



Gambia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as Republic of the Gambia]

04/01/1816 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: In April 1816, after the British had already established and abandoned a colony in Gambia from 1661 to 1779, Alexander Grant recolonized the region (Strych 2017). From 1821 to 1965, The Gambia Colony and Protectorate constituted the British colonial administration of the Gambia, within the context of the British Empire during the New Imperialism era. The colony encompassed the immediate vicinity of Bathurst (now Banjul), while the protectorate comprised the inland territory along the Gambia River, officially designated in 1894.¹ Influenced by the British since 1588, Gambia wasn't formally recognized as a distinct colony until 1888. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 1946, from 1947 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. Universal suffrage was absent until 1959 per LIED. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present until 1945 and as ambiguous from 1946 onward. From 1900 to 1960, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

04/19/1960 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the constitution for Gambia came into effect through the Gambia (Constitution) Order in Council, 1960 which created a House of Representatives in Gambia.² Of the 34 members of the House, twelve were elected by the protectorate, seven by the colony, eight seats were elected by the Head Chiefs, four seats went to ex-officio members and 3 to appointed members. In 1960 universal suffrage was introduced, the voting age was 21.³ Elections were held in 1960, with the People's Progressive Party (PPP) winning 9 of the 19 elected seats. However, Governor-general Edward Windley appointed Pierre Sarr N'Jie, leader of the United Party (UP), to be Chief Minister, as he gained support from all eight chiefs.⁴ According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. From 1961 to 1963, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. Constitutional changes in 1961 increased the number of representatives elected by the Protectorate to 25, bringing the number of elected seats to 32. These changes came into effect for the 1962 election.⁵ The PPP won the pre-independence parliamentary elections in 1962 with 18 out of 32 elected seats.⁶

10/04/1963 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Gambia (Constitution) (Amendment) Order in Council 1963 came into effect, which granted Gambia internal self-government.⁷ During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. On 02/18/1965, Gambia gained full independence within the Commonwealth. The PPP, led by Dawda Jawara, led the country to

independence on this date.⁸ Dawda became prime minister. The prime minister's office existed between 1961 and 1970.⁹ According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 1966 to 1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1970, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

04/24/1970 Continuation Electoral Hybrid Regime (as a republic): In a referendum on this date the office of the president of the republic of The Gambia was created and The Gambia became a republic.¹⁰ Dawda held the presidency between 1970 and 1994.¹¹ Until 1994 the PPP was the predominant political party. Nonetheless, competitive, multiparty elections were held regularly (1966, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992). The elections have by many observers been considered free and relatively fair (Bendel 1999: 411, Wiseman 1996: 917).¹² The government led by Jawara refrained from employing repressive tactics against its opposition. Instead, it adeptly utilized state resources to preserve its predominant status. While the existence of opposition parties was permitted, with their participation in elections unimpeded, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) managed to sustain an inequitable competitive environment. This was achieved through the exclusive control over patronage and the strategic allocation of state resources, a practice that continued for approximately three decades. (Hughes/Perfect 2008: 1-lvii, Lansford 2012c: 509, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 60-61). Furthermore, the limitations on the exercise of executive power were sometimes blurred and supported by the majority in parliament held by the PPP. Therefore, allegations of judicial inefficiency and control have been raised (Edie 2000: 168-173). After an unsuccessful coup attempt on 07/30/1981, the Gambia and Senegal founded the Senegambia Confederation on 02/01/1982 to promote cooperation but the confederation was dissolved on 09/30/1989.¹³ The classification of this period is contested. GWF, MCM, REIGN and AF (only until 1971) classify it as party-based autocracy, MCM as multiparty autocracy and AF until 1971 as single party autocracy. BR classifies it as civilian dictatorship, but HTW, LIED and AF (starting in 1972) as a(n) (electoral) democracy. We classify this period as an electoral hybrid regime, because, although there were flaws in the electoral competition, the opposition parties were not prevented from participating. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections during this period as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI the overall election conditions as somewhat free and fair. V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat clean elections until 1971. Since 1972 elections scored an ambiguous cleanliness. As per FH's classification for the period until 1979, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. In 1980 and 1981 the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. For the period between 1982 and 1988 a score of 6 to 7 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. From 1989 onward the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Furthermore, political liberties were not achieved according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI categorizes them as somewhat present for the entire time. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. From 1971 to 1976, For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Between 1977 and 1993, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1994, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

07/22/1994 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, the government of President Dawada Kairaba Jawara and his PPP was overthrown in a bloodless coup by junior military officers led by then-lieutenant Yahya Jammeh and his Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). Two years later,

Jammeh staged controlled elections in which he and his newly-formed party, the Alliance for Patriotic Re-orientation and Construction, won (Saine 1996: 97). Jammeh and the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council junta justified their coup stating the disturbing level of corruption and lack of democracy was harming the country.¹⁴ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1994 and 1995, in 1996 only executive elections were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, political liberties were absent (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores varied between absent and not really present for this period. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

01/02/1997 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: Legislative elections, planned for 12/11/1996, were postponed until January. The decision came after weeks of UDP-orchestrated anti-government demonstrations. Subsequently, in balloting on 01/02/1997, President Jammeh's APRC captured 33 of the 45 contested seats (the president is empowered to name 4 additional legislators), giving the party the two-thirds majority necessary to pass legislation and make constitutional changes unimpeded (Lansford 2021: 593). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) reported that the electorate had been "cowed by repression," making free and fair elections impossible (Lansford 2021: 593). The ban of political parties from the Jawara era (PPP, NCP and GPP) was enforced during the military rule and only lifted in 2001 (Edie 2000: 168).¹⁵ Presidential elections under Jammeh took place in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016. Following the 2001 election, the immediate post-election period witnessed a surge in authoritarianism and violence against political adversaries (Saine 2008: 63). And also, the presidential elections in 2006 fell short of international standards. These included vote rigging, voter intimidation and biased media reports (Saine 2008: 68-69). Jammeh was defeated by Barrow from the opposition in presidential elections on 12/01/2016, and acknowledged the result at first, then refused to accept the defeat a few days later and ordered new balloting, prompting wide-spread criticism (Lansford 2021: 593). From 12/2015 to 01/28/2017 Gambia was named Islamic Republic of The Gambia. Jammeh refused to step down and on 01/18/2017, the Gambian assembly voted in favor of an extension of his term in office for 90 days to prepare new elections. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Until 2017, LIED categorizes Gambian elections as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores elections as being of ambiguous freedom and fairness from 1997 to 2005 and in 2016. Between 2006 and 2015 not real freedom and fairness was achieved. Their CEI outcomes varied between not really clean and no electoral cleanliness. ECOWAS launched a military intervention into the country under the name "Operation Restore Democracy" with 7.000 troops. Forces entered the country on 01/19/2017 at the request of Barrow, who was sworn in that day as the new President at the Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal (Lansford 2021: 593).¹⁶ Jammeh subsequently stepped down and left the country. According to FH's classification for 1998 to 2000, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. In 2001 the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. Between 2002 and 2004, Gambia is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. For the period from 2005 to 2010 a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. From 2011 onward it is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. For this period political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present following V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 1, between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For almost the entire regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the

executive were moderate.

04/06/2017 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date legislative elections were held which the UDP won a majority with 31 seats, followed by the APRC, the GDC, and the National Reconciliation Party (NRP), with five seats each; the People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS), four; the PPP, two; and one independent (Lansford 2021: 594). Since the end of Jammeh's 22-year rule in 2017, Gambians have experienced increased freedom from undue influences on their political decisions. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. After 2017, LIED categorizes elections as competitive and both the V-Dem EF&FI and CEI score elections in this period as somewhat free and fair and of ambiguous cleanliness until 2021 and of somewhat cleanliness since 2022. However, reports of abuses such as the politicized distribution of money and goods to favor the ruling party persisted leading up to the 2021 election.¹⁷ On 12/04/2021, presidential elections took place in the Gambia. Incumbent President Adama Barrow of the National People's Party emerged victorious with 53% of the vote, prevailing over five other candidates.¹⁸ As of August 2022, ECOWAS forces remain in the country on the request of incumbent president Barrow, assisting and training domestic security forces. Per FH's evaluation for 2017 and 2018, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. From 2019 onward the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. LIED still indicates that political liberties were absent. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as fully present since 2017. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. For 2018, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. Since 2019, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambia_Colony_and_Protectorate

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1960/701/made>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Representatives_of_the_Gambia

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1960_Gambian_parliamentary_election

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Representatives_of_the_Gambia

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962_Gambian_parliamentary_election

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1963/1629/contents/made>

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Progressive_Party_\(The_Gambia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Progressive_Party_(The_Gambia))

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_the_Gambia

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_Gambia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1970_Gambian_republic_referendum

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawda_Jawara

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dawda-Kairaba-Jawara>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegambia_Confederation

¹⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Gambia_2018?lang=en

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_Gambia

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ECOWAS_military_intervention_in_the_Gambia

¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2022>

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ECOWAS_military_intervention_in_the_Gambia

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