

Country Expertise Post: The Gambia

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APRC / NPP Coalition Breakdown

Sources:

- BBC Africa, *Gambian alliance stands firm despite Jammeh speech*
- Foroyaa, *Full Text of Jammeh's Address to his Supporters*
- All Africa, **U.S. Acts to Seize Former Gambia Leader Jammeh's Property*
- The Point, *Victims concern over delay in submission of TRRC report*

Gambian dictator Yahya Jammeh came from a military background and is a member of the Jola ethnicity, from whom he drew loyal personnel to appoint to military positions once in power. He received officer's training in the United States in 1993; the next year, he and his fellow officers struck a bloodless coup against the Dawda Jawara government. After the 1994 coup which brought him to power, the provisional government worked to ban opposition parties and foreign aid was suspended. By the mid '90s, elections were organised with Jammeh running on the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction ticket, winning an overwhelming supermajority of the votes. Human rights abuses were rampant during his regime and Jola drug cartels operated with impunity along the Casamance border. In 2015, an opposition coalition won a surprise victory against him, which Jammeh initially accepted but then rejected. ECOWAS military groups forcibly ousted Jammeh in 2015 after he refused to concede electoral defeat, he and his family have been living in exile in Equatorial Guinea.

Adama Barrow, the current president of the Gambia, rose to prominence from a rather unremarkable position as a clerk who had been educated in England and worked in London before entering Gambian politics. Barrow became leader of the United Democratic Party and the leader of the Coalition 2016 ticket in the elections against Jammeh. He has been described as both a member of the Fula and Mandinka Ethnic groups, which makes him part of the majority ethnicity in the country.

In the years since Jammeh's removal, the Gambian state has sought to create a Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission to adjudicate hearings and fact-finding related to numerous abuses of power and crimes committed by Jammeh himself, his administration, and his political proxies. However, the commission has been stymied by unexplained delays. In this context, Barrow had also reneged on his promise for a power-sharing agreement with other members of the coalition which brought him to power, choosing to serve the full five years as president rather than 3. The latest development was the announcement

of a coalition between Barrow's new party, the People's Progressive Party, and Jammeh's APRC as Gambia heads into its next election this December.

The alliance is concerning to many who wish to see justice for the victims of Jammeh's regime. However, within a few weeks of the announcement, Jammeh announced from exile at a telephone rally of his supporters that the new alliance did not have his blessing. APRC leaders within the country, for their part, have dismissed this, reiterating their commitment to the agreement; perhaps they are trying to distance themselves from Jammeh and let him be the primary scapegoat of the TRRC report.

More important to consider is why Barrow felt the need to arrange this coalition in the first place. We can only speculate, but two explanations come to mind: first, the military is intensely loyal to Jammeh, and it is widely recognised that were the ECOWAS peacekeepers to leave the Gambia, Barrow could face a potential coup; second, it would be highly unlikely to replicate the surprise success of the Coalition 2016 victory, who only won with a plurality (48%) of the votes against an extremely unpopular incumbent. There are so many anti-Jammeh opposition parties with no single rallying cause that it arrests all attempts to build a serious political movement on the national level, even on a country as small as the Gambia.