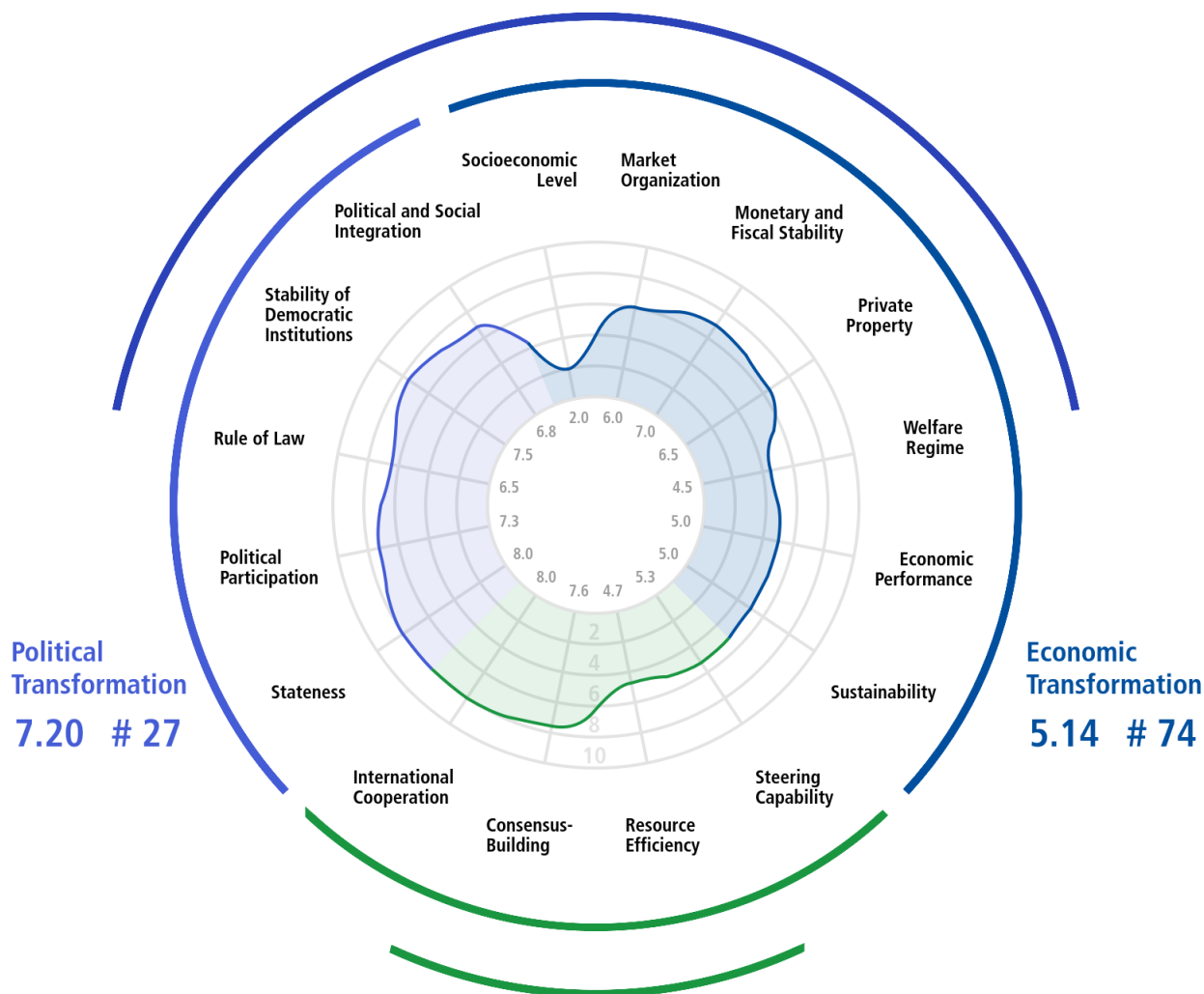


Gambia

Status Index

6.17 # 45

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
7.20 # 27

Economic Transformation
5.14 # 74

Governance Index

5.90 # 27

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

Please cite as follows: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report – Gambia. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 256
33111 Gütersloh
Germany

Sabine Donner

Phone +49 5241 81 81501
sabine.donner@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Hauke Hartmann

Phone +49 5241 81 81389
hauke.hartmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Sabine Steinkamp

Phone +49 5241 81 81507
sabine.steinkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Key Indicators

Population	M	2.7	HDI	0.500	GDP p.c., PPP \$	2510
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.5	HDI rank of 189	174	Gini Index	38.8
Life expectancy	years	62.1	UN Education Index	0.416	Poverty ³	% 47.0
Urban population	%	63.9	Gender inequality ²	0.611	Aid per capita \$	92.8

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

During the period under review, The Gambia has experienced two significant developments. One of these is the ongoing, albeit uneven, consolidation of democratic gains resulting from the transition away from Yahya Jammeh's autocratic rule, which ended in early 2017, to the democratically elected Adama Barrow (who secured re-election in 2021). Notably, during this period, the Barrow government accepted the majority of the recommendations proposed by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, established to investigate abuses during the Jammeh era. However, the implementation of these recommendations has been inconsistent. Overall, these democratic gains have manifested in consecutive free and fair elections at both the national and local levels, as well as a widespread improvement in human rights and governance. However, in certain critical areas, such as anti-corruption efforts and security sector reform, progress has been sluggish. Instances of law enforcement abuse and apparent self-dealing by public officials have also contributed to declining enthusiasm among the Gambian population. Barrow's decision to break away from his former party, the United Democratic Party, and form a new electoral alliance with a faction of Jammeh's former party, has not improved this perception.

The second major trend pertains to the repercussions of two key events: the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These events have had implications for the Gambian economy. While the Barrow government has aimed to improve economic governance and performance, the impacts of these external factors have reversed or slowed progress. At present, Gambians enjoy more freedom, but their economic circumstances are not necessarily significantly better than they were under Jammeh. A growing sense of disillusionment with the pace of economic and political reforms has led to heightened tensions. In fact, there was an alleged coup attempt in late 2022, resulting in the arrest of numerous soldiers and civilians. The details surrounding this coup attempt remain unclear. Subsequently, eight soldiers, two civilians, and a police officer were charged with treason or other offenses.

These two trends have unfolded amidst several natural disasters, an increase in communal disputes – primarily related to land ownership – and frequent allegations of government corruption and mismanagement. The Gambian media, now more outspoken and liberated, has played a prominent role in highlighting these issues. Although Barrow’s honeymoon period continues, as evidenced by his re-election, it is fair to say that the initial excitement of the immediate post-Jammeh period has somewhat diminished. Two additional questions arise: when will the Economic Community of West African States Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG), the Senegal-led intervention force deployed after Jammeh’s exile, and now increasingly unpopular with Gambians, leave the country? Second, what will be the fate of Yahya Jammeh, currently residing in Equatorial Guinea? In sum, the Barrow administration faces potential volatility on multiple fronts.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The Gambia, a small nation on the West African coast, is almost entirely surrounded by Senegal, with the exception of its Atlantic coastline. It holds the distinction of being mainland Africa’s smallest country, with a population just exceeding two million. It gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1965 and has been led by only three leaders since then. The first, Dawda Jawara, generally supported liberal democracy and free markets, although critics accused him of corruption and poor decision-making. In 1994, he was ousted by Yahya Jammeh, who subsequently claimed victory in elections (with questionable democratic integrity) in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011. Under Jammeh’s rule, The Gambia’s human rights situation deteriorated significantly and the economy suffered from rampant corruption. Jammeh isolated the country internationally by withdrawing from the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court. The Gambia also played a substantial role in the Euro-Mediterranean migrant crisis, as many Gambians sought to escape Jammeh’s oppressive governance.

In 2016, a coalition of opposition parties led by Adama Barrow defeated Jammeh. Initially conceding defeat, Jammeh later retracted his concession, resulting in a standoff that was only resolved when the regional group, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), threatened military intervention. Jammeh went into exile, enabling Barrow to assume control of the government.

The Barrow administration has largely focused on restoring stability, bolstering national institutions and improving how these are perceived by Gambians and the international community. To achieve this, the administration launched an ambitious transitional program, backed by substantial international support. This included the establishment of a Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, a security sector reform initiative, and modifications to some of the more oppressive laws dating from the Jammeh era.

However, the success of this transitional program has been mixed, influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Domestically, a pivotal factor is the breakdown of the coalition that ousted Jammeh from power. Barrow severed ties with his former party, the United Democratic Party, to form his own National Peoples' Party. In the country's unicameral legislature, the National Assembly, Barrow relies on support from smaller parties in addition to his own, including, controversially to many Gambians, remnants of Jammeh's party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction.

Concurrently with these political reforms, the Barrow government has endeavored to enhance the nation's economy and economic governance. During Jammeh's rule, The Gambia struggled in various key economic and developmental aspects. While international institutions like the African Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund have generally praised these reform efforts, notable governance gaps remain, particularly in terms of implementation. The compounding challenges posed by the global pandemic and the economic fallout from the conflict in Ukraine have added to the complexities of this task.

Societally, The Gambia is multiethnic and predominantly Muslim, with Muslims comprising approximately 95% of the population. Historically, The Gambia has enjoyed relative ethnoreligious harmony, fostered by high rates of intermarriage and a strong commitment to pluralism from political and religious leaders. However, this commitment wavered in the latter years of the Jammeh period when he employed inflammatory rhetoric in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to retain power. Regrettably, such rhetoric appears to be resurfacing in the Gambian public sphere, raising concerns that the country's traditional ability to avoid the type of conflicts seen in some neighboring nations might be diminishing.

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 legitimate use of force is unchallenged, but there are other significant actors who may use force in the country.

First, the ECOMIG, which was established in conjunction with the disputed 2016 election and subsequent removal of former President Jammeh, remains in the country. Its mandate has been renewed multiple times at the request of the Gambian government. While troops from Ghana and Nigeria are also present, the mission primarily consists of Senegalese troops. As a result, opposition figures and social media have made allegations that President Barrow is beholden to Senegalese interests. ECOMIG soldiers have participated in certain anti-trafficking initiatives in The Gambia, but there is no indication that these initiatives occurred without the consent and coordination of Gambian authorities.

Second, and more seriously, there have been isolated clashes between ECOMIG soldiers and the abovementioned rebels. In early 2022, four Senegalese soldiers with ECOMIG were killed and seven were taken hostage by Casamance rebels along The Gambia-Senegal border (on the Senegalese side of the border, although the border is in practice not clearly demarcated and there are conflicting media reports). Furthermore, more than 5,000 Gambians fled their homes due to the fighting between Senegalese forces and rebels. These incidents have raised concerns that The Gambia might be dragged into the on-and-off Casamance conflict.

Third, land disputes are frequent in The Gambia, and sometimes these disputes spiral into violence by community members. Such violence is typically deemed legitimate by the communities concerned, even if illegal. However, it is framed as a response to the inadequacy of the state monopoly on the use of force, rather than as questioning its monopoly in the first place.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

9

'06 9 '24 10

1

The Gambian nation-state is considered legitimate by the vast majority of Gambians. There are no significant interest groups that dispute its legitimacy and no major controversies regarding Gambian citizenship. Gambian citizenship can be acquired through birth, descent, marriage or naturalization. Gambian citizens by birth are permitted to hold second citizenships. Deprivation of citizenship, regardless of its mode of acquisition, is effectively governed by law and necessitates approval from the High Court.

There have been some controversies, nonetheless, around citizenship in The Gambia. The previous administration sought to institutionalize a process for the naturalization of descendants of African victims of the transatlantic slave trade, but this process stalled after the rejection of the 2020 draft constitution (which included a clause allowing for this process).

In addition, there are persistent rumors that Senegalese nationals are able to register to vote in Gambian elections, thereby indirectly undermining the citizenship law. However, neither of these controversies have led to a questioning of the citizenship law nor of the legitimacy of the nation-state.

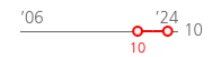
The Gambia is a secular republic, although the majority (around 95%) of the population is Muslim. As a result, the quasi-governmental Gambia Supreme Islamic Council holds a particular sway over public opinion, although it does not play a formal role in political decision-making or in the formulation of policies.

There have been suggestions in the Gambian media and civil society that religious polarization has increased under the Barrow administration. A key controversy was the 2020 draft constitution which omitted referring to The Gambia as a secular republic, which was in the 1997 constitution (the draft constitution did, however, prohibit the development of a state religion and outlined that the state does not discriminate based on religion, among other grounds). The rationale for the omission was that the word “secular” had been inserted into the 1997 constitution by the National Assembly through an amendment process later found unconstitutional by The Gambia Supreme Court. Nonetheless, and despite the failure to adopt the 2020 constitution, this incident, coupled with other acts, such as granting Muslim women in government employment leave to prepare for Ramadan, catalyzed a concern among some Christian groups that the Gambian government did not sufficiently respect the rights of religious minorities.

Islamic law guides Muslims in personal matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. Islamic law does not apply to criminal matters. There have been sporadic reports of non-Muslims having their cases heard in the Islamic court system despite their objections to this.

State identity

10



1

No interference of religious dogmas

7



1

The reach of the Gambian state apparatus across the country is uneven. The state's central administrative apparatuses, such as la

w enforcement and tax collection, are more robust in the Greater Banjul Area and are less effective in the more rural areas, due to factors such as cost and availability of transport, frequent power outages and a concentration of human capital in the Greater Banjul Area. The Barrow government and its international and bilateral partners have sought to even out these discrepancies through additional training and resources (such as providing rural police officers with bicycles) but the reach of the state remains inconsistent far from the capital and major population centers.

Infrastructure, likewise, is uneven. For example, 79% of urban Gambians have access to electricity, compared to 23% of rural ones (according to the latest Demographic and Health Survey conducted by the Gambian government). Likewise, 80% of urban Gambians have access to improved sanitation compared to 44% in rural areas. In the two most urbanized areas (Banjul and Kanifing), over 90% of the population has access to improved sanitation facilities, compared to the national average of 67.8%.

Other possible indicators of the state's reach also reflect regional divergencies. In Banjul, 72% of children have their birth registered with the relevant civil authorities, whereas in the much more rural Basse area, the figure is 57%.

While many indicators have improved under Barrow compared to his predecessor, most likely due to improved governance generally and better relationships with development partners, developments have not kept up with population growth. For example, access to a safely managed water source (as a percentage of the population) has declined slightly over the last seven years, although the overall trend for social indicators is upward.

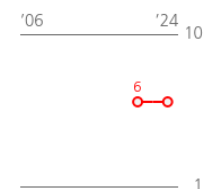
2 | Political Participation

Gambian elections are generally considered free and fair since Barrow came to power. The Gambian constitution guarantees universal suffrage for all Gambians over the age of 18. There are no indications that specific groups are denied these rights, though Gambians in the diaspora are not able to vote (making voting accessible to diaspora Gambians is under debate in The Gambia, but no practical changes have been made to realize this goal).

The 2021 presidential election, in which Barrow was re-elected to a second term, as well as the 2022 legislative and local elections, were all deemed consistent with democratic norms by most domestic and international observers. A controversy during the 2021 election was that the Independent Election Commission (IEC) only approved six presidential candidates out of an original field of 26. The IEC argued that this was because the rejected candidates failed to meet certain criteria, such as a

Basic
administration

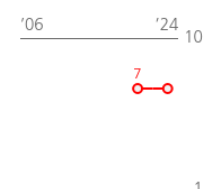
6



1

Free and fair
elections

7



1

sufficient number of signatures on their election applications. The courts judged a lawsuit by some of the rejected candidates in their favor, though the affected candidates failed to qualify in the end anyway. There is no indication that this avoidable mishap was due to political interference, but rather due to a lack of resources and clear operating procedures. This is consistent with multiple observers' findings that critical funding shortfalls affect the IEC's ability to fulfill its mandate. Nonetheless, the IEC's management of the elections (and the preceding registration drives) is generally viewed as adequate.

The conduct of elections generally has no major issues, though observers have noted isolated incidents, such as a lack of materials or a lack of barriers to ensure that ballots are secret. There is no indication that these are deliberate or patterned in a way that suggests partiality by the IEC, however.

The election schedule is set by law and, as a rule, followed; the only recent election was a by-election in 2020 that was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some members of the opposition alleged that the delay was politically motivated, though that allegation was never substantiated.

Political parties are required to pay a registration fee, considered excessive by some, and to have a nominal presence in the country's regions. Parties based on ethnic, regional or religious expression are prohibited by law, although in practice several parties are viewed as primarily protecting the interests of given groups. The former ruling party, AFPRC, for example, is tightly associated with the Jola ethnic group of former President Jammeh.

There is no public funding for elections in The Gambia. Coupled with the country's relatively meager resource base, this means that party funding is largely dependent on a few well-heeled Gambians and the Gambian diaspora. Election campaigns tend to be dominated by the incumbent and the major opposition party (in the most recent elections, this was Barrow and, in opposition, his former party, the United Democratic Party). Though not legally excluded, small parties tend to have difficulty accessing the media.

During the most recent elections, there was concern over increasingly heated rhetoric about ethnic identity from some politicians and party members.

There are no social groups with veto power (de jure or de facto) in The Gambia. But there are several actors that could theoretically undermine or otherwise restrict democratic decision-making. As noted above, Islamic groups, most notably The Gambia Supreme Islamic Council, hold considerable sway over public opinion, especially on issues pertaining to religious identity. Furthermore, critics of Barrow have alleged (also noted above) that he is dependent on Senegalese interests, effectively giving Senegal a considerable say in Gambian domestic matters (the continued presence of the mainly Senegalese ECOMIG mission fuels this

Effective power to govern

7

'06 '24 10

7

1

perception). Barrow's defenders have, for their part, periodically argued that ECOMIG's presence is required due to a lack of trust in The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF), pointing to a history in which the military exercised considerable control over democratic decision-making.

On a more local level, traditional authorities and kinship groups hold considerable sway in everyday life. There are incidents where state authorities defer to these, mainly in matters such as domestic disputes rather than policymaking.

Freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed by the Gambian constitution, but this freedom was routinely abrogated by the Jammeh government. Under Barrow, the situation has improved – as is generally the case for human rights matters in the country – but there are still instances when permits for demonstrations are declined, seemingly without legitimate justification, or when the police respond to demonstrations with excessive force. Demonstrations permits come under the colonial-period Public Order Act (amended several times), which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2018 and has been criticized by domestic and external observers alike for inconsistency with contemporary human rights standards.

For example, in August 2022, a group called the Coalition of Progressive Gambians, whose main goal is for the government to address the cost of living and alleged misuse of public funds, and planned to demonstrate to hasten the adoption of an Anti-Corruption Bill then pending in the National Assembly. The Inspector General of the Police denied the coalition a demonstration permit on vague “security grounds.” The protests were later called off.

Like freedom of assembly, freedom of expression has improved significantly since the end of Jammeh's rule. There are still reports of intimidation and harassment of media professionals by the security services, but these are not a matter of policy or direction from the government but due to misunderstandings or a lack of training at the local level. Likewise, there are occasional reports of journalists practicing self-censorship, though the government does not, as a rule, censor publications.

The legal framework governing freedom of expression has largely remained unchanged since the Jammeh period (Jammeh's administration routinely and with impunity violated its own laws), though freedom of expression and the press have been bolstered by court decisions. These include the Supreme Court stating that the criminalization of defamation is unconstitutional. The country also adopted an Access to Information Act in 2021, which is widely considered a boon to free expression. The Gambian government also allocated GMD 15 million (roughly equivalent to \$300,000) in assistance to print and radio media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first direct assistance to non-government media since the country's independence.

The media ecosystem has also increased in size and diversity since Jammeh's rule, although this is also attributable to improved access to technology, enabling a flourishing of online news and radio.

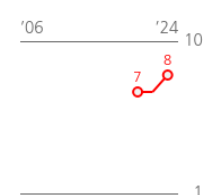
Association /
assembly rights

7



Freedom of
expression

8



3 | Rule of Law

The Gambia's executive, judiciary and legislature operate according to a functional separation of powers. This is in sharp contrast to the Jammeh period, when the National Assembly was largely a supine, rubber-stamping body and the judiciary was routinely cowed and impeded. There have been no constitutional changes during the transition from Jammeh to Barrow and no change in the formal balance of power. However, the changing composition of the legislature and the judiciary and the general opening up of the political climate have led to these branches becoming assertive toward the executive and each other. For instance, the Gambian Supreme Court rejected a push by the National Assembly to include a loan scheme for its members in the 2021 budget.

Barrow's ruling party is less dominant in the National Assembly than the ruling party was under Presidents Jammeh and Jawara (and also in 2017/18 when the electoral coalition that unseated Jammeh was intact), creating space for greater (and more strident) oversight of the executive by the legislature. Likewise, there has been a concerted effort to improve the independence of the judiciary, including through the Gambianization of it (under Jammeh, so-called "mercenary judges" were often brought in from other commonwealth jurisdictions).

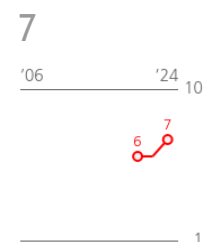
The Barrow government and its bilateral partners have exerted considerable effort to improve the independence and effectiveness of the judiciary. This is, however, complicated by the tripartite Gambian legal system, which consists of Islamic law, administered by the Cadi (or Qadi) court system, state law (modeled primarily on English common law) and customary law, administered by District Tribunals.

In general terms, the state law system has received the most attention in terms of reform in areas ranging from contract law to criminal law (unlike some other African Muslim-majority countries, there is no provision for Shariah, or Islamic law, in criminal matters). This is also the area where the Barrow administration has aimed to Gambianize the judiciary. The presence of non-Gambian judges was not an issue in the other two branches. There have been instances when the higher courts have issued verdicts against the executive and the legislature.

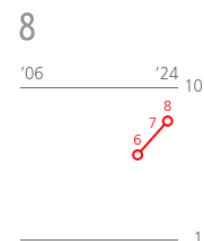
In the other two branches, there have been efforts to increase the codification of Islamic law and customary law, and to provide enhanced training to officials in and increase the capacity of District Tribunals and Cadi Courts. Some of these initiatives predate the Barrow administration, and significant resource constraints persist.

The Barrow administration's decision to accept all but two of the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission also largely signals a willingness to let judicial mechanisms operate without undue interference.

Separation of powers



Independent judiciary



Public officeholders are seldom prosecuted or otherwise penalized in The Gambia. An exception is the dismissal or suspension of officials associated with crimes carried out under Jammeh, when several high-level public servants, who are mainly associated with the security services, were dismissed.

Politicians are seldom held legally accountable in a meaningful way for corruption, though there is robust media and civil society coverage of allegedly fraudulent conduct. There are no recent cases of elected officials losing elections due to such public outcry, however.

Civil rights are broadly protected by Gambian law. The constitution of 1997 is largely consistent with international standards, though there are some significant shortcomings in relation to the death penalty and the permissibility of the use of force. The latter is permitted for the defense of property and not just the defense of life. That said, civil rights were routinely abrogated with impunity during the Jammeh period. Under the Barrow administration, the situation has markedly improved, and reports of abuses, such as torture and arbitrary detention, have decreased significantly. There is also increased attention to preventing such abuses and investigating alleged incidents by organizations such as the National Human Rights Commission, which was founded under Barrow.

Access to justice and equality under the law remain uneven, however, although these, too, are codified into law. Critics have alleged significant shortcomings in de facto access to justice, most notably for women, the poor and religious minorities. The underlying reasons for lack of access vary. One reason is the cost of legal representation, inadequate translation of statements and questions, and the uneven reach of the state (English-derived) system in rural areas. Another is that many personal matters, such as marriage and inheritance, are delegated to the Islamic or customary legal system. In these cases, civil society groups have argued that women and religious minorities experience systematic discrimination or do not have adequate access to the legal system.

Gambian law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Homosexuality is illegal in The Gambia. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, political or other opinions, property ownership, or disability is prohibited by the Gambian constitution. At present, The Gambia has weak protections for personal privacy; the main legal instrument in this area is the 2009 Information and Communications Act, but a Data Protection and Privacy Policy is under development to bring the country in line with the standards set by ECOWAS' Supplementary Act on Personal Data Protection and the African Union's Malabo Convention.

Prosecution of office abuse

4

'06 _____ '24 10

4

1

Civil rights

7

'06 _____ '24 10

6 7

1

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

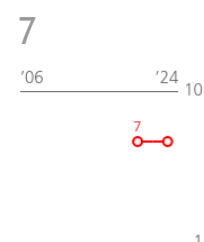
Gambian democratic institutions are generally able to carry out their functions, though there are several factors that impede their work. These factors include resource constraints, including those of human capital, which affect preparation, review and follow-through in public administration. This, coupled with their high dependency on donor support, means that democratic institutions cannot carry out their functions on a consistent basis. Furthermore, the legacy of the Jammeh period also impedes functioning because, under his rule, Gambian democratic institutions were largely hollowed out and rendered toothless. In this regard, the Barrow administration is necessarily engaged in a costly, time-consuming restoration project that is still ongoing.

Other factors include popular distrust of state institutions. For example, according to the most recent Afrobarometer 2021, trust in almost all public institutions has declined since 2018 – the one exception being the army – though this may reflect post-transition euphoria. In 2021, fewer than half of Gambians trusted their local councilors, members of parliament, president or the IEC.

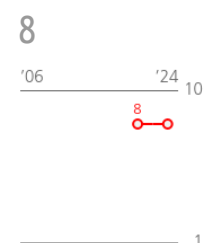
Democratic institutions are widely considered legitimate in The Gambia. There are no major entities that question their legitimacy. Public polling data suggests broad agreement on the part of the Gambian people with the principles of democracy. In the abovementioned Afrobarometer survey, 88% of respondents stated that democratic elections were the best way to choose a leader. Support for political parties was lower, however, with 42% stating that parties were divisive. This figure is arguably reflective of experiences with particular parties rather than a rejection of multiparty democracy.

At the end of 2022, there was an alleged coup attempt by members of The Gambia Armed Forces, the most serious threat against Gambian democracy since the 2016/2017 election standoff. Several soldiers and civilians were arrested, but details about the coup remain murky, and the government's initial decision to create a special investigative panel was criticized by some Gambians as a way to cover up a sensitive situation. Eight soldiers, two civilians and a police officer were later charged with treason or other charges in connection with the coup.

Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



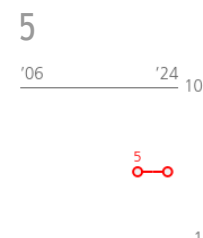
5 | Political and Social Integration

The Gambia is home to a large number of political parties – 19 at the beginning of 2023 – but several of these are very small and do not have credible means to obtain power or significant influence. Only a handful of parties have deep social roots and the ability to mobilize a significant voter base. Most of these parties have roots in the Jammeh period or earlier. For example, the United Democratic Party, which is today the largest opposition party, was founded in 1996 (early in the Jammeh period), and the smaller but politically influential People’s Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism was founded in 1986. In contrast, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construct, which Jammeh founded, was the ruling party and akin to a mass movement under his rule. Now it is significantly reduced in size (though it still has representation in the National Assembly). The People’s Progressive Party, the ruling party between 1965 and 1994, does not have a single seat in the National Assembly. The most recent significant party is arguably the National Peoples’ Party, which President Barrow founded after his break with the United Democratic Party.

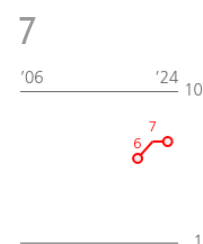
In practice, the Gambian party system has aligned itself in a pro-Barrow camp, centered around the National People’s Party, or an opposition camp, centered around the United Democratic Party. This division has caused tension within some of the smaller parties, such as the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construct. Such a bloc system has been a mainstay in Gambian politics, including under the rule of Jammeh and Jawara. Gambian political parties do not exhibit dramatically different viewpoints. All parties are broadly pro-democracy, pro-free market parties. Party choice is thus often less of a clear-cut ideological choice than one based on geographic, ethnic or personal loyalties. This is despite the fact that parties based only in one region of the country or exclusively on ethnic or religious identity are prohibited. The big political parties largely set the agenda, have developed party organizations with a wide reach, and frequently use the court system to pursue what they view as shortcomings in voter registration, the conduct of elections and political campaigning.

The Gambia has a broad range of civil associations, including religious groups, labor unions, development organizations and various watchdog associations, which play a mediating role in public affairs. Groups representing women and youth are particularly visible. In this context, professional associations, such as the Gambian Bar Association and the Gambian Press Union, hold significant sway over the articulation and mobilization of interests. The extended kinship system and traditional authorities similarly contribute to the diversity of contact surfaces between Gambians and the political system. In 2020, more than half of Gambians reported that they were active in at least one community-based group or civil society association, according to Afrobarometer data.

Party system



Interest groups



In general terms, Gambian organizations encourage consensus-building, which often makes it difficult for strongly divergent interests to have an impact – for better or worse. It is also the case that some interests are deliberately marginalized. LGBTQ+ interests, for example, have no platform in The Gambia, as homosexuality is illegal and there is an intense social animus against it. Afrobarometer data shows that 96% of Gambians say they are unwilling to have an LGBTQ+ neighbor.

Ethnoreligious mobilization is also often viewed with a great deal of skepticism by Gambian political society. Even though domestic observers have called attention to the increased risk of ethnoreligious polarization over the last few years, there are strong social pressures countervailing such a development.

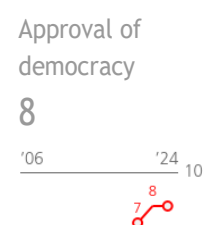
Although support for democracy is as high as 90% in The Gambia, there is fairly widespread dissatisfaction with democratic institutions and state institutions more generally, and the approval of both is trending downwards. At the same time, there is sustained pro-democracy organization by civil society members, and some of the country's political parties seek to broaden inclusion in the primary process to ensure internal party democracy.

According to Afrobarometer data, voting is sharply down among younger Gambians compared to their seniors; in the 2017 National Assembly election, 57% of 18–35 year olds voted, compared to 74% and 78% of those 36–55 and 56+, respectively. In the 2022 National Assembly election, turnout was reported at under 50%, compared to over 80% for the previous presidential election. However, voter turnout is generally low for legislative elections in The Gambia, and 50% is far from the low point of 19.4% in the 2012 legislative election, according to International IDEA.

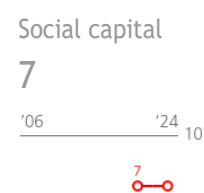
According to Afrobarometer (2022), approximately 57% agree that a multiparty system is needed to ensure real choices are presented but, at the same time, 40.9% believe that political parties create division and confusion.

Nonetheless, these statistics, coupled with declining trust in a wide range of government institutions, suggest that democracy's shine has faded somewhat, compared to the immediate post-2016 environment.

Gambians generally have a high level of civic trust and a tradition of social cohesion. The Gambia does not have, for example, a long history of ethnoreligious tension. When polled about experiences of discrimination, which could be interpreted as an indicator of a lack of trust in people different from oneself, very few Gambians report that they have endured it. Reports of ethnic discrimination were the most common, with about 16% of Gambians alleging that they were discriminated against based on their ethnicity in 2020. Fewer people allege discrimination based on gender, religion or disability (8%, 4% and 11%, respectively). Likewise, with the notable exception of homosexuality (see above), the same survey showed that Gambians exhibit a high level of tolerance regarding others.



1



1

There is similarly a high degree of engagement in civic organizations, as noted above, and a large number of organizations that focus on a variety of causes and interests, in which Gambians can engage.

The extended kinship system is, furthermore, a deeply significant aspect of individuals' social capital.

II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

The Gambia remains one of the poorest countries in the world, according to most metrics. In 2021, The Gambia ranked 174th (out of 191 countries) in the Human Development Index, with no significant improvement over the past five years. With the exception of Guinea, all countries ranked below The Gambia have a recent history of or are in an ongoing conflict. This score is estimated to have dropped by 30 points, due to inequality. Additionally, World Bank data indicates that 44% of the population lives in poverty. According to the 2022 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 28% of Gambians were at risk of multidimensional poverty, one of the highest percentages in the world.

Gambian inequality is gendered. With a score of 0.611 on the 2021 Gender Inequality Index, it is one of the 20 most gender-unequal countries in the world in terms of poverty. The structural constraints facing women in particular are significant. In a 2022 World Bank study, three out of four women (compared to half of men) had no access to their own earnings, and women are 3.7 times as likely as men to be engaged in unpaid family work.

There are significant differences in poverty rates across the country's various regions. In the two most notable urban areas – Banjul and Kanifing – the poverty rate was 17% in 2017, compared to an average rate of 70% in rural areas. These differences reflect a lack of infrastructure, including roads, water and electricity, as well as limited access to education and health care, and a scarcity of non-subsistence opportunities for rural Gambians.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	1813.6	1812.2	2038.4	2273.1
GDP growth	%	6.2	0.6	4.3	4.9
Inflation (CPI)	%	7.1	5.9	7.4	11.5
Unemployment	%	4.2	5.1	5.0	4.8
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	3.9	10.5	12.4	10.4
Export growth	%	-6.3	-20.0	5.7	-0.4
Import growth	%	-0.2	6.0	13.3	10.9
Current account balance	\$ M	-37.1	-86.6	-94.1	-
Public debt	% of GDP	83.0	85.9	83.1	82.8
External debt	\$ M	801.6	919.1	1073.6	-
Total debt service	\$ M	43.5	34.1	36.8	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	8.2	9.0	9.8	9.4
Public education spending	% of GDP	2.7	2.9	2.9	2.7
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.3	1.4	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.7

Sources (as of December 2023): 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

In principle, the Gambian economy is organized along market principles with few administrative barriers to investment. The legal environment in The Gambia is generally business-friendly. There are some licensing requirements for new businesses, depending on the sector, but these are not always consistently enforced. For instance, businesses with a potential ecological impact are required to undergo environmental impact assessments; however, these are often delayed due to systemic funding shortfalls.

Market organization

5

'06 '24 10

4 5

1

Several key sectors are either dominated by state-owned enterprises or have a state-owned enterprise as one of several major entities in a generally competitive sector. In two sectors, utility services and postal services, the state-owned enterprises are a monopoly. The state-owned enterprises in these sectors are the National Water and Electricity Company and The Gambia Postal Services, respectively. There have been successful attempts to privatize several state-owned enterprises and to facilitate increased market competition, but the governance framework remains underdeveloped. For instance, state-owned enterprises are not required to maintain separate accounts for commercial and non-commercial activities, thus enabling possible price distortions.

Beyond the state-owned enterprises, the private sector is largely informal, with only 16% of Gambian firms registered with the Gambian Revenue Authority. Generally, the informal sector is large in The Gambia, amounting to 79.5% in 2018, according to ILO statistics and Gambian government data from the same year. The ratio of informal employment varies by sector; one estimate suggests that 96% of all agricultural employment is informal, compared to 78% in other sectors.

Even though many markets are nominally competitive, in practice they tend to be dominated by one or two major actors. In the telecoms market, for example, there are five licensees – the fifth license was awarded in 2022 and that company has yet to commence operations. However, one company, Africell, holds approximately 62% of all active subscribers according to government sources. The runner-up, QCell, commands 28%.

Foreign investment in the country is a priority. This is overseen by The Gambia Investment & Export Promotion Agency, which has the authority to offer benefits, such as import waivers, in specific sectors. Priority areas include agriculture, fisheries and tourism. Gambian laws apply equally to both foreign and domestic investors.

The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (GCCPC) has the responsibility of ensuring that the market is not distorted by anti-competitive practices and that Gambian consumers are protected from misleading market practices. Its establishment dates back to the Competition Act of 2007. According to this act, the GCCPC is empowered to initiate investigations, hold hearings, impose penalties and take actions, such as prohibiting proposed mergers. Furthermore, The Gambia is part of the International Competition Network.

To date, the GCCPC has been most active in terms of investigations. It has conducted investigations in several distinct areas to address alleged cartelization and other anti-competitive practices. For example, it conducted a study of the Gambian cement industry in response to public outcry over dramatic price increases. The study found that the increases were not due to anti-competitive practices but rather to the weakness of the Gambian dalasi and low local cement bagging capacity. Similarly, another study of the real estate sector found no anti-competitive practices per se but

Competition policy

5

'06 _____ '24 10

5
4

1

highlighted that the sector left consumers vulnerable due to an outdated regulatory framework and low human capacity in the Ministry of Lands and local governments that oversee real estate transactions. In general, there are no indications of political interference with the GCCPC or any suggestion that it cannot operate independently of political interests.

While, as noted above, the GIEPA may issue tax relief for investment in specific sectors, there is no evidence that this is carried out in a clientelistic way.

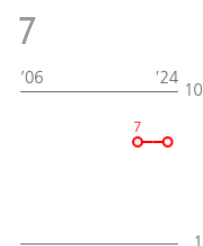
The Gambia has consistently maintained liberal trade policies and practices. In 2017, The Gambia acceded to the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, which involved adjusting around 4,000 tariff lines, accounting for about two-thirds of all tariffs. The Common External Tariff establishes a five-tiered system, according to which essential commodities are subject to lower tariffs compared to consumer goods. Import duty and tax exemptions are granted for imports in certain sectors considered special priority areas. The Gambia has few import restrictions, primarily motivated by national security concerns. Banned imports include firearms and pornography, for example. The Gambian export market is limited, primarily consisting of peanuts and fish, with a large re-export trade as well. Export taxes are not imposed, but The Gambia has implemented export bans on various goods. For instance, in 2022, it banned the export of timber to address illegal logging.

There are currently 12 commercial banks in The Gambia, licensed by the central bank of The Gambia under the Banking Act of 2009. One of these banks is an Islamic bank, which is also covered by the Banking Act. Additionally, there are approximately 20 microfinance institutions operating in the country.

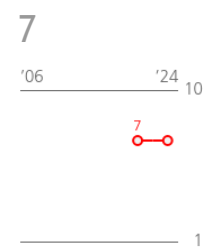
The banking sector is generally well-capitalized and liquid. The ratio of non-performing loans was 4.5% in 2019, which is low by regional standards, compared to almost 14% and 6% in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively, for the same year. The ratio increased to 6.8% at the end of 2020 before dropping to 5.1% at the end of 2021. The banking sector's capital-to-assets ratio is 13% (2019), above statutory limits and international minimum standards. The largest credit sector by far is construction, accounting for 32% in 2022.

In 2021, the Capital Markets and Securities Act was signed into law. Currently, the capital market consists entirely of government securities. A few Gambian equities are traded on exchanges in other countries (e.g., Trust Bank of Gambia on Ghana's stock exchange).

Liberalization of foreign trade



Banking system



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

The central bank of The Gambia sets monetary policy for the country, with the primary aim of establishing price and foreign exchange stability. The central bank is governed by a governor and a Board; both are appointed by the president in consultation with the Public Service Commission. The president has the authority to remove board members, but not the governor. That requires an independent tribunal. The legislation governing the central bank was adopted in 2018 as part of a larger project to promote and consolidate good governance after Jammeh's rule. As recently as 2023, international actors such as the IMF praised the central bank for its improvements, while also emphasizing the need for enhanced external and internal governance. Some scholarship has raised questions about the overall effectiveness of Gambian monetary policy.

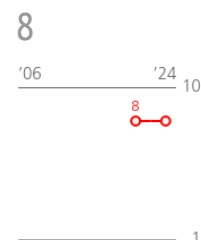
The Gambia is confronted with long-term inflationary pressures and persistent foreign exchange shortfalls. In 2021, its inflation was 7.1%, nearly twice the global mean of 3.7%. Following global trends, it experienced a substantial rise throughout 2022, reaching a record high of 13.1% in October of that year. The causes of inflation in The Gambia are diverse, including the global surge in commodity prices resulting from the war in Ukraine.

Inflationary pressures have added strain to the bank's foreign exchange reserves and tax revenues, which were already affected by disruptions in key exports, costly flooding, decreased tourism revenue, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased food import bills and planned budget expenditures, such as a significant 30% civil service salary increase (proponents of civil service reform argue that this increase was necessary to prevent excessive turnover in the civil service). With the Gambian economy experiencing various external shocks, the central bank's ability to maintain a stable currency and prevent inflation is limited.

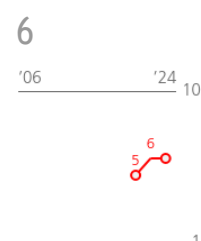
Improving fiscal stability has been a major goal of the Barrow administration since it came to power, and, on the whole, its track record in this area indicates movement in the right direction. Given the small size of the Gambian economy overall, its reliance on imports in several key sectors (such as food commodities and fuel), the lack of high-value exports and other factors, there is relatively limited room for maneuvering. The myriad external factors previously addressed have further curtailed these limitations.

In 2021, the fiscal deficit increased to 4.0% of GDP, compared to 2.2% the previous year. This increase is largely attributable to higher health expenditures and spending on subsidies to mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, at the same time, public debt declined from 85% in 2020 to 82.9% in 2021.

Monetary stability



Fiscal stability



In the short term, the fiscal deficit is not expected to decrease until the end of 2023, according to the African Development Bank. This prediction is based on the assumption that planned spending reforms and tax collection improvements will occur. These forecasts also presume a resumption of the international tourism industry, which, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, accounted for around a quarter of foreign exchange revenue, GDP and formal employment opportunities.

There have been sporadic protests in The Gambia over the economic situation, mainly centering on the rise in the cost of living due to inflation. There are no indications that the Barrow administration is letting such developments affect budgetary policies in a way that runs counter to fiscal stability.

9 | Private Property

Property rights are generally protected in Gambian law. Private property rights are guaranteed by the Gambian constitution, and subsequent legislation has clarified and expanded property rights in areas such as intellectual property and copyright.

During the Jammeh era, there were repeated instances of property rights not being respected. Land and real estate were extra-legally appropriated and demolished. Though overt incidents of malpractice in terms of property rights are much less frequent under Barrow, land rights remain an ongoing concern, and one prominent civil society organization has described the country as a “tinderbox.” Indeed, conflicts over land are at the root of most intercommunal disputes in the country.

At issue is the complexity of the Gambian land rights framework, which consists of multiple forms of land tenure, some of which are rooted in colonial-period law. This complexity is further compounded by a lack of records, where those are applicable, and the absence of cadastral maps, particularly in rural areas where customary land tenure is in effect. According to one estimate, approximately 90% of customary land borders in these areas have not been surveyed.

There have also been reports of corruption and self-dealing in the allocation of land by government officials down to the level of village chief. These officials, known as *alkalos*, are technically appointed by the government. However, in practice, such appointments often merely ratify a traditional practice of inherited authority.

Private companies of all sizes are recognized as primary engines of economic growth and development in The Gambia. This is one of the eight strategic priorities of the concluding National Development Plan.

A strategy of privatizing poorly performing state-owned enterprises has been central to successive Gambian governments, but with few results. Under Jammeh, a Gambia Divestiture Agency was established to oversee structural reforms leading to privatization, but it was scrapped in 2009. Privatizing key state-owned enterprises, or

Property rights

6

'06 _____ '24 10

6



1

Private enterprise

7

'06 _____ '24 10

7



1

at least outsourcing some aspects of their work, such as The Gambia Port Authority, is part of the National Development Plan. However, to date, there have been no major privatizations. Likewise, the establishment of new private sector concessionaires in areas such as public transport has been slow to materialize.

Where key functions have been awarded to private actors, there is evidence suggesting that the process does not always follow proper procedures. For example, a report by the National Audit Office in early 2023 found irregularities in the government's awarding of a contract to Securiport, a U.S.-based company, to manage immigration services in the country's sole airport.

Other private companies are affected by a high degree of informality, as noted above. While this allows some private companies to skirt regulations or tax obligations, it also affects, among other things, access to credit and thus prevents the private sector from playing its planned role in national development.

10 | Welfare Regime

Through the Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation, the Gambian government maintains a pension, workers' compensation and disability scheme. It is primarily available to employees in formal employment situations, estimated at around 10% of the population by a UNDP-UNICEF study; its scope is considered inadequate.

Other social safety nets are primarily ad hoc and funded by donors in response to specific crises (such as food insecurity). Additionally, there are long-term initiatives that target specific populations, such as a school feeding program.

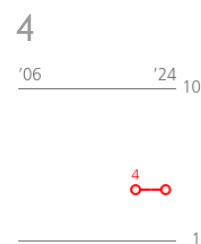
In 2021, the National Assembly adopted the National Health Insurance program, which aims to establish universal health care coverage through a public insurance scheme available to all Gambians who are not part of a private scheme. Private health insurance is largely nonexistent. However, Gambian media has criticized it for favoring government employees and for setting up a large, costly bureaucratic structure in a weak regulatory environment. Currently, The Gambia spends only about 1% of its GDP on public health care, according to World Bank data.

The same year, President Barrow also assented to the Persons with Disabilities Bill, which aims to provide health care, rehabilitation and social support to persons with disabilities.

In other areas, the social safety net is lacking or nonexistent. Mental health care, for example, is underfunded, governed by an outdated legal framework, and typically associated with social stigma. Hospice care, on the other hand, is largely the domain of individual families and extended kinship systems.

Life expectancy at birth in The Gambia is 62.4, which falls below the average for the continent. Most countries lower than The Gambia in life expectancy have faced recent conflicts or violent strife.

Social safety nets



The Gambian constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of “race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” It also separately provides for protection against discrimination for disabled Gambians. However, the non-discrimination clause does not extend to cases of marriage and divorce, burial, inheritance and adoption. Nor does it override discriminatory provisions in customary law. Both the Barrow and the Jammeh administrations have made concerted efforts to address certain disparities in opportunities. During Jammeh’s presidency, school fees for girls were eliminated, resulting in a nearly equal representation of genders in early childhood and primary education.

In practice, equality of opportunity is an ongoing concern in The Gambia. Across various indicators, women have limited access to education, employment and other opportunities. The literacy rate for men was 61.8%, compared to 41.6% for women in 2015. At the tertiary level, the ratio of female to male school enrollment is 0.7. As of 2021, female labor force participation constitutes approximately 43% of the total labor force. Additionally, women consistently earn less than men, particularly younger women.

According to the 2021 Demographic and Health Survey, which measures, among other things, women’s ability to participate in decisions concerning their own health care, visits to family and major purchases, only 27% of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported being able to participate in all three decisions. Less than half of all women reported being able to make decisions regarding their own health care, compared to almost 90% for men. Notably, more women than men report that it is acceptable for husbands to beat their wives for perceived failings, such as refusing to have sex or arguing with relatives.

Data on the differences in opportunity based on gender is the sole kind that is consistently collected in The Gambia; there is no comparable data available regarding ethnicity, religion or political preferences. Because homosexuality continues to be illegal in The Gambia, there is no relevant data regarding LGBTQ+ populations.

11 | Economic Performance

The Gambia weathered the COVID-19 pandemic better than initially feared, in no small part due to a dramatic increase in remittances from the Gambian diaspora. In 2020, remittances grew by almost 90% compared to the previous year, defying expectations. According to Bloomberg, remittances more than made up for the drastic shrinkage of the tourism industry due to the pandemic.

Coming out of the pandemic, The Gambia’s economic performance was relatively strong. In 2021, its economic growth was 5.5%, placing it among the top performers on the continent. However, inflation reached a comparatively high rate of 7.1% (although, in this regard, it also fared better than several other economies in the subregion).

Equal opportunity

5

'06 '24 10

5

1

Output strength

5

'06 '24 10

5

1

Foreign direct investment also dramatically increased to 12.4% of GDP in 2021 – the highest on record by a significant margin. This is arguably due to improved economic governance caused by the democratic transition. GDP per capita has also increased to \$772 (2021), though this is a relative decline from a peak in 2008 of \$857.9.

Public debt remains high, though it decreased somewhat from 85% in 2020 to 82.9% in 2021, and unemployment is 11.2% – almost twice the HIPC average. The vulnerability of The Gambia to external commodity price shocks, coupled with its traditional reliance on overseas tourism, makes its economy fragile despite improved governance under Barrow.

12 | Sustainability

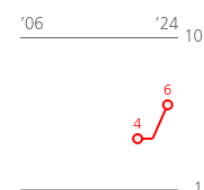
The Gambia is acutely sensitive to climate change and environmental risks, in a number of different ways. In 2021, some 17,000 individuals were affected by windstorms (10 Gambians died). In 2022, The Gambia experienced its heaviest rainfalls in 30 years, leading to two deaths and affecting 13,000 households. Drought remains a worry (in 2018, drought led to a food security emergency). Coastal erosion, deforestation, overfishing and air pollution are all ongoing concerns. There have been numerous protests about environmental concerns over the last several years. Some of these met significant police presence or were denied permits.

Environmental concerns are thus high on the public agenda, but ambitions are limited by resource constraints. The National Environment Agency conducts inspections, and new construction developments need to undergo environmental impact assessments, but enforcement is inconsistent. The National Environment Agency and other bodies have also adopted new regulations, such as banning certain pesticides on health and/or environmental grounds, but it is not clear if enforcement is consistent. Sometimes, environmental concerns appear to have been subordinated to other goals. For example, the sale of land near a nature preserve to the United States for the construction of a new embassy has been decried by local civil society members.

The Gambia has invested in green energy and climate change mitigation efforts, such as a large-scale wetland and forest restoration project, and a solar power project that is intended to provide energy for 1,100 schools and hospitals will, when complete, contribute to the goal of reaching 40% green energy by 2030. There are also various civil society initiatives to prevent or forestall environmental harm, such as an effort to replant palms along the coast to prevent erosion. The Gambia is currently on track to meet SDG 13 and is one of only a handful of countries on track to meet its Paris Agreement goals for carbon dioxide emissions.

Environmental
policy

6

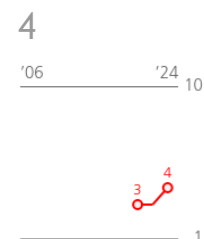


The Gambia is a winnow when it comes to education and R&D. On the U.N. Education Index, it has a score of 0.416 (which nonetheless is higher than several of its neighbors, including Senegal and Guinea-Bissau). It has only one public university, the University of The Gambia. It has been criticized for not offering courses and degrees aligned with its labor market needs. Efforts to turn The Gambia Technical Training Institute into a new university for science and technology have been implemented. There are also private institutions of higher education, mainly focusing on technical education. In 2015 (most recent availability of data), 8% of Gambian men and 5% of Gambian women were enrolled in tertiary education, with completion rates of 45% and 32%, respectively. Enrollment is highly dependent on family wealth, with 13% of the wealthiest quintile enrolling compared to 3% for the lowest.

Public expenditure on education is low, at 2.8% in 2020. In West Africa, only Liberia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau have lower proportionate expenditures. R&D expenditure is virtually nonexistent. About half of all Gambians are not literate. The country is in the bottom 20% on the U.N. Education Index, though it outscores several of its regional neighbors, including Senegal.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science & Technology shares responsibility for implementing the Education Sector Policy, adopted in 2016, with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. This policy calls for further development of research capacity, particularly in STEM fields. It also establishes an assessment unit within the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology.

Education policy /
R&D



Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The structural constraints facing the Gambian government remain very high. Despite emerging relatively unscathed from the COVID-19 pandemic, diversion of resources toward pandemic mitigation efforts has hindered progress in other development areas. Furthermore, the gains made in poverty eradication in previous years have been reversed, although the overall trend remains positive. As of 2021, approximately 11.1% of Gambians lived in extreme poverty. Additionally, the country has experienced significant natural disasters, such as strong winds and flooding, which have depleted public funds and resulted in losses of life.

The country's infrastructural weaknesses are significant. In 2018, it received a score of 1.82 on the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, which measures the quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure – the seventh lowest score, 0.01 ahead of Afghanistan and equal to Sierra Leone, and well below the average for low-income countries (2.09). Transport and infrastructure are also affected by the peculiar geography of the country, as it is almost completely surrounded by Senegal and bifurcated into two halves by The Gambia River. The Senegambia Bridge (also known as the Trans-Gambia Bridge) was opened in 2019 to promote quicker transportation between the two sides of The Gambia River and with Senegal. However, it has been criticized for undermining the local economy. Other than the bridge, the only other crossing is a ferry between Banjul and Barra, which is well-known for delays and breakdowns. The road network is poor outside of the Banjul area, though significant improvements are planned as part of the Trans-Gambia Corridor Project. The Gambia has one major port in Banjul, which is likewise a major port for the West African region. The port is considered a medium-sized port at which conventional bulk carriers and cargo ships can dock, but operations are limited by insufficient storage facilities. An expansion of the port is currently underway.

The Gambia's score on the World Bank's Human Capital Index, which measures a population's health, skills and resilience, is 0.4 (2020), average for the subregion – only Ghana scores higher. According to the 2018 Gambia Labor Force survey, unemployment varies significantly across education levels, with Gambians who have primary and secondary education experiencing lower labor force participation than those with no formal education, tertiary education or vocational education.

Structural
constraints

9



1

Civic and associational life has grown significantly in The Gambia since the transition, especially in terms of civic groups that directly engage with political systems, such as public interest watchdogs. A more accommodating than before de facto, if not de jure, legal framework is undoubtedly part of the explanation; civil society groups and their participants run less risk of harassment or worse by security forces, although such incidents do occur under the present administration. In addition to such groups, there are a range of professional and cultural associations, as well as groups dedicated to causes such as the environment.

The Gambia has a deep history of civic engagement. During the colonial period and under the first republic (1965 – 1994), there were a vast array of social clubs, political groups and professional associations, primarily in Banjul and its environs. The heavy-handed rule of Yahya Jammeh put a damper on such activities, forcing even relatively apolitical groups to keep a low profile.

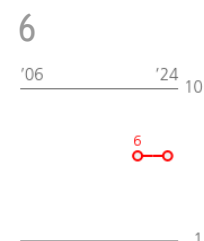
Beyond formal associations, the extended kinship system is an important form of social capital in The Gambia. It serves as a means to pool risk and provide in cases of misfortune, and offers avenues for resolving disputes and connections for employment. Likewise, traditional authorities and religious leaders can serve a mediating effect between state power and local communities. Strictly speaking, traditional authorities are appointed by the government so they are not part of civil society per se, but in practice such appointments often ratify traditional hierarchies, giving such authorities a measure of independence.

Although there has been somewhat of an increase in ethnic polarization in The Gambia over the past several years, such polarization remains low overall, and the propensity for and intensity of conflicts likewise remains low. Public exhortations to violence by political or religious leaders are very rare. When they do occur, they are swiftly rebuked and not acted upon on any meaningful scale.

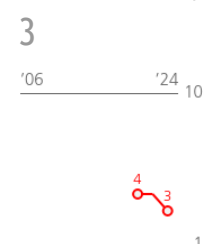
There have been instances when limited violence or threats of violence have occurred in conjunction with protests or in connection with intercommunal tension over land. For example, in early 2022, land-related tension between two villages in the Western Region of the country led to local village leaders threatening to attack the opposing village (as quoted in the Gambian press). The threat was not carried out.

One potential source of conflict in The Gambia, that in the neighboring Casamance Region of Senegal, receded in 2022 with a peace agreement between the Senegalese government and the rebels. Earlier that year, Senegalese soldiers in the ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) were reportedly captured by Senegalese rebels, raising fears that the conflict might spill over into The Gambia.

Civil society traditions



Conflict intensity



II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The Gambian government sets long-term priorities, most importantly through its National Development Plan. Sectoral-specific strategic plans are also developed, such as the National Social Protection Policy, covering the period from 2015 to 2025. The most recent plan covers the period from 2018 to 2021. A successor plan, the Green Recovery Development Plan (2023 – 2027) was validated by the government at the end of 2022 with a focus on reprioritizing development in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; the details are not available as of this writing. The National Development Plan (2015 – 2018) presented eight strategic areas, ranging from good governance to tourism. Within each area, core developments that would enable further growth are emphasized, such as developing electrical capacity or preventing communicable diseases.

Long-term plans are typically developed by the relevant ministries or agencies, with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs playing an exceptionally important role due to its work on the National Development Plan and its successor. International partners, most notably various U.N. agencies, typically collaborate on the development of long-term priorities. The Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery in the Office of the President serves a coordinating function, particularly for cross-sectoral planning.

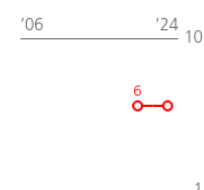
While domestic non-government actors are consulted in the formation of long-term plans and often specifically mentioned as key implementation partners, long-term planning in The Gambia is dominated by the executive in collaboration with international organizations. Civil society and the private sector have only limited opportunities to shape the agenda at the stage of conceptualization. It is also the case that the Gambian government's ability to carry out its long-term planning is hampered by the country's limited public finances and successive shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (and the attendant collapse of the tourism industry) and the knock-on effects of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The government's implementation of its policies is inconsistent due to a broad range of factors. Internal factors include a high turnover in the civil service due to low pay, despite repeated reform attempts (predating the transition to Barrow), resulting in a low capacity and perhaps unrealistic expectations in the plans themselves. Externally, the overall economic conditions of the country give the government little fiscal room to address unexpected challenges.

Question
Score

Prioritization

6



Implementation

5

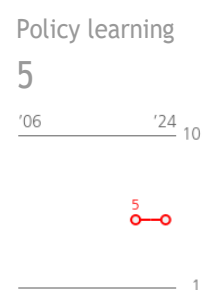


There are sector-specific factors that affect the implementation of different policies. For example, although the government adopted a National Security Policy as part of a sweeping reform plan for the security services, actual reforms have been more slowly implemented due to, among other factors, resistance from some security actors who feel sidelined by the continued presence of ECOMIG. Critics of the government have argued that there is a lack of political will in this regard (a charge not limited to this area).

In other areas, implementation is affected by deeply held social norms. In public health, for example, policy implementation has to contend with cultural attitudes about gender and age, as well as skepticism toward biomedical intervention among some Gambians.

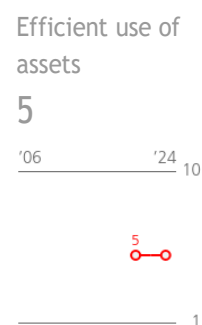
Policy learning is likewise affected by the above factors, most notably the government’s inability to retain high-quality civil service staff across different sectors, leading to a reinvention-of-the-wheel type of scenario. Frequent interactions with international organizations, in theory, contribute to innovations and policy learning. For instance, the European Union has supported Gambian government entities’ improving their policy monitoring and evaluation strategies. In practice, it is not clear how long-lasting and impactful such learning is. The reliance on international partners also means that the ability to act upon learned experience is contingent upon external funding mechanisms. Beyond interactions with international organizations, policy learning is not institutionalized. Professional associations and umbrella groups such as TANGO (The Association of NGOs) offer some opportunities for policy learning, but this is likewise typically contingent upon interactions with international partners.

The profound political change with the shift to Barrow from the autocratic Jammeh undoubtedly expanded opportunities for policy innovation, but the challenges are such that sustained learning is difficult.



15 | Resource Efficiency

The government’s resource efficiency has improved since the Jammeh period, but there is room for continued improvement. Under Jammeh, the effective use of resources was hampered by a bloated civil service with poor coordination, low pay and pensions for civil servants, and a politicized recruitment and dismissal process. Barrow’s administration adopted an Institutional Rationalization and Consolidation plan to address the resulting capacity gap, including a new Civil Society Reform program aimed at improving human capital, among other measures.



The Gambia has a very high level of public debt. Total government reserves have increased substantially to almost eight times what they were at the end of the Jammeh period. In the 2022 budget, the single largest item, at almost GMD 6 billion, was debt

servicing. There has been some criticism of the budget allocation to the Office of the President, which, at almost GMD 700 million, is larger than that to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Lands & Regional Government combined. Specific criticisms have been made of large retinues for travel and representation (a criticism that is also levied at other branches of the government, such as the National Assembly). The previously mentioned substantial increase in civil service salaries (by 30%) has also been criticized as wasteful, though proponents have argued that such a move is necessary to avoid excessive turnover.

Public budgeting lacks public participation and transparency, although there have been improvements in transparency. While the budget is presented to the National Assembly for approval and this process is closely covered by local media, Gambians and their civil society organizations have limited opportunities for genuine participation or input in the budget process. According to the 2021 Open Budget Survey, The Gambia scored a nine in public participation, an improvement compared to the 2019 survey. At the same time, it experienced a significant increase in transparency, with a score of 35 on a 100-point scale. Comprehensive budget documents are now generally accessible to the public, although auditing reports are inconsistently available. For instance, the latest publicly available audit report on the government budget is from 2019, and only about half of the most recent local government audit reports are accessible. Nevertheless, the National Audit Office has intensified its activities and received additional resources.

A significant event in the effort to ensure probity in public resource use was the 2021 Supreme Court decision to nullify a National Assembly appropriation aimed at establishing a self-loaning scheme, which critics vehemently denounced. This decision was made in response to a lawsuit filed by two Gambian civil society groups, namely Gambia Participates and the Center for Research and Policy Development.

Recruitment of public administration staff is overseen by the statutory Public Service Commission, unless otherwise provided for in the Gambian constitution. Village and district chiefs, for example, are appointed by the minister for local government and the president, respectively. There have been instances where local government officials are dismissed, but it is unclear if these dismissals are for cause or due to political reasons. For instance, in one controversial case, the alkalo (village head) of Kassa Kunda in the West Coast Region was dismissed by the regional government allegedly due to a visual impairment. This dismissal caused local protests and condemnation from The Gambia Federation of the Disabled.

Gambian policy since Barrow came to power has largely focused on salvaging the economic wreckage left by Jammeh's administration and has been generally coherent and trending in the right direction, even though long-term planning had to take a backseat to COVID-19 (a crisis that The Gambia weathered more successfully than many feared, in no small part due to remittances from the Gambian diaspora).

As a rule, different policy goals are not in conflict with each other, but there is a danger of duplication of effort due to the high reliance on project funds from external donors in different sectors (both the government and key partners, such as the United Nations, seek to coordinate their work to avoid such duplications, however). Likewise, funding shortfalls in some key sectors undermine coherence. While there are periodic allegations of clientelism and bias in public policy formulation and implementation, there is no evidence that this is systematic or widespread to the point that it poses a significant challenge to cohesion.

The Gambia has made significant improvements to its anti-corruption efforts on paper. The National Assembly is in the process of adopting a new Anti-Corruption Act (it has passed successive readings in the legislature, as required by Gambian law, but has not yet passed). This will establish a new Anti-Corruption Commission and allow for imprisonment or levying fines against public officials convicted of corruption. This is a much-delayed promise by the Barrow administration (and by his predecessor; an early anti-corruption act in 2012 is largely considered to have had minimal concrete impact). At this point, it is too early to tell whether this new commission, once in place, will have a significant impact. In 2021, Barrow assented to a new, also much-delayed, Freedom of Information Act which is likely to facilitate anti-corruption oversight by media and civil society.

There are other bodies that have an anti-corruption function, such as The Gambia Financial Intelligence Unit, which primarily deals with money laundering, and The Gambia Public Procurement Authority, parts of whose mandate is to prevent corruption in public procurement. The National Assembly can also serve an anti-corruption function. For example, in 2022, a parliamentary committee investigated the former minister of tourism.

Such institutions notwithstanding, the IMF's Governance Diagnostic for The Gambia concluded that there is a high degree of vulnerability to corruption in public processes, owing to a lack of administrative capacity and digitalization and to inconsistent enforcement of property rights, among other factors. Gambian media also frequently reports on government corruption, suggesting that such incidents are relatively common. Afrobarometer polling shows that 77% of Gambians believe corruption is on the rise.

Public officials are expected, according to Gambian law, to make asset declarations, but these are not always made public (those made by parliamentarians are kept by the National Assembly, for example). Political parties are not allowed to receive donations from non-Gambians or from corporate entities, but these restrictions are seldom enforced.

Policy
coordination

6

'06 _____ '24 10

6

_____ 1

Anti-corruption
policy

3

'06 _____ '24 10

4
2 3

_____ 1

16 | Consensus-Building

There is no fundamental disagreement about democracy among major actors in The Gambia. Though there was an alleged coup attempt in 2022, there is no evidence that the plotters had widespread (military or civilian) support. There is a self-professed socialist party, the People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism, but it is arguably one of the country's staunchest supporters of democratic norms.

There are occasions upon which political actors, both at the national and local levels, question norms associated with a democratic disposition, such as multiculturalism. Such incidents are rare, however, and tend not to have any major uptake. There are no significant counter-democratic forces in the country.

Likewise, a market economy is broadly accepted as a goal, though there are sometimes sharp disagreements about specific policies for specific industries. But there are no widespread calls for a planned economy, nor are there any significant voices calling for a complete liberalization of all sectors. The consensus is largely in favor of a market economy with aspirations for a more robust social welfare state.

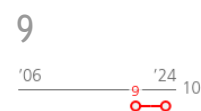
The impetus for continued reform in The Gambia is generally strong. All significant actors are in favor of democratization, although there are disagreements about the pace and specific policies. Even supporters of the previous president are generally in favor of democratization; they would arguably reject the premise that The Gambia under Jammeh was not a democracy. Their politics are generally not presented as anti-democratic. Nor do they voice disagreement with specific practices, such as democratic elections.

There are worries that the Gambian military may serve as an anti-democratic force, given the country's history and the regional upswing of military coups. The 2022 coup attempt is evidence in support of such claims, and the continued presence of ECOMIG is often presented as part of the answer to such worries. However, there are no indicators that the 2022 would-be putschists were even close to successful, and there is no evidence of large-scale anti-democratic sentiment in the security services.

The most significant cleavage in The Gambia today is arguably ethnoreligious, which intersects with other sensitive issues, such as tensions or party politics. As a rule, the political leadership does not deliberately exacerbate this cleavage. Exceptions include, for example, the proclamation that female civil servants were permitted to leave work early during Ramadan to prepare for iftar (the evening fast-breaking meal), which Christian groups argued was discriminatory.

There is, however, widespread discussion in The Gambia today about a worsening ethnoreligious polarization and that the government, if not actively contributing to it, does not do sufficient work to prevent or mitigate it. For example, a new land commission was formed in 2018 to address land disputes, but its work has not had much public impact.

Consensus on goals



1

Anti-democratic actors



1

Cleavage / conflict management



1

The Gambian political leadership routinely consults with Gambian civil society in an essentially corporatist way, with designated groups serving as spokespeople for larger demographic or professional groups (e.g., women or traditional authorities). Key professional associations (e.g., the Gambian Press Union) are regularly consulted by the political leadership as well. It is, however, not always the case that such consultations have a meaningful impact on implementation. Youth groups, in particular, have frequently decried what they see as a lack of participation in important decisions and policy implementation. There is, further, a high degree of variability in this regard depending on the sector. Civil society consultations are generally more robust in matters pertaining to social welfare, health and education compared to, for example, national defense.

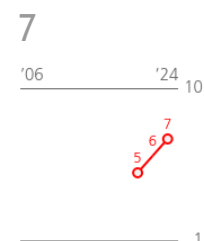
The reconciliation process in The Gambia is currently underway. As noted, the Barrow administration has accepted all but two of the recommendations issued by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, including the prosecution of President Jammeh and his vice president, Isatou Njie Saïdy. The two recommendations rejected were a ban on foreign judges – so-called mercenary judges – and amnesty for the former vice chairman of the Jammeh-led military junta in 1994, Sana Sabally. As of this writing, it does remain to be seen whether all the recommendations will be implemented; a project to address implementation is currently underway with the support of the United Nations Development Program (it is scheduled to end in December 2024).

The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission process has been criticized domestically for not addressing issues that contributed to fault lines exploited or exacerbated by Jammeh. Land ownership and land rights, for example, remain contentious issues in The Gambia and the commission is virtually silent on these.

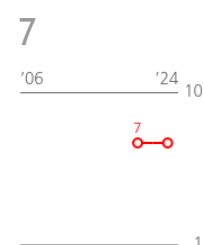
Aside from the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, other elements of The Gambia's democratization process make for a mixed record. The bid to create a new constitution, free of Jammeh's thumbprint, stalled in 2020 after pro-Barrow parliamentarians voted against a second read. When Barrow won re-election, he pledged a new constitution, but it is unclear how the process will move forward. Likewise, the security sector reform program, deemed important to shore up Gambians' faith in the security services, has mostly stalled. On the plus side, the establishment of a robust National Human Rights Commission should be considered a success as it has launched high-profile investigations into prison conditions and caste discrimination, among others.

Barrow has not remained a unifying figure in the country. In fact, though he was re-elected in 2021, the opposition parties made gains. Gambian observers have also decried his administration for following in the footsteps of Jammeh with allegations of nepotism, corruption and fanning the flames of ethnic polarization. Particularly upsetting was the decision to contest the 2021 election in an alliance with a faction of Jammeh's former ruling party, the AFPRC. There is thus something of a mismatch

Public consultation



Reconciliation



between institutional improvements and “big picture” developments, on the one hand, and public discourse around Barrow, on the other, which suggests that Barrow’s ability to promote reconciliation is limited.

17 | International Cooperation

International assistance is a major factor in the Gambian government’s development agenda, in both the conceptualization and implementation stages. In the National Development Plan (2018 – 2021), 62% of expenses are planned to be covered by Official Development Assistance (ODA) and a separate financing strategy has been developed to achieve this goal.

ODA arguably plays a larger role today than it did under the previous government. After 2017, major partners, such as the European Union, released aid previously frozen due to the Jammeh administration’s human rights record. Today, international assistance is key to ongoing democratization and the improvement of the fiscal environment. Since the transition, the European Union alone has invested about €350 million in The Gambia, targeting areas such as job creation and green energy that the government has identified as priorities.

The long-term agenda for the effective use of foreign assistance to implement government goals reveals inconsistencies across sectors and industries. These do not always line up chronologically, potentially making it difficult to coordinate across agencies and sectors.

The Gambian government has become a more reliable international partner under President Barrow compared to its reliability under his predecessor. Under Barrow, The Gambia has acceded to several key treaties, including the Convention Against Torture and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons Against Enforced Disappearances. The Gambia has also worked to increase compliance with state reporting requirements under different treaties. It has made significant progress to meet its commitments to the Paris Agreement, at one point being the only African country on track to do so. The Gambia was one of approximately half of African countries that voted to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine at the General Assembly. At the regional level, the Barrow government has sought to ensure compliance with ECOWAS requirements. In 2019, it adhered to 44 of the 53 protocols on treaties, and work was underway to ensure compliance with the remaining ones.

The Gambia has not lodged, nor been the recipient of, any complaints under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

Effective use of support

7

'06 _____ '24 10

7

1

Credibility

8

'06 _____ '24 10

7 8

1

In some regards, the country has sought to punch above its weight class and played a significant role in international organizations, arguably a return to The Gambia under President Jawara, when the government actively sought a leadership role in several international organizations. The most high-profile indicator of this is The Gambia's case against Myanmar in the International Criminal Court, where The Gambia alleges that the latter government is engaging in genocide against its Rohingya population. While the case has not yet been decided, it has received widespread international attention.

The Gambia generally enjoys good relationships with its neighbors and is an active participant in the subregional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and in the African Union. The Barrow administration has agreed to abide by multiple adverse decisions made by the ECOWAS Court of Justice that stem from actions taken by his predecessor. The most recent, in 2022, concerns a case ending impunity for actions by security services. The government is also taking steps to implement the remaining ECOWAS agreements.

Given its geography, its most important bilateral relationship is with Senegal. Here, there has been a marked improvement since the Jammeh era, when the relationship would intermittently turn frosty. Under Barrow, relations with Senegal are generally warm. Some Gambian observers allege that Barrow's relationship with Senegal is too close and that he is beholden to Senegalese interests; the continued presence of the Senegal-dominated ECOMIG force is cited as evidence for this. The relationship has been complicated by the ongoing fighting in Senegal's Casamance Region and there have been worries that The Gambia might get dragged into the conflict. Senegal is also the largest export market for Gambian goods, accounting for approximately half of all Gambian exports. The other important markets in the region are Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

Nigeria is also a major partner of The Gambia. Nigeria has a long history of technical cooperation with The Gambia, primarily in the areas of law, medicine and the military. In 2021, The Gambia and Nigeria signed a defense agreement.

In general terms, the Barrow administration represents a return to The Gambia being a good-faith actor in bilateral and regional relations compared to its prior government.

Regional
cooperation

9



1

Strategic Outlook

The Gambia's challenges for the future are several and largely revolve around the ongoing democratization program and the government's ability to navigate an economic recovery from the dual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ripple effects of the war in Ukraine.

The democratization process rests on several key pillars. The government has committed to implementing nearly all of the recommendations proposed by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. Failing to do so would undermine the government's credibility. Another crucial aspect is revitalizing the Security Sector Reform program, which has encountered obstacles. Following his re-election, Barrow promised to adopt a new constitution, though the realization of this remains uncertain. Since a prior attempt was thwarted by parliamentarians loyal to Barrow, successfully adopting a new constitution would send a clear message to Gambians and the international community that the period of Jammeh is definitively over. It is equally essential for the government and other significant political figures to maintain a measured tone in political discourse, so as to prevent further division along ethnoreligious lines.

The Gambia's economic revival largely hinges on factors beyond its direct control. The country's influence over global commodity prices, for instance, is limited. Besides continuing to bolster economic oversight and governance, significant focus should be placed on reinvigorating the international tourism sector. This might involve diversifying the tourism industry and extending the tourism season.

In recent years, the nation has witnessed crucial legal developments, such as the enactment of an Access to Information Act. How these measures are implemented and used, particularly by civil society groups, remains to be seen. A prudent approach would involve full implementation, with the necessary funding allocated.

Casting a shadow over the country's political trajectory is the matter of ECOMIG and the fate of former president Yahya Jammeh. It is evident that ECOMIG's presence is increasingly unpopular among many Gambians. The manner and timing of ECOMIG's reduction in its force are therefore of paramount importance. Maintaining its presence risks alienating both civilians and members of the armed forces.

It is worth noting that Yahya Jammeh maintains a level of popularity among a notable minority of Gambians, and the Gambian media often speculates about his potential return to the country. The Barrow administration has signaled its intent to prosecute Jammeh, but the specific form this prosecution will take remains unclear. Currently, the possibility of a hybrid court involving ECOWAS or AU participation seems likely. The composition and location of this court will be instrumental in establishing its legitimacy, particularly for those Gambians who still have positive feelings about Jammeh.

In summary, there are considerable uncertainties surrounding both the political landscape and the economic trajectory of The Gambia moving forward. Balancing the pursuit of accountability for Jammeh-period abuses with the goal of maintaining stability will necessitate tactful maneuvering and consensus-building among key sectors and societal groups. The economic challenges, despite an overall positive trajectory, will undoubtedly add complexity to these tasks and challenges.