

Working Paper

Titre Français : La Gambie décidera... de rester une démocratie ou pas ! une démocratie encore fragile à l'assaut des urnes

Titre Anglais : The Gambia will decide... whether to remain a democracy or not! A still fragile democracy to the ballot box

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Introduction

The challenging west African "turmoil" is yet a bitter and an unarguable part of its present. In addition to the democratic demands of its peoples, there are cyclical political crises: electoral tensions, military coups, etc. These crises can only be understood by relating them to the contradictions of the current systems, the nature of political regimes and the political history of the region. Three political cycles can be identified in West Africa since 1960: the era of multiparty democracy immediately after independence, the era of one-party rule and military dictatorships from 1966 to the 1970s, and the period of democratization that began in the late 1980s and 1990s (Adejumobi 2007).

The democratic process, which began in the last period, shows "striking contrasts", building on unresolved conflicts, on the one hand, and the hold of a disguised autocracy, on the other. As a result, most of them are still fragile states, such as The Gambia.

Located on a 'stretch of West African coastline opening onto the Atlantic Ocean', and sharing 'two borders with Senegal', The Gambia is 'one of the smallest countries in West Africa' (Dougan-Beaca, Suma 2011: 2). Since its independence in 1965, its political development has been tumultuous. It has been marked by internal and external upheavals, to the extent that intervention by the international and African community has been necessary to bring about peace and democracy. Under the presidency of Dawda Kaibara Jawara, from 1970 to 1994, the country experienced an attempted coup d'état in 1981, followed by the establishment of the Senegambia confederation in 1982, which broke up in 1989. As a substitute, a treaty of friendship was signed in 1991.

The overthrow of President Jawara in 1994 by a group of young officers brought Yahya Jammeh to power who ruled the country with an iron hand until 2016. His dictatorship was by no means restful for him and his opponents. He faced youth protests in the 2000s and 2010s, demanding more democracy and attention to their social concerns and yearnings. In his desire to preserve his interests, he exercised unprecedented violence on opponents and trampled down human rights. It is in this context that Adama Barrow came to power in 2016, after ECOWAS and the international community exerted pressure on Jammeh, who refused to step down.

The arrival of Barrow had raised hopes among Gambians, especially political actors, of a new united Gambia where the Head of State would respect the will of the people and his promise to serve a three-year term. This has not been the case, raising concerns that the country may fall into electoral tensions in the aftermath of the December 4, 2021 presidential poll. 5 years after

being elected, Adama Barrow is in the process of organizing his first election where he is a candidate competing against 5 other candidates.

The objective of this study is to analyze the political situation in The Gambia following the departure of Jammeh and the accession to power of Barrow. It seeks to address the following questions: What is the political evolution of post-Jammeh Gambia? How has President Barrow regime managed the transition? What reconciliation and stabilization initiatives have been taken? What are the current threats and risks in the country?

For the reader's guidance, an analysis is proposed along three main lines. Firstly, after presenting some historical landmarks, the background of the forthcoming polls of December 04 2021 is set in relation to previous elections held in The Gambia.

In this first point, we revisit the political trails and assessment of the stabilization initiatives. Secondly, we propose a geopolitical analysis of current political tensions. The issue of political risks and tensions has not only arisen in The Gambia but also in the sub-region. In doing so, we better understand the geopolitical and geostrategic stakes of political interplay between neighboring countries and the smiling coast of West Africa.

Third, we offer a quick analysis of the potential risks and opportunities related to the 2021 presidential elections. We focus, among other things, on the effects of the implementation of the electoral process, alliances and the consequences for social cohesion. This section attempts to highlight the fundamental place of the 2021 presidential elections, as well as the immediate or long-term effects that can be expected. One last clarification: this is not a prospective study and our analyses are in no way predictions. We are working on strong hypotheses, drawn from interviews and analysis of the literary review among other methods.

Background

At its 58th Ordinary Summit held on 23 January, the African Union expressed its concern about the situation in Banjul, a few months before two major elections. To this end, "the Assembly notes the strong political differences in the country over the revision of the Constitution, as the country prepares for presidential and legislative elections at the end of 2021," according to the final statement of the session¹.

¹ https://www.seneweb.com/news/Politique/gambie-les-tensions-politiques-inquieten_n_339025.html

This is a strong warning in view of the signals that are not green at the moment with a relatively uncertain social and economic situation. In fact, following the departure into exile of former President Yaya Jammeh on 21 January 2021 and the accession to power of President Adama Barrow, there was hope for a renewal in The Gambia. The demonstrations of the Gambian people and especially the youth with citizen movements such as **#Gambia has Decided**, the position of ECOWAS materialized by joint intervention of armed forces led by Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria had finished installing a climate of confidence in the future of the homeland of Jawara. All observers hoped that the Gambia would move towards a good handling of the democratic issue thanks to the consensus of the former opposition political parties around President Barrow.

Unfortunately, before long, the group was crumbling and the political parties around President Adama Barrow began to leave the coalition. At the same time, President Barrow decided not to keep his promise of only three- year terms and to call early elections. On the contrary, not only did he feel that he had to go beyond his five-year term, but he also left the United Democratic Party (UDP) and launched his own formation, the People's National Party (NPP), and seemed likely to run for a second term on 4 December 2021 in the presidential election. This creates a wind of protest and the slogan chanted becomes "Three years, Jotna" ("Three years, enough") to remind the president of his promise. All this foretells future protests and an uncertain democracy. This raises the question of whether the forthcoming elections will not be a life-size test of the solidity of the electoral system and the maturity of democracy in The Gambia.

Research Interest

The Gambia has long been a country considered to be under dictatorship and has been run with an iron fist by President Yaya Jammeh. The former President had managed to put in place a lockdown mechanism to win all elections. He was also able to muzzle his political opposition and did not seem to have a strong opponent until December 06, 2016 polls with the unexpected arrival Adama Barrow. Since then, freedom of expression has been boosted and citizens have regained the right to say what they want, to whom they want. As a result, many of the atrocities committed under Jammeh's regime have been brought to light through the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). In addition, ethnic tensions in the country have been exacerbated and rivalries between ethnic and linguistic groups have increased. At the time of Yaya Jammeh's departure, conflicts had already broken out between Diolas and Mandingos. After the collapse of Yaya Jammeh, there were also incidents between these two communities in separate locations.

These same tensions could be rekindled in the upcoming election. This is why a study is needed to assess the weight that ethnicity may have on the upcoming elections, the stability of the country and the future of democracy.

Methodology

This study is essentially qualitative. Due to many constraints related to the health context and also to the availability of major political actors, the analysis was mainly focused on and supported by a review of the scientific literature and a constant monitoring of the press, which is the barometer of the political situation. Social networks, especially Facebook groups, were used to collect interesting information and to get in touch with key informants to feed the research. Additional interviews were conducted with resource persons (political actors, civil society actors, members of youth movements, parliamentarians, academics, leaders of student and women's movements, etc.). The data is collected, verified, triangulated and discussed before being analyzed and presented. The analysis unfortunately suffered from time constraints, and has limitations that hinder any holistic approach. The analyzed items are contextual and evolve according to events. Keeping track of these evolutions was a major challenge for the authors, as very often analyses were repeated according to trends, alliance dynamics and important events that occurred during the period. However, this does not detract, at least for the time being, the validity and reliability of the analyses.

Policy Trails and Assessment of Stabilization Initiatives

The political evolution of The Gambia since independence has been marked by unrest and chronic instability. The 1981 military coup against Dawda Kaibara Jawara by the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and its leader, Kukole Samba Sanyang, was the starting point of this instability, the consequences of which were felt in the political, economic and social spheres. The intervention of the Senegalese army to restore President Jawara's rights resulted in a huge loss of life: more than 500 people died (Dougan-Beaca, Suma 2011: 2), but also in the establishment of a Senegambian confederation in 1982, which was intended to strengthen the Dakar-Banjul diplomatic axis and defend their common interests. Jawara was in power until 1994 and laid the foundations for cohesion and peace, declaring a general amnesty for most MOJA members.

Jawara's stabilization drive was halted by a coup that overthrew him and propelled Lieutenant². Yahya Jammeh to power. The coup engendered a new era in the political trajectory of The Gambia, marked by repression, violation of fundamental freedoms and of the constitution. Indeed, one of Jammeh's first acts was to suspend the constitution and all existing political parties. His thirst for power and his desire to ensure the destiny of the Gambia as long as possible forced him to engage in a fury of elimination: imprisonment, execution of opponents, etc. There is no shortage of examples to support this:

- 'Two of the five members of the military council who opposed President Jammeh's political agenda were accused of fomenting a coup against the council and sentenced to nine years imprisonment' (Sanyang and Camara 2017: 7).

- "In May 1995, Finance Minister Ousman Koro Ceesay was found dead in the burnt-out carcass of his official car. Just before this event, he made his last trip to accompany the President to the airport. No culprit was ever identified" (Ibidem).

In order to give political legitimacy to his power, he abandoned his military hat to take that of a civilian. This resulted in the creation of the 'Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction' (APRC). Challenged by his comrades-in-arms for having reneged on his promises, and having come close to a coup d'état, he embarked on a serious purge by having most of those who tried to overthrow him assassinated and then buried in anonymous graves near the country's barracks.

From then on, he presented himself as the strongman of the Gambia, governing in defiance of democratic norms and international conventions, while ignoring, however, the evolution of mindsets and the impact of social networks in the political game. Indeed, the 2000s witnessed the aspiration to real democracy in African countries. Young people's awareness of their power brought down several regimes deemed undemocratic in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The shock wave of what is described as the "Arab Spring" did not leave the West African political sphere without interest. In such a context, Jammeh is increasingly challenged by an evolved youth, especially after the assassination of 14 students in April 2000, who demanded justice for the murdered and raped students. Thus, the youth later found in Barrow's candidacy a hope to get the country out of the clutches of a dictator who only rules for his clan, who serves himself instead of serving. International denunciations of Jammeh's abuses, the support of the Gambian diaspora and the commitment of young people were to sweep away the Banjul dictator in 2016,

² <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/342596/politique/jour-22-juillet-1994-yahya-jammeh-sempare-pouvoir-gambie/>

who refused to recognize the victory of his rival. It took the military intervention of ECOWAS for Jammeh to leave power and for Barrow to be installed.

In power, Barrow made a commitment to reconcile Gambians through several initiatives and acts to stabilize the country. On 13 December 2017, a law instituted the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). "Chaired by a former diplomat to the United Nations, Lamin Sise, the Commission is composed of four women, including the Vice-Chairperson, Adelaide Sosseh, and represents all ethnic and religious communities in the country³. It has the power to investigate and hear all persons involved or suspected of involvement in political abuses under the Jammeh regime. This is an ad hoc mechanism by which the state has delegated to 'persons from civil society a mandate to seek and establish the truth about the past and to develop a policy of reparation, symbolic or material, to the victims⁴. After hearing more than 370 witnesses (ministers, police and intelligence chiefs, and many victims) over two years, the TRRC highlighted the need for a criminal investigation into the actions of Jammeh, who is accused of murder, torture, rape and other terrible crimes by the "Junglers", a death squad under his command. The major question is how the government will respond to the recommendations of the commission, in a context where for political calculations, the National People's Party (NPP) of President Adama Barrow, and the Patriotic Alliance for Reorientation and Construction (APRC) of the former dictator Yahya Jammeh have come together for the election of December 4, 2021. This is upsetting Gambian opinion and crystallizing potential political tensions, undermining the TRRC's efforts for justice and peace.

Geopolitical Analysis of the Electoral Context

The context of the December 2021 presidential elections in the Gambia cannot be analyzed in terms of a political homogeneity free of any conflict. Beyond the historical causality and

³ <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/700222/politique/gambie-premier-auditions-de-la-commission-verite-et-reconciliation-deux-ans-apres-jammeh/>. Consulté le 22 novembre 2021.

⁴ <https://www.aixhumanitaire.org/single-post/les-commissions-v%C3%A9rit%C3%A9-et-r%C3%A9conciliation-un-droit-%C3%A0-la-v%C3%A9rit%C3%A9-politis%C3%A9>. Consulté le 22 novembre 2021.

Among the acts commissioned by Jammeh, carried out by the 'Junglers' and acknowledged by them, are

- The murder in 2004 of an editor, Deyda Hydara;
- The 2005 killings of about 59 West African migrants, including about 44 Ghanaians;
- The 2013 murders of Alhajie Ceesay and Ebou Jobe

democratic aspirations which are strongly determinant, it is necessary to consider the heterogeneity of facts that reflect a diversity of actors whose expectations and demands are opposed and confronted, with consequences for the stability of the country. A geopolitical approach is therefore necessary in the analysis of the election context in The Gambia. Geopolitics is understood in this reflection as the analysis of geographical determinants that come into play in the definition of state policies, both internally and externally. Another related understanding of the term, as a grid for this study, is that which we borrow from the French geographer Yves Lacoste, who refers to the study of power rivalries and representations present in a territory as the object of geopolitics⁵. This leads to the complex task of examining the pre-electoral environment, which this modest analysis does not pretend to scrutinize thoroughly here but proposes to address on a national, international and transnational perspective, to offer a reading grid for the December 04, 2021 and its aftermath.

Cross-border Governance and Cooperation with Senegal:

In terms of inter-state relations between the two neighboring countries and the relations between the cross-border communities, it is worth noting that the Gambian presidential elections are of paramount interest to the country and to the West African region, which is gradually becoming the scene of state crises, Islamist terrorism, radicalization and criminality. This unenviable notoriety has unfortunately found fertile ground in poverty, poor governance and the skewed exploitation of natural resources, disrupting social harmony and overshadowing the tolerance and historical societal demands of the community understood here in the functionality of solidarities⁶.

A threatened Senegambia

Between Senegal and The Gambia, excellent historical relations have cemented the neighborhood and embellished the political landscape with the smiling coastline of the region. The common belonging to this geographical area, which stretched from southern Mauritania to

⁵ Lat Soucabé Mbow, *La géopolitique : Une Grammaire pour Comprendre les Crises et Conflits*, Presses Universitaires de Dakar, 2017. p.18.

⁶ Marie Alain, « 2. Du sujet communautaire au sujet individuel. Une lecture anthropologique de la réalité africaine contemporaine », dans : Alain Marie éd., *L'Afrique des individus. Itinéraires citoyens dans l'Afrique contemporaine (Abidjan, Bamako, Dakar, Niamey)*. Paris, Karthala, « Hommes et sociétés », 2008, p. 53-110. DOI : 10.3917/kart.marie.2008.01.0053. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/---page-53.htm>.

the two Guineas⁷, played a major role in the good interplay of peoples and in State cooperation. The failure to establish a Senegambian State due to a conflict of interests between political leaders did not mean a break in the socio-cultural and historical foundation that unites almost all the ethnic groups on either side of the border.

However, if it is possible to note an ethno-linguistic kinship on which cultural diplomacy between is based, it is appropriate to note some discordance in this concert of two intertwined nations. The consequences of the dictatorial regime of ex-President Jammeh have negatively impacted on this neighborhood through the use of the border as a military gateway and a geostrategic weapon for access to the southern part of Senegal.

In 2016, following the post-electoral crisis, an occurrence scarcely grasped by the general public shook the roots of this cultural bridge of the two states' diplomacy. As Abdou Sané, (2019) argues, it is surprising and bitter to note that despite the achievements of Senegambia in terms of dialogue and integration, the intervention strategy of ECOWAS first consisted in positioning Nigeria in the conduct of the negotiation mission for peace, while in fact of the political stalemate, Senegal will be enrolled largely due to the geostrategic and tactical advantages of the conduct of the military operation⁸. And yet, in the peaceful beginnings of the transition following Barrow's victory, the conduct of the ECOWAS mission in April 2017 faced negligible but still real resistance from a faction of the Gambian military in Kanilai. An exchange of fire was reportedly recorded in the context of the search for a cache of weapons⁹. It is thus difficult to ignore the dangers that such acts can represent in the current climate in a Gambia where the ex-President is still supported by some. Looking from this angle, hasn't the peacemaking voice of Senegal's neighbor registered a discordance in the Senegalese-Gambian diplomatic tradition?

On the night of 14 to 15 March 2021, an unfortunate event darkened the Senegambian sky, following a robbery by a Senegalese migrant fisherman: the results were one death, ransacked businesses, dugout canoes with a police station set on fire, and dozens of Senegalese families sheltered in a school in the neighboring town of Batokunku, under the protection of the

⁷ Jean Marc FLEURY, Senegambia, building on the Past, The confederation of Senegal and Gambia: a first step to abolishing the boundaries to development in West Africa?, <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/24163/110492.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, consulté le 23/11/2021.

⁸ Abdou Sané, « Evaluation de la politique diplomatique de bon voisinage du Sénégal dans le contexte de la crise postélectorale gambienne », Le Quotidien, <https://lequotidien.sn/evaluation-de-la-politique-diplomatique-de-bon-voisinage-du-senegal-dans-le-contexte-de-la-crise-postelectorale-gambienne/>, consulté le 23/11/2021.

⁹ BBC News, « Gambie, échange de Coups de feu » <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-39663515>, consulté le 22/11/2021.

Gambian police. These events reportedly led to the displacement of 250 Senegalese from the Gambian village of Sanyang¹⁰. While analyzed in a socio-political trajectory, these isolated elements in their appearance heighten a known stereotype of the invader and deserve the attention of leaders. Despite the root-causes the legality of the military operation (MICEGA) on the basis of resolution 2337 of the United Nations Security Council mandating the ECOWAS¹¹, President Barrow is allegedly building nexus with the political party of former President Jammeh. Considering these contradictions, what credibility can be given to "armed" negotiators in the event of a crisis, when the political figure of President Barrow is equated with treason and calls for a radical change on the part of a large portion of the Gambian population, particularly the victims of the former regime who are still calling for justice?

In January 2020, demonstrations by these victims were noted in The Gambia with slogans such as "justice must prevail" and photos of alleged victims claiming justice against the former President. But alongside these, there are other demonstrations in the streets of Banjul by thousands of his supporters who requested his return to address the chaotic situation the country is allegedly going through. The desired precedence of the handling of these issues in relation to the holding of elections poses a problem that goes beyond the results of the December 4 elections. Therefore, what might be the future of the rule of law, human rights protection, democracy and security for the smiling coast of West Africa? There is no doubt that The Gambia needs the support of the international community in the limit of the principle of sovereignty to give efficient answers to this series of questions.

The Cross-border Context in the Timber and Transport Sectors

The porous nature of borders resulting from balkanization in West Africa favors a breakdown of the social fabric in the context of economic rivalries, migration and the exploitation of cross-border natural resources. Regulatory mechanisms and legal regulations are expected on both sides to eradicate cross-border tensions and consolidate peace. However, the challenges are sometimes disproportionate to the solutions of the national development plan initiated by

¹⁰ Charlotte Idrac, « Une accalmie espérée après les heurts entre Gambiens et Sénégalais à Sanyang »,RFI, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210324-gambie-une-accalmie-esp%C3%A9r%C3%A9e-apr%C3%A8s-les-heurts-entre-gambiens-et-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9galais-%C3%A0-sanyang>, Consulté le 23/11/2021.

¹¹ Djiby SOW, “ Crise Gambienne: rétrospective juridique sur l’intervention militaire de la CEDEAO », Tribune, janvier 2017, <https://www.wathi.org/laboratoire/tribune/crise-gambienne-retrospective-juridique-lintervention-militaire-de-cedeao/>, consulté le 22/11/2021.

Adama Barrow with its pillars established as follows: restoring the rule of law, deepening democracy, advancing transitional justice, transforming the security sector according to information from the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies¹².

Cross-border transport is still a matter of frustration and tension that contribute in plaguing the economies of both countries. With regards to the context of cross-border crime and taking into account the residues of the Casamance conflict¹³, and internal tensions between Pro-Jammeh groups and supporters of the victims, it would be appropriate for political leaders to address the issue with consensual solutions so as not to leave citizens with a feeling of abandonment conducive to the emergence of self-defense groups.

In view of the movements on the left bank of the Senegalese-Gambian border, reflected in the large flows of people, vehicles and goods that cross the border every day, the security of populations should be at the heart of any political agenda. Significant illegal flows such as timber trafficking, cattle rustling and smuggling¹⁴ are part of the crucial issues to be tackled. These security problems are added to the complexity of the political landscape where the specter of Jammeh' still haunts the country and does not favor political stability.

In terms of education in line with Sustainable Development Goal 04, (UN, 2015), on the northern Senegalese-Gambian border, schools in the Senegalese villages of Médina Sabakh, Passy Ngayène, Keur Ayib, Keur Moussa, receive pupils from The Gambia. In Farafenni, 27.3% of those interviewed said that they had children studying in Médina Sabakh. The reverse journey is made daily by Senegalese children who have been excluded from the school system and/or whose parents have a preference for English education¹⁵. This reality should lead citizens, political and all stakeholders to make the free movement of goods and people a priority in favor of vulnerable and marginalized groups, in the electoral process, through a good understanding of post-electoral stakes.

¹² Centre d'études stratégiques de l'Afrique, « L'itinéraire de réformes démocratiques emprunté par la Gambie », mai 2018, <https://africacenter.org/fr/spotlight/litineraire-de-reformes-democratiques-emprunte-par-la-gambie/>, consulté le 23/11/2021.

¹³ Abdourahmane Mbade Sène, « La frontière Sénégal-Gambie dans le contexte du conflit en Casamance : mobilités, flux transfrontaliers et géopolitique », <https://www.population-et-avenir.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/frontiere-senegal-gambie-casamance-analyses-population-et-avenir-sene-lap.pdf>, consulté le 22/11/2021.

¹⁴ Facteurs commerciaux et socio-économiques des mobilités transfrontalières sénégal-gambiennes, Revue des études multidisciplinaires en sciences économiques et sociales, <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/13512-48017-1-PB.pdf>, consulté le 23/11/2021.

¹⁵ <https://journals.openedition.org/echogeo/14411?lang=en>

However, the context is full of contradictions mixed with the imbrication of non-state actors and a certain number of frustrations witnessed by governments and political leaders who are supposed to provide specific measures. Let us recall the issue of "rosewood, protected but cut in Casamance, in the south of Senegal, then transported to Gambia from where it is illegally exported to China. According to the Institute for Security Studies in Dakar, about one million trees have been illegally cut down in Casamance, a third of the region's forest¹⁶.

It seems difficult to find the appropriate leadership to deal with this set of facts, particularly since, despite the good relations between political leaders, the lack of popularity, and disillusionment of citizens are gradually taking hold. The restoration of democracy and the rule of law is demanded by the masses who no longer trust the state machinery and whose determination is often confronted with the exploitation of certain regal forces that guarantee and guarantee the security of citizens.

The Gambia and the Obsession with Power, an Echo of a Senegalese "Y'en a marre"

The political arena in both The Gambia and Senegal is no exception in the fatal protests against the regimes in place. The values of democracy based on Abraham Lincoln's definition of the term as government of the people by the people and for the people have become very fragile. While it is true that in a democratic system power comes from the people or the majority, one has to wonder about the gap between the rulers and the crowds of citizens in the streets for reasons of governance and social justice, but above all for the voters' feeling of betrayal towards their elected representatives.

As a candidate for his own succession, President Adama Barrow is under political pressure from his former allies who led him to the head of the country before withdrawing because of conflicting interests of the coalition parties, but especially because of doubts about his willingness to step down and organize new elections after three years (Jeune Afrique, 2018) in accordance with his electoral promise in 2016. The impact of this on the Gambian electorate is not minor. On 26 January 2020, following a stated desire by the incumbent President to complete his five-year term on a constitutional basis, the *Three Years Jotna* Movement

¹⁶ Charlotte Idrac, « Le trafic de bois de rose au menu d'une réunion diplomatique entre la Gambie et le Sénégal » <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210116-le-traffic-de-bois-de-rose-au-menu-d-une-r%C3%A9union-diplomatique-entre-la-gambie-et-le-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9gal>, consulté le 26/11/2021.

organized a demonstration that resulted in violent repression, the closure of radio stations, arrests and censorship of the movement deemed subversive by the regime¹⁷.

In reviewing these facts under sections 207 and 208 of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, which provide for and guarantee the full and complete participation of independent and responsible media operating in full autonomy and freedom, in upholding...the provisions and objectives of the Constitution and the obligation of the Government to be responsible and accountable to the people of The Gambia¹⁸, it becomes easy to note discrepancies that hardly consolidate the state of Gambian democracy. The fact that the demonstration in question is not isolated leads to a reading of a certain revolutionary scope of the activity. It is part of a series that includes the demonstration for the reparation of the rights of victims of the former regime and the protest against the censorship of Jammeh's APRC.

But against all odds, on January 16, 2020, thousands of pro-Jammeh activists took to the streets of Sakuta to request the former President's right to return to Gambian soil (Article 19, 2020). Considering the numerous abuses perpetrated during the 22-year reign of the former President, the case of former army officers who supported Jammeh (Jeune Afrique¹⁹), the impunity that weighs heavily on the protection for human rights as well as the birth of youth movements, it would be appropriate to promote national unity around democratic values to prevent any internal tension and ensure the stability of the country. The awakening of a democratic and pacifist conscience among young people must prevail over any strategy of instrumentalization for political purpose.

The Role of Civil Society and Youth Movements

Civil society in The Gambia has been instrumental in the country's democratic transition in 2016, despite the high risk of tensions and the roots of a 22-year old dictatorial regime. This

¹⁷ Article 19, "Gambia: New regime crackdown a chilling reminder of 22 years of repression", <https://www.article19.org/resources/gambia-new-regime-crackdown-a-chilling-reminder-of-22-years-of-repression/>, consulté le 24/11/2021.

¹⁸ José Domingo Dougan-Beaca, Mohamed Suma Gambie, « Climat de peur chez les défenseurs des droits de l'homme : Rapport de mission internationale d'enquête », l'Observatoire pour la protection des Défenseurs de Droits de l'Homme, juillet 2011, [Droits humain en gambie.pdf](#), consulté le 30/11/2021.

¹⁹ Benjamin Roger « Gambie : Adama Barrow sous pression, un an après la chute de Yahya Jammeh » janvier 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/516739/politique/gambie-adama-barrow-sous-pression/> consulté le 24/11/2021.

shows a maturity in protecting the interests of the country. The hashtag #Gambia Has Decided²⁰ is a youth initiative that succeeded in reviving the hope of an entire people through its creator, activist and lawyer Salieu Taal. Gambian youth are thus participating in the country's democratic and peaceful transition. Unfortunately, as in many countries on the continent where young people make up more than 65% of the total population, there is often a manipulation trend of this group.

Despite the turning of the page of the former dictatorial regime, Gambian civil society quickly changed its view on the true identity or orientation of the new regime when, during a demonstration held on 18 June 2020 in Faraba Banta²¹, two young demonstrators were killed by the police. This violent repression was condemned by civil society, which had contributed strongly to Barrow's election, and by human rights organizations such as the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA). On closer inspection, youth policy in Africa is verbiage and redundancy. Their place in the political discourse and agenda does not always correspond to the reality. Responsibility for this sad reality is shared in almost all African countries, such as Gambia.

In addition to the steadfastness of some in the demand for democratic values and the defense of human rights, it is worth noting the commitment of others to stand behind candidates such as Ousainu Darboe of the United Democratic Party (UDP), Mama Kandeh of the Gambia Democratic Congress, Halifa Sallah, as well as independents Essa Mbaye Faal and Abdoulie Ebrima Jammeh²².

This is undoubtedly ordinary and constructive for a democracy that longs for maturity. But looking back at the cases of the pro-Jammeh youth, it should be noted the portents of crude manipulation in front the tearful, faces of the victims who are waiting for justice to be done. According to the 2017 global peace index The Gambia had already fallen 18 places with a series of socio-economic challenges that persist, namely impoverishment, unemployment (70%

²⁰ Salieu Taal, « #GambiaHasDecided (La Gambie a décidé) : un hashtag ayant suscité l'espoir » <https://www.openglobalrights.org/a-hashtag-that-inspired-hope-gambia-has-decided/?lang=French>, consulté le 24/11/2021.

²¹ « Gambie: la société civile en colère après la mort de deux manifestants », <https://www.business-humanrights.org/pt/%C3%BAltimas-not%C3%ADcias/gambie-la-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-civile-en-col%C3%A8re-apr%C3%A8s-la-mort-de-deux-manifestants/>

²² « Présidentielle de décembre en Gambie: 15 candidats rejetés » <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/pr%C3%A9sidentielle-de-d%C3%A9cembre-en-gambie-15-candidats-rejet%C3%A9s/6303220.html>, Consulté le 26/11/2021.

among youth)²³ and the widening gap between urban and rural areas, and a declining literacy rate²⁴. Therefore, the youth must remain the concern of leaders and while participating efficiently in the process as actors. The Youth National Council plays a major role in youth empowerment and entrepreneurship. As far as women are concerned, despite the debate on gender equity, empowerment and protection in accordance with UN Resolution 1325, there is unanimous agreement that much remains to be done, starting with the demand for the truth about the many victims of violence under the former regime.

Public Governance Analysis,

The issue of public governance in the Gambian electoral context deserves some reflection on the major axes around which it revolves in order to see in its multidimensional nature what consequences it may have on the election. The expression is understood here as 'an interdisciplinary field dealing with the relations of power between public authorities, civil society and the market, in a context of transformation of the ability of political communities to govern themselves legitimately and to act effectively²⁵. These relations can be of different kinds: relations of authority - authority emanating from the state, but also from the market under contractual arrangements - relations of influence and persuasion, coercion and manipulation. Starting from the 22-year rule of former President Yahya Jammeh, it is easy to see that democracy has advanced with the 2016 elections. The restoration of the rule of law through a more striking separation of powers has freed the country from the dictatorial tendencies that were undermining it. The Gambia is a democracy based on the classic principles of separation of powers as provided for in the country's constitution and laid down in three functions as follows:

- the function of enacting general rules;
- the function of executing these rules; and

²³ International, Peace Institute, « La prévention en vue de pérenniser la paix dans la « nouvelle Gambie » <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IPI-E-RPT-Prevention-for-Sustaining-Peace-GambiaFrench.pdf>, consulté le 24/11/2021.

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ Benoît Rigaud, Le dictionnaire encyclopédique de l'administration publique : la référence pour comprendre l'action publique, https://dictionnaire.enap.ca/dictionnaire/docs/definitions/defintions_francais/gouvernance_publicque.pdf, Consulté le 25/11/2021.

- the function of settling disputes is the judiciary²⁶

The President of the Republic is responsible for conducting relations with other states and international organizations, and for negotiating, subject to ratification by the legislature, the conclusion of international treaties and agreements. Through its constituent parts, the state ensures territorial governance through its administration, which is competent to draw up development policies, promote and partner with the private sector, provide basic social services, etc.

In the period of democratic transition following 22 years of autocratic rule, the new government, the bearer of the hopes of an entire nation enthusiastic about its deliverance and ambitious about its future, has quickly fallen into incoherence and rupture. This relates to the chaotic legacy that is stifling efforts to combat poverty but also to consolidate democracy through violent repression. The work of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission, whose major challenge would have been to make its results public so that justice could be done is still a problematic issue.

In the economic sector, there are still major challenges to be met, complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a study by the International Monetary Fund shows, in terms of rebuilding the economy, poverty levels remain high in the midst of a fragile economic situation based on agriculture, tourism and remittances for support. In 2020, The Gambia suffered one of the sharpest contractions in its recent economic history, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the IMF's April 2021 forecast, GDP growth is estimated at 6% in 2021 and 6.5% in 2022, subject to the post-pandemic global economic recovery²⁷.

This reality does not fuel enthusiasm and the dream of change when added to the enigma of Barrow's alliance with the party of the former strongman of the Gambia, the ethnic exploitation for purely political purposes and the risks linked with Jammeh's return in Banjul. However, it would be very pathetic to discredit the current regime on this point. According to some studies, Jammeh's former regime was marked by the favoritism of the Joola community, his ethnic group within the state apparatus, to the detriment of the Mandingos, victims of hostile declarations.

It should be recalled that this community would have made a sanction vote, mostly in favor of Adama Barrow in the 2016 elections, supporting today the United Democratic Party (UDP) of

²⁶ Frank Baron, « La séparation des pouvoirs », <https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/270289-la-separation-des-pouvoirs>, Consulté le 25/11/2021.

²⁷ « Gambie : le contexte économique », BNP Paris Bas, <https://www.tradesolutions.bnpparibas.com/fr/explorer/gambie/contexte-economique>, consulté le 25/11/2021.

Ousainou Darboe, from which sprouted the candidate to his own succession. However, for the December 4, 2021 elections, the creation in 2019 of Barrow's National People's Party and the so-called controversial alliance with Jammeh's party, has reversed the popularity trends of a leader who succumbed to the temptation of power after committing to give up his seat after three years and to organize an election in which he could not stand again.

In the opinion of some, persistent socio-political risks compromising the implementation of initiatives and reforms defined in the National Development Plan (NDP) launched in February 2018 serve as hotbeds of tension in case Jammeh returns to the country with a political agenda.

This is to be exorcised by political leaders who all have an obligation to consolidate national unity, especially when the residues of the MFDC and the history of the independence movement correlating with Jammeh's rule are taken as other elements of analysis. In the play of probable alliances, the accountability of former partners must be raised. The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission hearings also revealed the APRC's condemnation of what it calls a witch-hunt. Indeed, the transitional justice process reflects a real problem in the country as it moves towards the ballot box.

The management of the Electoral Process

The management of the electoral process is entrusted to the Independent Electoral Commission. It exercises its mandate in accordance with Article 46 of the Constitution of The Gambia and Article 40 of the Electoral Act. In the context of the presidential elections of 4 December, some difficulties were noted regarding the registration of voters due to a logistical problem related to the purchase of materials and equipment. This mishap led to the postponement of registration and caused a lot of uproar within the Gambian political class, despite the guarantees that the IEC would hold the elections on the set date. Civil society remains on the lookout for this state of affairs as it is already concerned about the turn the President has taken in the democratic transition by not respecting his promise, by creating his own party and by making an alliance that has been strongly criticized. Six candidatures were validated after 15 were rejected for lack of conformity with constitutional requirements following a procedure duly established by the IEC.

For the electoral campaign, a press release from the competent body had already announced that it would take place from Tuesday 9 November 2021 to Thursday 2 December 2021. The Gambian electorate will therefore meet around these candidatures to elect its President, in a context of socio-economic crisis plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic and undermined by risks

of tensions to be systematically controlled by restoring Gambian democracy, through a free and transparent election. To this end, election observers at the national and international levels are expected to make a significant contribution to the calming of the electoral and post-electoral context.

Analysis of Potential Risks Related to the Presidential Elections in The Gambia

Developments in Gambian politics since independence have been accompanied by significant swings, which have been documented in several analyses. There have often been studies that show how long anti-democratic practices have been entrenched in The Gambia. However, this was a political history centered on coups and the reign of President Yaya Jammeh... Now that The Gambia has been able to go through a transition without bloodshed, but against a backdrop of tensions, the country is still threatened, on the eve of its 2021 presidential elections, by the risks of socio-political conflicts that we wish to analyze here. The order of analysis is totally random and in no way reflects any desire to prioritize or stagger the risks.

Risk of clashes in The Event of a Loss of Power

In January 2020, thousands of Gambians, mainly from the " Three Years Jotna " movement, demonstrated to demand the departure of President Adama Barrow, who had promised to serve three years in office. The press and observers reported on the demands which, in essence, revolve around the respect of promises and the departure of President Barrow after 3 years:

“The president is backtracking, saying that the Constitution guarantees a five-year term," he said. Five years during which he will have slept! We are here to remind him that he promised a three-year agreement to the Gambian people, that it is this agreement that Gambians voted for and that it is this promise that we take into account because it was supported by the coalition”.

Despite these demonstrations, President Barrow has insisted on finishing his mandate and organizing the elections. These upcoming presidential elections will be highly contested, with six candidates competing during their rallies in proffering threats. Even if this seems normal given the fragile democratic situation, there is a risk of clashes after the elections.

Most importantly, in Africa, the sadly famous assertion that 'you don't hold elections to lose them' could create even more doubts about the outcome of the election. Will Barrow accept his defeat? Will the other candidates accept his victory? In several respects, sensitization and

advocacy actions should be initiated with the political class and its supporters. Why? Simply because this feeling of betrayal of the given word, denounced by the Three years Jotna Movement, reflects the loss of confidence of a large part of the people towards President Barrow. The alliances and breaks with former President Jammeh have damaged the credibility of some candidates and above all, have created frustration among the people. The Jammeh case, which was reported at the end of November 2021, has not been resolved and is likely to be a sensitive issue during the next term of the President-elect.

Election is one of the mainstays of any democratic system because it is one in which the rulers are chosen by the ruled through genuine and free elections (Kokoroko, 2009). If there are doubts about the transparency of this choice, it goes without saying that the people and the losing candidates will demonstrate and as a consequence, one could expect repression and abuses to lead to clashes between supporters and also between the demonstrators and the defense and security forces.

Loss of Confidence in the Political Dialogue after the Elections: a likely Cross-Purpose looming ahead

The controversies and the mobilization for or against the departure of Adama Barrow reflect a malaise that persists in The Gambia and which seems to be exacerbated on the eve of the elections. From the outset, the fact that the incumbent President has reneged on his promise to serve three years is a serious blow to the socio-political stability of the country and does not favor a transparent dialogue between the various actors. The tension in Gambian political life is strongly linked to this aspect, but it seems to be worsening with the alliances contracted with former President Yahya Jammeh in order to establish this stability in favor of dialogue. Yet, whether in The Gambia or elsewhere in West Africa, political dialogues have often focused on issues related to respect for the constitution, respect for mandates and the organization of elections (Maurille Sètondji Quenum, 2016).

As for their effectiveness, recent experiences of political dialogue have not always had the expected effects, except as a means for the government to last²⁸. In the case of The Gambia, the dynamics of alliance and opposition between the competitors who have each attempted to negotiate with former President Yahya Jammeh, might make room for cross-purpose dialogue after the elections: who will be accountable among the different candidates? Who will trigger

²⁸ Mallet R., « Le dialogue politique, un remède efficace ? », 2019, <https://www.dw.com/fr/le-dialogue-politique-un-rem%C3%A8de-efficace/a-50783377>

the justice process? What about the former President (whether he is in the winning or losing camp)? These questions could pose serious problems to national reconciliation after the elections. In general, as far as the candidates are concerned, there is a gap between the will to do justice and the political practices, alliances and shifting discourse on the Jammeh case in the face of the expectations of the public expressed by various socio-political actors. Very often, the aftermath of elections has given rise to tensions between the authorities and opponents who refuse to take part in the dialogue.

Loss of Legitimacy in the Making of a Democratic Debate As Alliances with Yaya Jammeh Create Tensions

According to RFI²⁹, as the presidential elections in The Gambia approach, two former enemies are getting closer. The press had relayed the information that the ruling party of President Adama Barrow had signed an alliance (which will later fall apart), Sunday, September 5, 2021, with that of the former "dictator" Yahya Jammeh. This surprising alliance, which comes a few months before the presidential elections, creates doubt about the willingness to prosecute the former leader for alleged human rights violations, especially since the points of agreement include the return of Yahya Jammeh to Banjul. The various analyses show that both upstream and downstream, the Gambian presidential candidates have dealt a serious blow to their legitimacy by opening up to dialogue with former president Yahya Jammeh. On the part of the public opinion, the main fear linked to this controversial alliance between the APRC and Adama Barrow's National People's Party (NPP) was the risk of hindering the implementation of the recommendations of the commission, which submitted its report on 25 November, 2021.

Following recent events, particularly the breakdown of the alliance between President Barrow and former President Jammeh, who is said to have allied himself with candidate Mamah Kandeh, there is a threat to democratic continuity and transparency in the post-election debate. However, the political mechanisms and initiatives that the next President will propose should, in the eyes of the people, reflect a real desire to provide lasting solutions to the problems facing the Gambia, particularly the legal proceedings against the former dictator.

²⁹ <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210906-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-en-gambie-alliance-entre-le-parti-au-pouvoir-et-celui-de-l-ex-dictateur-jammeh>

Socio- Cultural, Economic and Political Risks In the Event of " Questionable " Elections

The campaign for the December 2021 presidential election is likely to be marked by violent verbal confrontations between the candidates, but also by future confrontations between security forces, opponents and supporters of President Adama Barrow after the elections.

The alliances of the current President and a candidate with the party of the exiled former President Yahya Jammeh will be a major factor. The social instability in The Gambia would be consistent with the plausible hypothesis that former President Jammeh would seek a way back into the country, first in the event of a Barrow victory (when their alliance was made official on 5 September and then broken off a few days before the official filing of candidacies) and then in the event of a victory for Mama Kandeh, a candidate in the rally and a new ally of Jammeh.

Recently, during demonstrations by the Three Years Jotna (2020) movement, the police used tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. According to Red Cross sources, 28 people were hospitalised and 137 arrested. Such demonstrations are expected to occur in the wake of the results proceedings.

The analysis of the speeches of the various candidates for the 2021 presidential election already reveals a climate of distrust and mistrust. This also justifies the release of the National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia, which issued a statement calling on the six candidates to exercise restraint to ensure a peaceful, transparent and credible presidential election.

Messages of 'threat' or as the protagonists would say, 'warning', are heard in speeches. For example, during a rally President Adama Barrow made a speech that sounded like a threat to his rival Mama Kandeh:

"I warn Mama Kandeh. We want peace in this country, Yahya Jammeh lives in exile. His exile takes away his right to participate in Gambian politics, Yahya Jammeh's expression on Kandeh's political platforms can cause conflicts in this country. I am seriously warning him and asking the Electoral Commission to put Mama Kandeh on notice.

One of Kandeh's speeches could be seen as a response to Barrow:

"I didn't know that Adama Barrow had become a king instead of being president of the Republic of The Gambia, the President of The Gambia and the president of everybody. He should not threaten citizens because they say what he does not like. Tomorrow, Yahya Jammeh's situation could well be that of Adama Barrow.

According to the national and local press, this verbal violence is a sign of the growing tension between the candidates who are making threats about the post-election period during their meetings.

Post-Election Witch Hunt, Repression and Democratic Rollback Risks.....

One of the major risks that should be taken into account is a potential witch hunt of the next president and his supporters.

It is clear that the demonstrations by supporters of former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh do not seem to be going in the direction of appeasement after the elections, and this would be a consequence of all the threats made against the former President. In a speech in 2020, a Gambian High Judicial Authority said that if former president Yaya Jammeh returned to The Gambia, he would be immediately arrested and prosecuted for alleged crimes committed during his 22 years in power.

However, the former President, bolstered by the mobilization of his supporters declared that Yahya Jammeh has never hidden his intentions to return to the country, and information has circulated in a supposed "recent recording" circulated on social networks, in which he claims, the respect of his rights, including that of return. The new alliances contracted on the eve of the December 2021 elections would suggest that his return is possible. This situation creates potential cycle of reprisals and settlement of political disputes.

On the other hand, if the former President and his allies lose the elections, his return would be potentially compromised. Even worse, his allies could find themselves in a bad position, with potential repressions that are politically motivated, but may also be ethnically motivated.

In fact, pending cases can be at the heart of political agendas for national reconciliation. The Commission's hearings highlighted the need for a criminal investigation into the rule of former President Yahya Jammeh. The case has not yet been closed. To date, over 300 witnesses have been heard. Accusations" have been made and abuses have been blamed on the former President by former members of the government (ministers, heads of the defence and security forces, including police and intelligence officers). Testimonies have been pouring in since 2019 before a Gambian truth commission. The claims and testimonies on the involvement of former President Yahya Jammeh in many serious crimes during his 22 years in power should, if the process goes ahead, be followed by a more thorough investigation and criminal sanctions should be imposed. Victims are waiting.

The Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) submitted the report of its two years of testimony and investigation in late November 2021:

"Mr Barrow has one month to submit a summary of the report to the National Assembly and international organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN. It has six months to decide on the follow-up to the recommendations.

President Adama Barrow who is expected to address the issue is likely to make it a battle-horse in this final round, and after the elections it is clear that it will be a contentious issue that awaits the winner. Containing the results of two and a half years of investigative testimony and hearings on President Yahya Jammeh's 22-year rule, as well as his recommendations on what to do about it, it is assumed that whatever the circumstances, if the Jammeh camp wins or loses, there is a real risk of a "witch-hunt".

Stalling Risk For Reforms and Development Plans

The post-election period could create or exacerbate socio-political divides. Indeed, these cleavages could undermine governance and the effective and efficient implementation of public policies, initiatives and reforms defined in the National Development Plan (NDP-2018).

After the December 2021 elections, many of the reforms could easily be stifled by deep-seated political problems, linked to President Barrow's current modes of governance or fears of a return of former President Yahya Jammeh to the spheres of governance already challenged by a large segment of the Gambian people.

Brief Analysis of the Stakes Related to the 2021 Presidential Elections

For contemporary societies, elections are the instrument through which the international community classifies or downgrades, evaluates or devalues political systems, especially in developing countries. From this point of view, elections have not always met democratic expectations because they constantly give rise to criticism by a rhetoric forged around notions such as tampering, hold-up, instrumentalizing of the electoral law, etc., which reveals the difficulties of changing political habits through norms or mechanisms that are as primitive as they are sophisticated (Kokoroko, 2009).

2021 Presidential Election: An Opportunity to Reassure International Opinion of The Political Commitment to Democratic Rule

The first presidential elections since the 2017 transition are eagerly awaited to remove some of the ambiguities linked to the Gambia's desire to remain a democracy in search of maturity. These elections, which will be tested against the influences of the former President whose shadow still hangs over the country, constitute, to a certain extent, a great step forward for democracy in French-speaking black Africa, particularly for West Africa-Sahel, which has experienced a great deal of political turmoil linked to elections over the past ten years (Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, etc.).

The opening of the political space following the inauguration of President Barrow had given The Gambia a rare opportunity to broaden its political process and strengthen democracy. In 2017, the nine political parties in The Gambia entered into a memorandum of understanding under the lead of the Inter-Party Committee (IPC). The signatories pledged to refrain from political intimidation and violence, to accept the results of the elections as long as they are transparent and credible, to establish mutual relations based on dialogue and cooperation, and to work with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to ensure the smooth running of the elections.

Through the regular organization of transparent elections, presidential power becomes theoretically accessible, or at least open to a wider range of actors (Kokoroko, 2009). It is also an opportunity to reassure international opinion about the real political will of the Gambian elites to remain a democracy:

"Elections thus testify to the evolution of political behavior and a new vision of politics. Of course, even if they are not a guarantee of democracy, they are nonetheless, whatever their limitations, a necessary condition for democratic development (Kokoroko, 2009)

It stands to reason that if the Gambian presidential election is conducted in a procedurally correct and transparent manner, the acceptance of the results by the candidates will ease the early stages of political tension and go a long way to consolidating the achievements of social cohesion, unless the president-elect allows (1) the return of former President Jammeh without any form of prosecution, (2) closes the Jammeh case and does not follow up on the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which recently submitted its report.

[2021 Presidential Election Offers a Valuable Opportunity for the President-Elect to Strengthen Human Rights Protection and consolidate social cohesion in The Gambia](#)

The era of former President Yahya Jammeh was marked by mass arbitrary arrests, widespread torture, extrajudicial killings and persecution of dissenting voices. Several advances have been

made in the area of respect for human rights and the restriction of freedoms. The results of the next elections will therefore be decisive for the continuation of these advances. The President-elect will have to continue the reforms and complete them as far as possible. He or she will also have to deal with judicial matters fairly, show a strong will to restore justice, and also a will to reconcile and rebuild social cohesion.

Indeed, if members of former President Yahya Jammeh's regime who are accused of serious crimes are expected to be brought to justice, it will be necessary to ensure that their rights to a fair and transparent trial are respected, and, if their guilt is established, that sentences and sanctions are carried out with clarity.

The next President should also commit to repealing repressive laws that restrict freedoms, in particular the 2001 Immunity Act, which gives the president the power to exempt members of the security forces from prosecution for any act committed during an unlawful assembly or in an emergency situation.

[An Opportunity to Strengthen Cooperation and Diplomacy](#)

Relations between The Gambia and other countries in Africa and the Western world have improved since the advent of democracy in The Gambia. Analyses have shown that the election of Adama Barrow, at the beginning of 2017, putting an end to the 22-year dictatorship of former President Yahya Jammeh, has allowed several donors to accompany and support the country in its transition. While some Heads of State, by recognizing the newly elected President very early on and opening diplomatic offices, others have tended to increase investment.

In 2017, thanks to the transition, The Gambia opened up to international aid and was able to benefit from the European Union's assistance. More than ten international organizations, including the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Community of West African States and the Islamic Development Bank, along with 43 bilateral representations, decided to provide financial support to the Gambia's "National Development Plan" to the tune of 1.45 billion euros. These commitments testify to the confidence of the donors in the new regime. In parallel with political stabilization, these commitments open the way for a resumption of foreign direct investment, particularly in the tourism sector.

The 2021 presidential elections will therefore put the country's achievements since 2017 at stake, and will make it possible to consolidate the diplomatic ties that the Gambia already has with many countries. It would also allow, thanks to a political stability that is increasingly confirmed, to favor the attraction of donors. One example of the direct consequences of the

democratic transition is the fact that The Gambia has been able to count on France's support. Indeed, during the Inter-ministerial Committee on International Cooperation and Development (CICID) of 8 February 2018, Gambia was added to the list of 19 priority countries for French development aid.

Conclusion

The Gambia is a small country in terms of surface area, but its political trajectory has been far from linear. It was under civilian rule before it fell into a military junta led by young officers led by Yaya Jammeh. Jammeh strove to return the country to civilian life and to organize elections he had always won for 22 years before being surprisingly defeated by Adama Barrow, a default candidate of the Gambian opposition. But the latter did not respect the consensus on which all the opponents had agreed, specifically that of having a three-year term before organizing elections in which he himself would not be a candidate. Thus, five years later, he has to organize the presidential election in which six candidates are competing and face national but also international challenges, the first of which is the lawful consolidation of relations with the most immediate neighbor, Senegal. The issue of timber trafficking at the borders is still unresolved.

In addition, the loss of trust between the political actors themselves and between the political actors and civil society are major challenges to be addressed, despite the attempts at national reconciliation made by the government, but the report of the commission is still pending. In addition, the sincerity of the election is being questioned by opposition political actors who suspect that the shadow of former President Yaya Jammeh over the election.

The Gambia has a very young population that mobilized to remove Jammeh and has high expectations that the country is struggling to meet. Indeed, resources are scarce and the country relies on tourism and trade to build wealth. As a result, the youth and civil society will not stop fighting for more democracy but also for addressing the problems that young people face.

However, this election is an opportunity for The Gambia to consolidate its comeback on the international scene and to reassure the international community of the country's willingness to turn the page on Jammeh and focus on its future. It is also an opportunity to show that the issue of human rights, which has been a black mark throughout Jammeh's reign, can be overcome with the new regime and that internal security, which is still provided by ECOWAS, can be guaranteed by the Gambians themselves in a peaceful environment. This is the only way to strengthen international cooperation and Gambia's weight in ECOWAS, the African Union and international bodies.

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