidency, although the initial improvement after Jammeh left power tapered off somewhat in 2019, as measured by GDP growth. According to the CBG, GDP growth in 2019 was 6.2%, compared to 7% in the preceding year. Despite an increase in GDP/capita every year since Jammeh's departure (2019: GK\$2,298), the Gambia remains a poor country with a GDP/capita just above Afghanistan and in the lower third among African countries. The size of the economy (as measured by 2019 GDP: \$1,763.8 million), is among the smallest in sub-Saharan Africa, better only than Guinea-Bissau among the countries for which data is available. Unofficial unemployment is trending in a downward trajectory and, as in 2020, was just over 9%, comparable to Morocco. However, according to the Gambia Bureau of Statistics' 2018 Labor Force Survey, over 35% of Gambians are classified as unemployed. According to this survey, unemployment is higher for women than for men (57.1% compared to 42.9%) and higher in rural than in urban areas (76.6% and 23.4%, respectively). About half of all unemployed report being discouraged job seekers, and thus on the verge of dropping out of the labor market.

The COVID-19 pandemic evidenced a marked slowdown of the Gambian economy, as elsewhere in the world. In the first nine months of 2020, The Gambia's current account balance deficit worsened from 2.03% of GDP to over 6%, with a similarly sharp increase in the goods account deficit (from 16% of GDP to over 22% of GDP). This increase particularly reflects growing imports of COVID-19 related materials and a decline in re-exports. The overall government deficit actually decreased during the first nine months of 2020, but only when external grants are included. Otherwise, the deficit experienced a slight increase in absolute terms, to 6.1 billion Gambian dalasis (6.2% of GDP).

Gambian business owners the CBG surveyed nonetheless remain optimistic about the overall direction of the economy.

Output strength



12 | Sustainability

The Gambia faces multiple environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, deforestation, beach erosion and overfishing. Environmental concerns are often subordinated to economic growth and development or only receive sustained attention where they directly affect the economy. For example, attempts to promote ecotourism in the all-important tourist sector (which accounts for around a fifth of the Gambia's GDP and all employment, according to the World Tourism Organization) only yielded limited success prior to the dramatic decline in tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Another example is the 2018 launch, by the Gambian government in collaboration with the Green Climate Fund, of a large project to promote climate resilience, focusing in particular on the environmental challenges the Gambia's agricultural sector faces.

Targeted efforts in other sectors, such as a 2018-2020 initiative to conduct a complete inventory on the use of asbestos in buildings, are dependent upon external funders. The Gambia Bureau of Statistics launched a program in 2018 to improve the gathering and coordination of environmental statistics across different government entities.

The country's National Environment Agency has conducted training with law enforcement officials to enable them to address environmental concerns, such as pollution, effectively, although these efforts are hampered by lack of resources.

There are no tax incentives or similar programs in place to promote sustainable behavior by the average Gambian.

The Gambia's education policy largely focuses on ensuring access to primary and junior secondary education for all Gambians, with particular attention paid to ensuring gender equitable access. Access to education is limited for disabled youth. The Gambia's literacy rate as of 2015 (the most recent year for which figures are available) is just over 50.8%, which is equal to or higher than its West African neighbors, although significant gender discrepancies remain. Public education is hampered at all levels by a lack of resources and, according to UNICEF, most pupils do not meet the targets the National Assessment Test sets. The Gambia scored 0.406 at the UN Education Index in 2019. In 2018, the government spent 2.4% of its GDP on education.

Education on the post-secondary level is limited to the University of the Gambia (UTG), specialized institutions such as the Management Development Institute and a few private institutions of mixed quality. Gambian lawmakers have criticized the UTG for not producing enough relevant research. Teaching staff and students have

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policy

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Education policy /
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protested inadequate pay, insufficient resources to support research and teaching, and living conditions. Significant research in the public health sector is carried out by the British-funded Medical Research Council in the Gambia. Gambian expenditure on R&D is 0.1% of GDP. The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology supports the development of domestic research capacities through programming such as funding Gambian PhD students at non-Gambian institutions in areas like engineering and agriculture.

Governance

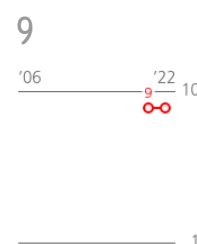
I. Level of Difficulty

Several factors, including extreme poverty, infrastructural deficiencies, and, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic circumscribe the Gambian government's performance. According to the Gambia Bureau of Statistics, poverty increased in the country in the 2010s, except in the urban pockets of Banjul and Kanifing. Rural households in particular, are dependent on agriculture. Shoring up such households' resiliency to external shocks – such as environmental catastrophes, price fluctuations, labor supply fluctuations and so forth – is a major hurdle for the Gambian government. In 2019, cereal production in the Gambia was well below average according to FAO, requiring additional imports and government investment.

The Gambia's infrastructure has significant shortcomings. These include a poor, unsafe and incomplete road network and an erratic power supply. The latter is a central priority for the Barrow government; in 2020 it received World Bank funding to install several solar photovoltaic power plants, rehabilitate transmission lines and restore water storage tanks. The government has also pledged to update the Port of Banjul, the country's one airport, and is exploring a transportation service along the Gambia River. The inauguration of the Trans-Gambia Bridge in 2019 improved road transport for both Senegal and the Gambia, though critics state that it hurt the local economy, which is based on vending to people waiting in long lines to cross the river by boat.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Gambian government's operations significantly and forced a re-allocation of meager resources. While the Gambia suffered relatively few deaths (just over 4,000 cases of coronavirus, with the majority recovering), the pandemic's impact on the government will be considerable. The loss of revenue from tourism and other sources, coupled with expenses, will, according to the UNDP, half the economy's projected growth rate. There are significant concerns that the impact on the already resource-strapped school system will set human capacity needs back for a considerable time.

Structural
constraints



During the Jammeh era, civil society organizations operated in a climate of fear that made certain kinds of work or activism very difficult. Some civil society organizations, such as the Gambian Press Union, experienced serious harassment from authorities. Certain ways of framing issues, too, became a challenge. For example, “rights-based development” was treated with skepticism by the Jammeh government because of its emphasis on rights.

Nonetheless, the Gambia has a fairly rich tradition of associational life outside the political sphere. This has continued under Barrow’s rule. This includes religious groups, professional associations and other groups. Afrobarometer data suggest that the majority of Gambians are engaged with such groups in some capacity. Politically oriented groups also have a freer hand under Barrow than they did when Jammeh was president.

Social capital is significantly mediated through the kinship system and ethnic identification, but there are also social features and cultural mechanisms (e.g., interethnic marriages and the “joking kinship” system) that promote cross-ethnic social trust. Social capital and trust are hard to quantify in the Gambia as there are no largescale surveys or other data addressing these questions. A partial exception comes from Afrobarometer (from 2018), which shows that a clear majority of Gambians (over 75%) would like to see members of other ethnic groups as neighbors.

Traditionally, Gambian decision-making emphasizes consensus and compromise – some Gambian critics allege to too great an extent – which also facilitates social trust. But, on the flip side, social trust arguably eroded under Jammeh as there were widespread beliefs that the government had informants and spies in settings such as schools, mosques and major offices. The alleged rise of “tribalism” under Barrow also undermines social trust.

In short, given the country’s troubled history under Jammeh, Gambian civil society traditions and social trust are relatively strong, but this strength is undermined by the policies of successive governments. Moreover, the ongoing transition also affects social relations in the process of redefinition. Social trust is still high but rotten politics may affect it over the long run.

Despite the tumult of the transition, the Gambia, on the whole, is a peaceful society. There is anecdotal evidence regarding a rise in violent crime, but no official statistics have been released to substantiate these claims.

There are occasional episodes of violence. These typically fall into one of several categories. One is intercommunal conflicts, typically involving gangs of youth from communities armed with melee weapons (clubs and the like) and occasionally locally made firearms. The root causes of such clashes are typically disputes over land ownership and land use (e.g., contested burial grounds). These sometimes have an ethnic shading, but not consistently.

Civil society traditions

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Conflict intensity

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A second category comprises skirmishes related to national politics, including both fights between adherents to the different political parties and heavy-handed responses to protests and demonstrators, in which Gambian security forces engage in undue violence. These incidents are not couched in terms of ethnicity or other identitarian cleavages as such, but ethnic differences are sometimes sublimated into the party system. Both these types of incidents are relatively rare under Barrow. Shortly after the transition, there were a few incidents of violence between ECOMIG soldiers and Gambians, though these do no longer occur.

There are ongoing security concerns linked to transnational actors in the Gambia. These include the still-simmering conflict in the neighboring Casamance. As recently as November 2020, the main Casamance rebel faction (MFDC) reportedly threatened the Gambia with an attack if the country supported Senegal's efforts in the region. Transnational crime is another concern with several substantial drug seizures in the Gambia over the last several years. Finally, while the Gambia has been spared Islamist terrorism, this does occur in the region and counter-terrorism is part of the ongoing security sector reform program. There is no evidence that any of these three security concerns have directly led to increased violence between Gambians or that Gambians have been recruited to support these causes. Part of the rationale for the repeated renewals of the ECOMIG mandate is to allow it to support the Gambian government in the fight against transnational crime (including not just drugs, but also other forms of smuggling, such as that of lumber).

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The Barrow government has, like its predecessor, formulated a comprehensive National Development Plan (NDP) that includes eight strategic priorities: 1) continued reform to support good governance and human rights, 2) economic stabilization and growth, 3) modernization of agriculture and fisheries, 4) investment in people and social services, 5) infrastructure development, 6) promotion of tourism for sustainable growth, 7) investment in youth and 8) leveraging the private sector for growth. The COVID-19 pandemic did not induce any adjustments of the NDP's strategic priorities but created additional challenges to their implementation.

Some underlying objectives, e.g., a new constitution by 2021, will not be met, while others remain to be seen (the current plan spans 2018 – 2021). Although there is no specific evidence that the government is deviating from the NDP for short-term political gain, several objectives have been criticized as overoptimistic in the

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domestic press. The absence of key provisions (such as land tenure reform) and slow progress on others (especially ones deemed key to the transition, such as security sector reform) raise questions about the government's priorities. In any case, the NDP is heavily dependent on support from international partners and hampered by some of the issues it aims to address (e.g., lack of institutional and human capacity).

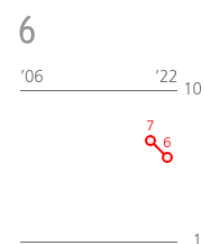
Although the Barrow government oversaw a period of economic growth (pre-coronavirus) and has been able to implement some programs aimed at improving the livelihood of the poorest Gambians and stabilize the post-Jammeh economy, it has fallen short of implementing several of its key policies in the areas of good governance and human rights. These include security sector reforms, establishing an anti-corruption commission and adopting a new constitution. Barrow has not openly undermined the new constitution, although Gambians widely believe that the Barrow government worked against it behind the scenes. The fate of the former initiatives appears to be slowed due to a lack of political will. This is an example in which political schisms within the coalition of parties that successfully ousted Jammeh in 2016 have paralyzed the institutional reform process Barrow pledged. It is especially worrisome that the Barrow government appears uninterested in such key measures intended to promote good governance, especially at a time when there already is growing public skepticism regarding his government.

Uneven government capacity has undermined policy implementation, regardless of sector. Some government agencies are comparatively understaffed and under-resourced, while the Office of the President and the security services consume a disproportionate amount of public funds. Specific stakeholders identified by the Barrow government as keys to the Gambia's development, namely the diaspora and youth, have complained about the lack of clarity and coordination on the part of the government and its partners, resulting in an uncertain landscape.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated budgetary obstacles to the implementation of strategic policies, as well as created an opportunity cost as government ministries and agencies have had to focus on the pandemic and associated countermeasures.

It does not appear that the Barrow government is particularly adept at policy learning. There does not seem to be much in the way of institutional or policy innovation in the Gambia at present. As stated above, many of the high-profile policy breaks with the Jammeh era have stalled. The government has in many ways doubled down on the same strategies deployed under Jammeh, albeit with the notable exception of an improved human rights climate. A case in point is that the objectives outlined in the 2018 – 2021 NPD in many ways overlap with the previous government's goals (promoting foreign investment, improving agriculture, etc.). It is not always clear why things should improve this time. Policy formation is typically carried out with considerable input from international partners and at least

Implementation



Policy learning



pro forma consultations with CSOs. There is a long history in the Gambia, prior to Barrow, of a kind of reverse policy learning as new initiatives are dependent on the vicissitudes of donor funding. When these expire, the learning ends.

One notable exception to this assessment is the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been relatively effective, especially given the country's resource constraints. The Gambia's experience with the Ebola pandemic (which never came to the Gambia) has been cited as a learning example, informing the government's response to coronavirus. A second area where, prior to the pandemic, the government showed some progress is in reforming the tourism sector and promoting high-value tourism, with mixed success.

15 | Resource Efficiency

The Gambia remains a highly indebted country, though, according to an IMF assessment conducted in 2020, the debt is sustainable. This assessment takes into account the COVID-19 pandemic. External debt, in 2019, was 46% of GDP and projected to decrease. Although the Barrow government has sought to promote transparency in budgeting and various irregularities in the government budget have been reported to the National Assembly, shortcomings remain in the efficient use of state resources, financial and otherwise.

Government corruption remains a serious concern. There have been numerous incidents, in numerous sectors, of "ghost personnel," fake or deceased individuals, on the payrolls of government entities. There are also frequent allegations of inappropriate, but not illegal expenses, such as transportation allowances. Not all government accounts are consistently audited, though the Barrow government has pledged to improve in this area.

The national budget is presented to the National Assembly on an annual basis but other budget reporting is not consistently made available to the public. The National Assembly only intermittently pushes back on budget requests. The contents of the state budgets have become a source of criticism with frequent allegations of inappropriate balancing of resources made in the Gambian media. One notable concern is the large proportion of the budget consumed by the Office of the President (OP). The proposed budget for 2021, for example, allocated almost as much funding to the OP as to the Ministry of Defense, four times as much as to the Ministry of Justice, and almost 50% of what was appropriated for the Ministry of Health.

The Barrow government has proved to be quite trigger-happy when it comes to reshuffling cabinet members and other senior officials. Public rationales for this are not consistently provided. Some moves have caused public dismay as they led to the departure of respected civil servants (e.g., former journalist and Minister of

Efficient use of assets

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Information DA Jawo) and the elevation of others accused of abetting Jammeh. The cabinet has been reshuffled several times, which has resulted in fewer parties from the 2016 coalition finding themselves represented in the cabinet. Critics have argued that political expediency lies at the root of these changes and that they do not reflect any effort to improve cabinet competency.

Human resource constraints are significant throughout the government, which affects various agencies' abilities to engage in policy analysis and planning. Capacity-building in ministries is a Barrow government priority. Highly skilled civil servants have little incentive to remain in the civil service. They pursue international appointments or private sector opportunities, when available.

Government policy is in practice led by the Office of the President. Under Barrow, the National Assembly had become more assertive in questioning and shaping policy, including rejecting a 45-day state of emergency in response to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and, in 2019, rejecting a supplemental budget request made by the executive.

There are mechanisms in place to coordinate policymaking between various ministries, agencies, and other stakeholders relevant to specific domains (e.g., the British-funded Medical Research Council in the area of public health). Such interagency task forces and commissions vary enormously in terms of their effectiveness, however. A 2018 review by the World Food Program, for example, found that, despite a clearly articulated zero hunger strategy, policy coherence was minimal. Policy coordination is further hampered by frequent movement of key public officials, including at the cabinet level, between different organizations and sometimes to ministries with wildly different concerns.

Reports of corruption and economic mismanagement by government officials are frequent in the Gambia. For example, in October 2020, an audio recording surfaced purporting to prove that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources received payments from a Chinese-owned fish processing plant to overlook environmental regulations. There have also been numerous reports of diplomatic passports being sold to Gambians and non-Gambians.

There are few effective safeguards against corruption in place. Prosecutions and other sanctions are rare. For instance, in the above case, the permanent secretary was suspended but has not yet been prosecuted. While Barrow and others in the senior leadership condemn corruption, not enough has been done to create institutions to combat corruption. Most notable is the failure to establish an anticorruption commission. Public procurement is not always transparent and there are multiple reports of cronyism in the procurement process. A bill to update the Gambia's public procurement regulations to bring them in line with international standards was presented to the National Assembly in late 2020 but has yet to be enacted.

Policy
coordination

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Anti-corruption
policy

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Auditing of state spending and transparency in state spending are inconsistent at best. According to the Open Budget Survey, Gambia scores only four (on a 100-point scale) for budgetary transparency, much less than other countries in the region and well below the threshold for sufficient transparency, which is 60. Among the factors cited as reasons for the low score is the lack of public availability of budget documents, including interim reporting.

There is no access-to-information act in the Gambia. Nor is there other pertinent legislation, such as whistleblower protection.

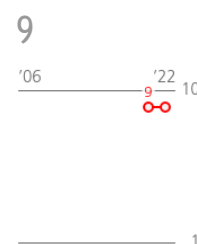
The lack of progress on addressing corruption is arguably one of the biggest shortcomings of the Barrow era.

16 | Consensus-Building

All significant political players in the Gambia share a consensus that democracy is the best long-term strategy for the country. In the post-Jammeh era, there has been a delegitimization of alternatives to democracy. Even the now-much-reduced former ruling party (ACPR) is very much a pro-democracy party in its rhetoric. In fact, much of its criticism of the Barrow regime ironically suggests that the latter is insufficiently committed to democracy. There are disagreements about some key tenets of democracy. The controversy over the lack of a secularism clause in the draft constitution, for example, prompted some Islamic groups to suggest that the separation of church and state was not a necessary condition for democracy, to intense opposition from Christian groups.

As is true for democracy, there is a close-to-universal normative agreement in the Gambia about the key long-term strategic goal of promoting a free market. Differences between political parties do not signify major points of difference in this regard. In fact, it is difficult to identify key points of difference between the different political parties beyond the personalities involved. All parties generally agree on the use of the free market to alleviate poverty. There are occasional differences over priorities and frequent allegations of bad faith – but not in a manner that undermines consensus. Disagreements are typically over specific short-term decisions. The small political party PDOIS, which officially espouses a socialist future for the Gambia, is an arguable exception. It has not yet been in a position to promote specific policies (such as the nationalization of key industries). It is moreover not clear that it would so if it had the opportunity. Its current role in the Gambia is more of a local opposition party that pushes for probity and transparency.

Consensus on goals



There are no significant anti-democratic actors in the Gambia. The military has largely stayed out of politics since the transition to the Barrow government, and Jammeh's former party (APRC) is, as stated above, rhetorically committed to democracy on par with other parties. There are no commercial interests with the inclination or ability to foster anti-democratic sentiment.

There are allegations from some civil society actors that Barrow himself is an anti-democratic actor. Citing his decision to launch his own political party, to start a youth movement, and the slow movement on key good governance reforms such as security sector reform, critics allege that Barrow is following Jammeh's playbook and undermining the Gambia's democratic progress. Barrow and his allies have consistently denounced such allegations and pointed out that Barrow's actions are wholly within acceptable democratic norms and that his critics are trying to short-circuit democracy for personal gain.

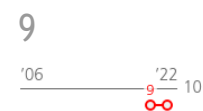
With presidential elections slated for the end of 2021, the political situation in the Gambia is evolving.

The Gambia's political leadership is not consistently able to depolarize cleavages and at times escalates them. The most salient cleavage is ethnicity. There are frequent media reports of alleged ethnic discrimination or favoritism by political leaders at all levels, coupled with allegations of the same by government entities, such as the immigration authorities and the security forces. On the national level, although ethnicity is not legally allowed to be the basis for forming a political party, several parties are associated with specific ethnic groups. Political leaders denounce tribalism, but typically in a language that projects it onto their political opponents. There has been some reporting in the Gambian media that underlying Barrow's split with the UDP and subsequent outreach to small parties (including APRC) is a play at an "anti-Mandinka" coalition.

There have been episodes of violent clashes between youth members from different political parties, and some of these have ethnic undertones (APRC/Jola vs. UDP/Mandinka).

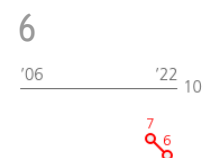
While religious cleavages are not prominent in the Gambia, there have been concerns that these could flare up in conjunction with the debate over the inclusion of secularism in the draft constitution. The previous government also exacerbated religious cleavages by unconstitutionally declaring the Gambia an Islamic republic. The Barrow government did not directly comment on this aspect of the draft constitution and has largely refrained from discussing religion other than in very general terms by praising the Gambia's religious pluralism.

Anti-democratic actors



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Cleavage / conflict management



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Civil society organizations are routinely involved in policymaking in the Gambia, often in an official or quasi-official capacity (e.g., formal membership on task forces). Workshops and conferences allowing CSOs to have communication with government officials are common, but it is not always clear how these interactions translate into action. Civil society participation can thus appear somewhat shallow.

Such CSO participation is typically by invitation, targeting established CSOs working on the issue of concern. As a result, a few CSOs tend to dominate, leading to the exclusion of poorly connected CSOs that represent marginalized perspectives.

Civil society groups have criticized the Gambian government for failing to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and for failing to address the concerns of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities.

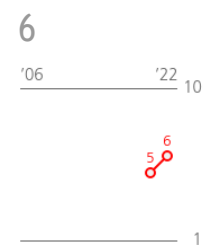
The Gambia's reconciliation process is still ongoing, with the final report of the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission (TRRC) due late in 2021. The Barrow government has been supportive of the TRRC's process, thus far. It remains to be seen how it will act upon specific recommendations once they have been issued. The government caused controversy by its decision not to prosecute members of the "junglers," former President Jammeh's hit squad, who revealed participation in high-profile killings during the Jammeh era. This decision feeds into a widespread concern in the Gambia that not enough is done to punish wrongdoers. There have also been media reports suggesting that the government has not done enough to reach out to organizations representing Jammeh's victims.

Another tentpole feature of the transition was establishing the Constitutional Review Commission, which produced a new draft constitution after a national dialogue. While some aspects of the draft constitution were controversial, other new features were very popular with Gambian citizens. The proposed two-term limit for president, for example, was supported by over 80% of Gambians, according to Afrobarometer data. The Barrow government publicly supported the draft constitution, but it was torpedoed in the National Assembly by pro-Barrow representatives.

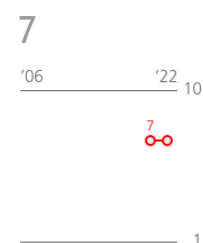
Other aspects of the transition program stalled or are moving at a slower pace than wished for by both civil society groups and external partners. Examples include security sector reform, the adoption of a freedom of information law and the establishment of the anti-corruption commission. Continued reliance on ECOMIG for security and its use for routine law enforcement have also contributed to a sense that the transition is incomplete.

The net result is that, while there have been several institutional developments as part of the transition, these are matched by a fairly high degree of societal disappointment – if not cynicism – over the lack of prosecutions and the lack of visible changes in the security agencies.

Civil society participation



Reconciliation



17 | International Cooperation

International assistance from bilateral partners, international organizations and private donors is a major factor in the Gambian government's economic, political and social development. The Gambia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been enabled by substantial support from the World Food Program and other organizations. The country has benefited from debt relief under the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust scheme.

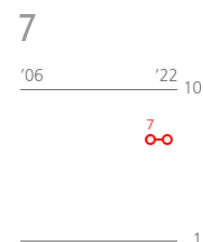
The Barrow government adopted Gambia's National Development Plan, which extends through 2021, in 2018. While the COVID-19 pandemic shifted priorities, the plan outlined eight clear areas for political and economic development (e.g., improving education and health services, building infrastructure). The plan is not always clear with regard to the kinds and extent of international input needed to realize these goals.

Some long-term plans announced after the 2017 transition from the Jammeh to the Barrow government have stalled or have been only partially implemented, in some cases to the consternation of international funders. The government's enthusiasm for these programs appears to be waning, which may reflect shifting domestic priorities.

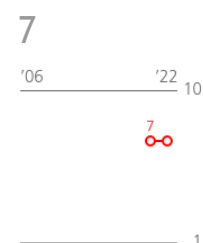
On the whole, the Gambian government is a credible and reliable international partner. Under Barrow's leadership, it has signed or ratified several key multilateral instruments, including the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to abolish the death penalty, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Barrow government has also re-entered the country in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Commonwealth (Jammeh withdrew the Gambia from both organizations). The Barrow government gained widespread acclaim for filing a case at the ICC against Myanmar in 2019, concerning the latter's treatment of the Rohingya. The Gambia is one of only a handful of countries (thus far) indicating it will be able to meet the commitment to limit temperature increases as stipulated by the 2015 International Paris Climate Agreement. The Barrow government has complied with adverse decisions against the Gambia at ECOWAS Community Court of Justice. The Gambia has also signed bilateral agreements with countries such as Switzerland to address civil aviation and irregular migration.

The Gambian government has not signed or acceded to several multilateral agreements advocated for by domestic and international civil society organizations. Notable examples include the Arms Trade Treaty, the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, and the African Union Road Safety Charter.

Effective use of support



Credibility



The Barrow government generally cooperates with regional organizations and has taken concrete steps to undo some of the measures the Jammeh government took that served to isolate the Gambia. The relationship with ECOWAS is a critical one, especially given the continued presence of ECOMIG in the Gambia, by request of the Gambian government, to support stability and security sector reform. The government has also begun to compensate the families of two journalists assassinated under the previous regime, pursuant to an ECOWAS Community Court of Justice judgment. The relationship between the Gambia and ECOWAS can be described as significantly improved compared to previously, when the Gambian government occasionally took positions at odds with the rest of the bloc. Relations with the African Union, similarly, are positive although this relationship does not have an immediate impact in the Gambia today. The Gambia remains the seat of the African Union's African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights; under Jammeh, there were calls from civil society to move this body elsewhere, given Jammeh's human rights records, but those calls have now ceased.

One bilateral relationship that may shift in the future is with Ghana. In 2005, over 50 Ghanaians and other West Africans were killed in the Gambia (later it was later confirmed by government forces). In 2018, the government of Ghana announced a task force to study further action regarding this issue and the Gambian government pledged to cooperate. No concrete steps have yet to be taken.

Regional
cooperation

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Strategic Outlook

The Gambia is currently in a challenging position. There are several measures the government and its partners should implement to consolidate the democratic gains of the last four years and to ensure that the economy bounces back after the pandemic.

First, the institutional reforms pledged as part of the transition should be continued. This includes security sector reform, the anti-corruption commission and a new constitution. Failures to follow through on these questions, unfairly or not, cast doubt on the Barrow government's commitment to genuine institutional reform. There is a profound sense in the Gambia that, while there have been some noticeable improvements in terms of human rights, the systemic weaknesses of the Gambian political system remain in place.

Second, the budget should be sized to fit the needs of the country. This would most likely involve trimming the budget of the Office of the President and the security forces in favor of education, social services and health care. Human capacity shortcomings in key sectors such as education should be addressed and matched with the appropriate expenditures, preferably in a manner less dependent than currently upon project-based donor funding.

Third, the government must take a decisive stand against corruption and the hollowing out of public administration. The anti-corruption framework is well overdue. The lack of consistent prosecution of officials engaged in corrupt practices sends a signal that corruption is permissible. Payroll and other accounts must be consistently audited throughout the government to eliminate "ghost personnel" and similar practices. Government information, including that concerning the budget and procurement, should be made publicly and electronically available. An access-to-information law should finally be passed.

Fourth, land tenure needs to be addressed. Land ownership disputes are one of the most volatile elements in post-Jammeh Gambia. Yet the government has made little effort to address them. Land registries are out of date. Speculation, especially in urban areas, is rampant. While the risk of serious ethno-religious conflict in the Gambia is minimal, land issues exacerbate these fault lines. Land issues also affect migration which, while it has receded from headlines as an issue, is nonetheless still an ongoing concern.

Fifth, efforts to diversify the Gambian economy and make it less dependent upon agriculture and fishing should be continued. Unemployment remains stubbornly high and needs to be addressed. Even a return to pre-COVID-19 levels would be insufficient to address Gambians' needs. Access to financing remains an issue for Gambians, particularly those without land.

Sixth, while the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the Gambia was not as dire as initially feared, the pandemic has revealed the patchy inadequacy of the social support system, especially for those not employed in the formal sector and those who, for one reason or another, cannot rely on

extended kin for social protection. The significant increase in the remittances during the pandemic was due to reliance on formal remittance mechanisms, which enable accurate data recording. Such recording should be maintained post-pandemic.

Finally, the initial burst of goodwill the Barrow government experienced after coming to power in 2017 is gone. While few Gambians wish for a return of the Jammeh era, Barrow has become a polarizing figure in his own right. A reinvigorated reform program as outlined above would go some way toward restoring some of that goodwill.