

Democracy in The Gambia: Past, Present and Prospect for the Future

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Résumé: Le coup d'État militaire de 1994 a mis fin au règne du gouvernement du Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) de Sir Daouda Jawara, effaçant 29 années de politiques électorales en Gambie après l'indépendance. La Gambie sous Jawara était décrite comme étant un pays démocratique stable, avec un leader qui s'est efforcé de développer le pays, et qui a bénéficié du soutien de la majorité.

Cet article affirme, au contraire, que la Gambie d'après indépendance manquait de stabilité démocratique, et que les institutions politiques ont été utilisées pour perpétuer le pouvoir de ceux qui contrôlent l'État, et non pour œuvrer des changements nécessaires au développement du pays. Ce point de vue contraire est sous-tendu par une évaluation des conditions sociale, économique, et politique pendant et après le règne de Jawara. Des questions concernant les perspectives d'un développement démocratique après l'interlude militaire sont soulevées.

For more than a quarter of a century, The Gambia was one of sub-Saharan Africa's longest standing multiparty democracies. It was perceived (along with Botswana and Mauritius) as an 'exception' on an African continent where authoritarianism and military regimes have been the norm. Apart from the aborted coup of 1981, The Gambia had enjoyed relative peace and stability since it attained independence from Britain in 1965. In 1994, The Gambia was perceived again as a deviant case when a military coup d'état toppled Dawda Jawara's People's Progressive Party (PPP) government,

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thereby bucking the post-1989 Sub-Saharan African trend away from authoritarianism towards multiparty politics.

Should the collapse of the PPP government have been expected? What prevented the consolidation of democracy in The Gambia? Consistent procedural exercise of elections and former President Jawara's known commitment to human rights and democracy were not sufficient for the entrenchment of democracy in the society. Continued external praise for these attributes may have diverted attention from the serious underlying problems within the political economy. It must be noted that The Gambia had never experienced even one electoral turnover, hence the political elite's commitment to succession via the ballot box was never tested. PPP came to power in 1962 (during the period of internal self-government preceding independence) and held on to power until 1994. There was no alternation between parties, as the government remained under the control of Dawda Jawara and PPP. The electoral system had become a one-party dominant system in which the Opposition parties were fragmented and were under constant pressure of co-optation or regulation by the dominant PPP. It was difficult to criticise the government because the civil society was weak and the country lacked strong independent print and broadcast media. Although some economic reforms were introduced in 1985, the living standards of the vast majority of Gambians remained extremely low. A survey of available opportunities for satisfying political, civil and economic rights revealed that conditions required for the entrenchment of democracy were lacking during the Jawara years.

The Evolution of Competitive Politics

The Gambia was granted independence in 1965 and thus became the last of Britain's West African colonies to attain independence. A limited franchise existed from 1880 to 1960, and this allowed educated Africans in the 'Colony' (the urban area of Banjul, formerly known as Bathurst) to have representation on the Legislative Council. In 1960, Britain conceded with a new Constitution allowing for the extension of the franchise to the 'Protectorate' (provinces outside the urban area). With universal adult suffrage, the Protectorate formed its own party, the People's Protectorate Party (PPP), which joined the former Colony parties: the Democratic Party (DP), the United Party (UP), and the Muslim Congress Party (MCP). As the

Gambian political elites prepared for independence, they accepted the British-derived competitive party politics as the ideal mode of State power that they had to replicate in their independent nation.

Competitive party politics was introduced in the context of the Colony/Protectorate geographical division which coincided with a clear pattern of ethnic demographic distribution. In 1963, The Gambian population was ethnically composed of: Mandinka (42 percent), Fula (18 percent), Woloff (16 percent) Jola (10 percent), Serahuli (9 percent), Others (4 percent), Non-Gambians (1 percent) (Census of The Gambia, 1963). Islam has been the religion of over 85 percent of the population, and the remaining 15 percent are identified as Christians or practitioners of African religions. The Colony was predominantly inhabited by the urban Woloffs and the Akus¹. There were also small groups from the rural Fula, Mandinka, Jola and Serahuli communities. In the Protectorate, the Mandinka constituted the largest group, followed by the Fula and the Jola. There was also a significant number of rural Woloffs (Nyang 1974:247).

In the course of preparations for the 1962 election, party politics became intense as the new political leaders appealed to voters on the basis of the Colony/Protectorate rivalry and subsequently appealed to their ethnic and religious allegiances (Nyang 1974). All the Colony parties drew their support from the urban areas while PPP depended on the rural areas for its support base. PPP had a strong identification with the Mandinka, as did UP with the Woloffs in Banjul and Fulas outside of Banjul. Realizing that in the long run it would need the support of other ethnic groups to ensure electoral victory, PPP adopted a less parochial name—the People's Progressive Party—and a new ethnic-inclusive style of politics. Thereafter,

¹ The Akus are descendants of emancipated slaves from Yorubaland, who had been sold as slaves during the wars between the Egbas and their neighbours after the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807. They were freed by the British Navy and landed at Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they were freed, baptised Christian and resettled. Others settled in Bathurst (Banjul) and elsewhere on the west coast of Africa. The language spoken by the Aku in Sierra Leone and The Gambia is Krio. For an excellent account of the history of the Akus, see James Africanus Horton's *West African Countries and Peoples*. London: W.W. Johnson, 1866, and the 1969 edition with an introduction by George Shepperson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

PPP leader Dawda Jawara's style of politics became one based on coalitions and alliances (Nyang 1974; Hughes, 1975, 1983). He immediately sought to form an alliance with the urban Wollof and Aku-dominated State bureaucracy, whose technical and administrative skills were suspected to be critical of his government. PPP successfully mobilised the Mandinkas and Jolas to challenge the dominant and popular urban-based UP in the 1962 elections. After its success in the 1962 election, PPP formed a temporary coalition with the only successful DCA candidate (MCP having merged with DP to form DCA) who stepped down for PPP. In 1963, both PPP and DCA agreed to invite UP to join the government coalition, thereby reinforcing PPP's power-sharing strategy. PPP's new strategy of limiting ethnic divisions prevented regionalism from becoming a factor of national division (Nyang 1974).

PPP therefore emerged after independence as the dominant party with significantly weakened Opposition parties. Since voters in the provinces outnumbered those in the capital city and surrounding areas by nearly five to one, PPP (with its support base in the provinces) became the overwhelmingly dominant party (Rice 1967; Hughes 1975). By 1965, UP began to decline as a strong Opposition Party, after the termination of its two-year coalition with PPP. UP disintegrated towards 1970 when its Secretary-General resigned and applied to join PPP. Two major UP candidates ran as PPP candidates in the 1972 elections. The former leader of MCP also joined PPP. The ruling party co-opted the top hierarchy of the opposition parties and gave them lucrative cabinet posts or other opportunities to improve their living conditions (Nyang 1974). These developments represented an incipient process of Opposition party co-option which had serious implications for the future of party politics in The Gambia.

The National Convention Party (NCP), founded in 1975 by Sherif Dibba, a Mandinka, soon became the major opposition party. Sherif Dibba had been a former high-ranking member of Dawda Jawara's cabinet, who left PPP after a conflict within the leadership. NCP's initial strength was based on its mobilization of discontented rural Mandinka, unhappy with PPP leader's neglect of their interests in favor of urban elites and other ethnic interests. Ideologically, there was little difference between PPP and

NCP; both were committed to capitalist development and liberal democracy, both favored a development strategy with heavy reliance on Western financing for development, and both supported government ownership of utilities and some productive enterprises (Wiseman 1985). NCP won 5 of the 34 seats in the 1977 election and only 2 in the 1982 election. In 1987, some recovery was made, when it obtained almost one-third of the votes cast, but won only 5 seats as it was in a close race with PPP and two newly-formed opposition parties (Tables 1 and 2). The Gambia People's Party (GPP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were PPP offshoots formed in the latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s. They received a small percentage of disaffected PPP voters, but were never strong challengers to PPP.

The most significant differences between Gambian parties emerged only in the late 1980s when the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS) emerged as an organization committed to radical socialism. The major characteristics of PDOIS' socialist ideology have been: Opposition to neo-liberal economic reforms, non-aligned position in international politics and sympathy to 'Third World' socialist States, and commitment to a powerful State apparatus controlling economic development (FOROYAA 1991-1992). PDOIS was the only voice of the Opposition that challenged PPP on a daily basis during its last few years in power. NCP maintained a low profile in the Opposition between 1988 and 1994. With PDOIS, there was for the first time a clear difference between the (capitalist) ruling party and the (socialist) Opposition.

Tables 1 and 2 below indicate that in all the elections held between 1966 and 1992, PPP was overwhelmingly dominant, consistently obtaining between 55 and 70 percent of the popular vote and an overwhelming majority of seats:

Table 1: General Election Results (%), 1966-1992

Parties	1966	1971	1977	1982	1987	1992
PPP	65.32	63.84	69.79	61.73	54.50	54.47
UP	33.37	15.69	*	2.88	*	1.43
DCA	**	----	----	----	----	----
GPP	----	----	----	----	15.50	7.96
NCP	----	----	27.87	19.65	28.83	21.00
PDP	----	----	----	----	----	4.81
PDOIS	----	----	----	----	1.05	2.72
Independent	1.31	20.56	2.34	15.74	0.12	7.60
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

* included in NCP totals

** included in UP total

*** included in UP/NCP votes

Source: This table was computed from the voting results published in *The Gambia News Bulletin*, 1966-1992 and *The Gambia Gazette*, 1966-1992.

Table 2: Seats Won By Political Parties in General Elections (1966-1992)

Parties	1966	1971	1977	1982	1987	1992
PPP	24	28	27	27	32	25
UP	8	4	2	----	----	----
DCA	----	----	----	----	----	----
GPP	----	----	----	----	----	----
NCP	----	----	5	3	4	6
PDP	----	----	----	----	----	----
PDOIS	----	----	----	----	----	----
Independent	----	----	----	5	----	3
TOTAL	32	32	34	35	36	36

Source: *Gambia Gazette*, 1966-1992.

Four political parties are now (in 2000) on the political scene in post-Jawara Gambia. The ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), led by (retired Captain) Yahya Jammeh, the United Democratic Party (UDP), led by prominent lawyer and Vice-Chairman of the Gambian Bar

Association, Ousainou Darboe, and the National Reconciliation Party (NRP), led by Hamat Bah, were all formed in 1996 in preparation for elections leading to the restoration of civilian rule. PDOIS, led by Sidia Jatta, is the only party from the Jawara era, all the others having been banned. With the exception of the socialist PDOIS, the other three parties were hardly different in policy positions or ideology. The incumbent President, Yahya Jammeh, advocated support for his programmes and pledged to continue the work he had begun during the transitional period. Table 3 indicates that in the 1996 Presidential election, APRC obtained 55.8 percent of the total votes, UDP, 35.8 percent, NRP, 5.5 percent, and PDOIS, 2.9 percent. The National Assembly elections followed in January 1997 and APRC continued to dominate the process, with 33 of the 45 contested seats. UDP won 7; NRP, 2; PDOIS, 1, and the independent candidates, 2. President Jammeh nominated another 4, thus bringing the total number of Members of Parliament (MPs) to 49 (Wiseman 1998:68-69).

Table 3: Votes and Seats won by Political Parties in the 1996 Presidential and 1997 National Assembly Elections

PARTIES	1996		1997	
	VOTES CAST	(%)	SEATS	(%)
APRC	220,011	55.8	33	52
UDP	141,387	35.8	7	34
NRP	21,759	5.5	2	2
PDOIS	11,337	2.9	1	8
Indep	N/A	0	2	4
TOTAL*	394,494	100	45	100

Source: Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC): Banjul, 1996, 1997.

The results of these elections showed continuity in the post-independence pattern of domination by the incumbent party (Tables 1 and 2). APRC captured from the Opposition approximately the same percentage of votes and seats, as did its predecessor. The 1996 Presidential and 1997 National Assembly elections returned The Gambia to the electoral context of the

Jawara era with regard to the level of support for the Opposition. Many Gambians did not believe that APRC 'won' these elections fairly (Wiseman 1998), but that did not reflect a change in credibility of the electoral process. The nature of this façade of competitive politics will be explored below.

The First Republic

State Limitations on Competitive Politics

In principle, competitive party politics existed in Jawara's Gambia. A wide range of parties was permitted to participate in a relatively open competition for State power. Governments were selected by elections based on secret balloting and universal adult suffrage. However, there was a one-party monopoly of State power centered around the dominant personality of Dawda Jawara. Power contenders were permitted to exist outside the political directorate as long as they did not threaten PPP's control of the State. The non-governing opposition parties were very weak and they all functioned under constant threat of being excluded from the political system or being declared subversive, once they seemed to threaten PPP. Opposition parties were allowed to exist to satisfy certain constitutional criteria for legitimacy and to provide a disarming façade of competition for State power. Competitive party politics tolerates sharp disagreement, opposition and dissent, but one-party dominant systems like Jawara's demanded unity in order to consolidate the power of the ruling PPP, which attempted to control many aspects of the democratic infrastructure in order to suppress the Opposition.

The Opposition was not given equal access to resources it needed to successfully challenge the People's Progressive Party. Specifically, there were charges that both the business classes (who depended on the government for contracts) and the PPP government would not provide financial assistance for the election campaigns of the Opposition, as they did not want to see a strong and effective Opposition². The PPP government was accused of preventing the Opposition from having equal opportunity to court the electorate in the contest for State power. While PPP's political programmes received headline coverage in the government-controlled

² Personal interview with three members of one of the Opposition parties. Banjul, July 25, 1991.

media, the Opposition had to pay for the announcement of the venue and time of its meetings. Besides, the Ministry of Information decided whether the announcement should be made or not. This practice obstructed the Opposition's democratic right to disseminate party information to the people. In the late 1980s, PDOIS set up *FOROYAA*, an alternative press medium of its own, which had very limited circulation in the capital city of Banjul and in neighbouring Serrekunda.

In contrast to the role played by the Opposition in many parliamentary democracies, The Gambia's Opposition has been powerless, with no access to State resources, no effective role in maintaining the democratic system, and is viewed with little respect in the political system. The electorate has realised this, so voting for the Opposition would be very difficult despite the shortcomings of the incumbent PPP. Why did some Gambians who opposed PPP continue to vote for it during elections? The answer frequently given was that PPP was chosen on Election Day by default³. There was a strong belief that the fragmented and weakened Opposition parties lacked the resources necessary to defeat the incumbent. Voting for an Opposition with no chance of victory against the incumbent made little sense to many Gambians.

Vote-buying was perhaps the most vexing problem in Gambian politics during the Jawara era. It was at the heart of the system that suppressed the Opposition and kept PPP in power for over three decades. Vote buying had been alleged by the Opposition and its supporters. While not accepting responsibility for any lapses in the democratic institutions in the society, the PPP government officials conceded that they had heard of cases where people sold their voter registration cards or some other vital resources⁴. An Opposition MP confirmed this:

During Presidential election campaigns, party activists dole out money to buy votes. People can buy voting cards. They take an Opposition Party's card and confiscate it and offer that potential voter a sum of money. In this way, it is ensured that the Opposition does not get the vote. Lots of inducements are offered during the election period⁵.

³ Personal interview with members of Church groups, market vendors, businessmen, lawyers, and domestic workers. Banjul, July 28, 1991.

⁴ Personal interview with a high-ranking Cabinet member of PPP. Banjul, July 15, 1992.

⁵ Personal interview with Opposition MP for Serrekunda, July 27, 1991.

The poor were faced with making the choice to sell their voters' card in exchange for resources needed for daily sustenance. Self-preservation under conditions of severe poverty seemed to be the most significant factor considered by many Gambians, as they accepted rice, money and other resources from politicians in exchange for their votes. Vote-buying was alleged in The Gambia even as far back as the 1962 elections, when MCP leader I. Garba-Jahumpa believed he lost his seat to the UP member because the latter paid for many of his votes (Rice 1967:336).

Voter registration was another issue that created a legitimacy problem for the competitive party system. It was a widely-held belief that the incumbent PPP mobilized illegitimate voters to ensure its victory in the polls. During more than three decades of PPP rule, voter registration lists were frequently challenged but the problems remained. The PPP government was unwilling to acknowledge that the flaws in the system of voter registration could have given it an unfair advantage over the Opposition. A senior electoral officer was asked to reflect on that problem. His response was very revealing:

A structure exists to challenge the voter registration list. If it is not correct, the court will strike these names from the list. The Opposition is making excuses because it has been unable to win a majority to form the government. If the PPP rigged all the elections, it would not have continuously been defeated in Serrekunda West and Bakau by NCP candidates⁶.

The structure that this electoral officer referred to was not perceived to be independent of the government. Many had little faith that judges, whose appointments were made by the government, would have the courage to hand down decisions that were not favourable to the government. In 1991, PDOIS went to court to challenge the voter registration lists in several constituencies, charging that approximately 10 percent of those registered to vote in Banjul did not live there. People were found to be registered under addresses such as the Mohammedan School, or Albert Market, where they could not reside. PDOIS' challenge was dismissed on a technicality, but it exposed the fact that the people who were not qualified to vote in certain areas were issued voting cards (*The Nation*, April 20, 1991).

⁶ Personal interview with a senior electoral officer. Electoral Office, Banjul, August 1991.

There were also charges that traditional authorities were co-opted by PPP and integrated into the machinery that suppressed the Opposition. The 'alkalo' (or village head) has a respected role in the Mandinka communities of The Gambia. The alkalo has had a clear administrative role in the post-colonial period. He collected local taxes on behalf of the area councils, facilitated the implementation of development projects and represented the village at district meetings. During PPP era, the alkalo served as a broker for the government, assigning voter registration cards to eligible voters. People in the community who were dependent on him (for resources he received from the central government in Banjul for community development), may not want to vote against the party of his choice, for fear of repercussions. The Opposition often accused the alkalo of fraudulent registration because of the role he played. In the words of an opposition MP, 'the main problem is in voter registration. The alkalo gives voting rights'⁷. Like the alkalo, many 'kabilos' (heads of lineage units) and 'seyfolus' (chiefs) have been used to mobilize support for the incumbent PPP. Davis *et al.* (1994:262) noted an opposition kabilo leader's explanation of the patronage networks favouring PPP supporters:

If resources come through government they tend to leave them with PPP supporters and at times there is friction. Some years ago, on the Food for Work Programme, the Opposition was never happy because the food wasn't shared properly. The policy is that the government operates through the alkalo. PPP people are informed about Food for Work—they select their own labourers and go and pick up the food from the divisional capital. They would be paid before distributing it. At every juncture, resources are diverted politically, right from the top. The minister gives resources to the commissioner and when he distributes it to the district and villages, it comes to the village and the PPP members benefit.

In the rural areas, Divisional Commissioners, Alkalos and Seyfolus were almost exclusively supporters of Jawara's PPP, thus creating a line of patronage extending from the central government down to the village level (Davis *et al.*, 1994).

⁷ Personal interview with Opposition MP. Serrekunda, July 27, 1991.

One-party dominant systems require control, co-optation and regulation of private and public centres of power in the political system (Stone 1980). In the post-aborted coup environment of 1981, PPP became increasingly authoritarian, placing curbs on expression and closely scrutinising the Opposition. The government won libel suits against prominent journalists and there were known incidents of independent press muzzling by the government. Independent newspapers were hard-pressed to survive because of the difficulty in obtaining income from advertising in a private sector closely allied with the ruling PPP. The government owned most of the newspapers and these tended not to report stories that would embarrass it. In the late 1980s, independent weeklies emerged, attempted to be aggressive and reported the shortcomings of PPP (e.g. *Foroyaa*, *Gambia Onward*, *The Observer*). The broadcast media consisted of three radio stations: one (Radio Gambia) was owned by the government and the other two (Radio Syd and Radio One) were privately owned purely commercial ventures. PPP government talked about establishing a television station but that did not materialise until 1995, after its removal from power. In a competitive party system, the tendency towards participatory politics (via issue articulation in the public domain) elevates the role of public opinion and encourages the development of mass media that generate a free flow of ideas on political events and issues. However, public opinion was not valued in Jawara's Gambia, as opposition and disagreement were discouraged. Participatory politics was limited in its expression to areas regulated by the State.

Political rights in the competitive party system are protected by the legal system and enforced by constitutional guarantees which guard against their violation. Individual freedoms are protected under the law, and there are clear limits to the power the State is able to exercise over the individual. Under the system of one-party domination in The Gambia, these forms of institutional protection of liberal democracy were absent. The strength of the executive branch (and the President specifically) came at the cost of ineffectual legislative and judicial branches. The influence of the legislative branch was limited as the dominant PPP had an overwhelming majority of parliamentary seats. Posts in the judicial branch were secured by appointment and those making the selection were part of the incumbent PPP government. The Judiciary was perceived as a tool of PPP, hence it could not guarantee the protection of individual rights.

The majority of Gambians may have valued the institutions of competitive party politics in place since independence. However, at the time PPP was removed from power, commitment to those institutions had declined to a low level. Many appeared to have lost faith in a government that was unable to show that a system based on competitive party politics could lead to benefits for the majority of the society. There was much cynicism and distrust of political leaders by the end of PPP rule.

The Politics of Economic Reform

One of the most marginal nations in the capitalist periphery at independence, The Gambia was incorporated into the world capitalist system as a supplier of agricultural exports (largely groundnuts) and more recently as a tourist resort area. Since independence, there has been little change in the structure of the economy, which remains very heavily dependent on groundnut production. Agriculture and tourism are the dominant sectors and also the main sources of foreign exchange, employment, and income for the country. Each sector respectively accounted for 23.1 percent and 12 percent of the GDP in 1990/1991 (Dieke 1994).

Modest rates of economic growth were achieved during the first decade after independence due to an increase in groundnut production. Production increased from 60,000 tons in 1960 to 125,000 tons in 1968/69 and a stable producer price was maintained. The value of the country's exports increased from £2.5 million in 1960 to £7.1 million in 1968/69; imports were generally in line with exports and the foreign exchange rate was relatively stable (Annual Economic Review 1970:20; Sallah 1990; World Bank 1985). The economy improved with an average annual growth rate of 4 per cent; inflation was low, foreign debt was small, the government's recurrent budget was balanced and foreign exchange reserves increased (Dieke 1994).

Thanks to the growing economy, the government introduced in the 1970s the policy of Gambianisation which led to an expansion of the State's role in the economy. There was a 75 percent increase in total government employment over the 1975-1980 period. The civil service personnel increased from 4,000 civil servants and 2,000 non-permanent staff in 1975 to 10,700 civil servants and 5,000 non-permanent staff in 1985 (Hadjimichael *et*

al, 1992:19). The public and parastatal sector expanded to the point where it was involved in almost every economic activity. There was much public sector capital investment in transport and communications. By 1975, the gap in income and access to essential facilities favoured the urban minority in Banjul, that enjoyed a per capita income four times that of the rural population. Public sector investment, which was geared mainly towards the urban areas, increased rapidly from 21 million Dalasis in 1975/76 to 45.3 million in 1976/77 and 93.6 million in 1977/78. There was an expansion of physical and social infrastructures and improvements in water supply, health facilities, education and welfare services in the urban areas surrounding Banjul. Development expenditures totaled 350 million Dalasis against the 175 million Dalasis originally projected. The first few years of the First Five-Year Plan (1975-1980) were marked by the rapid growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and of government revenues and external reserves as a result of the favourable situation in the groundnut sector, as well as the high export prices (*Gambia Weekly*, January 26, 1990, p.6). The educated middle classes and professionals in the urban area benefited from public sector expansion, as they did elsewhere in the post-independence period in many developing nations.

The government encountered severe economic problems midway into the Second Five-Year Plan (1981/82-1985/86) and abandoned it. Under this plan, there was a shift in priorities away from physical infrastructure to emphasis on productive sectors like Agriculture, which witnessed an increase in allocations, receiving 30 percent of the projected expenditure. Ceilings were imposed on development expenditure and bans were placed on commercial loans while imports were given low priority. The drought in the Sahel reduced agricultural outputs, the price of groundnuts declined on the international market, international prices for oil escalated along with the public sector expansion and all these factors contributed to major economic crises in the Gambian economy. The country was almost bankrupt as the economy virtually came to a halt (Sallah 1990). The government faced serious shortages of foreign exchange, deficits in fiscal and external accounts, stagnant productive sectors, high inflation and high unemployment rates, etc.

In 1985, foreign payment arrears totaled US\$114 million, approximately 60 percent of the country's GDP. The Gambia could not meet its debt service obligations, especially to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and was forced to cancel the Stand-By Agreement signed with IMF in 1984 (McPherson and Radelet 1991:117-120).

From 1985-1990, the government implemented an IMF-sponsored Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). A Sustainable Development Programme (SDP) followed the ERP and was in place until 1994. The ERP was designed to reverse economic decline, curtail inflation, boost annual real GDP growth by 3.3 percent, create a viable volume of official foreign exchange reserves, reduce external arrears and normalise relations with creditors (World Bank 1989; Sallah 1990). To meet those objectives, the following policies were adopted: liberalisation of price and marketing structures; stringent discipline on demand management through appropriate monetary, fiscal, exchange rate and external debt policies; reforming public enterprises to improve their efficiency, profitability and accountability; reducing the size and scope of government; reforming the civil service; improving the allocation and productivity of resources through differential remunerations according to skills and performance; developing the country's human resources, and strengthening the financial tax system (Sallah 1990).

In the context of giving priority to IMF demands of cutting capital expenditures, heavy emphasis was laid on reducing public expenditure in order to eliminate budget deficits. Expenditures on social services, agriculture and public works were the most significantly cut, and were about half of their pre-ERP levels in 1988/89 (Jabara 1994:320). Between March 1986 and July 1986, 2,624 temporary or daily paid workers were retrenched and 459 established posts removed; 700 civil servants with established posts were retrenched and 700 vacant posts were suppressed (Budget Speech, June 15, 1990). The government had promised to cut expenditures on the civil service to improve educational and health services, but no additional resources were spent on these areas up to the 1989/90 budget, as fiscal discipline was urged. However, budget deficits still remained throughout the ERP; in 1985/86, the deficit was 72 million Dalasis and it increased to 169 million Dalasis in 1990/91 (Budget Speech, June 15, 1990).

Consumer prices doubled during the ERP. Elimination of subsidies on the price of foodstuffs such as groundnut oil, beef, and eggs, allowed the prices to rise in response to the market. Prices of government-supplied services such as health, electricity, water and public transport escalated and import tariffs on petroleum products were raised as the government tried to increase its revenues. Energy prices tripled and the price of energy products increased significantly. Government-fixed prices for water rose by 60 percent from July 1986 to July 1988, and bus fares increased by 100 percent from April 1986 to October 1988 (Jabara 1994:316). Real income for workers in the urban sector was reduced over the 1985-1994 period as they struggled to deal with pressures of economic reform. Living standards of urban residents and the poor deteriorated because of soaring prices and the removal of subsidies. Poverty increased in the society while a tiny elite connected to the State continued to accumulate wealth through corruption.

Under the ERP, money-seeking opportunities became more abundant, and many private businessmen and public officials turned to illegal means to make profit. Corruption created a serious legitimacy crisis for PPP. Several cases of corruption were revealed and these seriously indicted the PPP regime. The Gambia Commercial Development Bank (GCDB) collapsed, and this was largely due to its failure to collect loans. An Assets Management and Recovery Corporation (AMRC) was set up under an Act of Parliament in 1992, but the PPP government was not willing to use its influence to assist AMRC in its recovery exercise. This was particularly embarrassing because the people/organizations with the highest loans were close to PPP. The government's attitude towards AMRC influenced the public's perception of its unwillingness to deal with corrupt practices of party supporters who owed money to the State. U.S.A. withheld several million dollars of aid money and made disbursement contingent on AMRC recovering the sum of 37, 254,000 Dalasis it had set itself to collect by the end of 1994. Not unexpectedly, AMRC failed to meet its target (Yeebo 1995).

In an embezzlement scheme at the Gambia Co-operatives Union (GCU), fraud was revealed in Customs (McNamara and McPherson 1995), and through the process of privatisation it was discovered that many dummy loans were given to well-connected individuals at GCDB (McPherson and Radelet 1995:11). A group of parastatal heads and big

businessmen closely associated with PPP (nicknamed the 'Banjul Mafia'), were seen as most responsible for corruption in the public sector (Sallah 1990:643-644). Driven to make profit, many elites did not refrain from manipulating State power to maintain a lifestyle of wealth and privilege. Corruption had become a serious problem in The Gambia, especially during the last two years of the PPP rule.

Implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms has been difficult in Sub-Saharan Africa⁸. Its negative effects have impacted disproportionately on the urban poor in the society. Within the one-party dominant system, PPP was able to implement economic reforms without being undermined by the Opposition parties. As organizations within civil society were few, weak and not independent of the government, PPP was not undermined by interest groups (Perfect 1986). Reducing the public sector workforce went against the interests of civil servants and State bureaucrats, many of whom lost their jobs. Some of them had sufficient capital to set up their own businesses and took advantage of the new opportunities offered through privatisation. The former Managing Director of The Gambia Port Authority (GPA) became owner of a privatised dockyard. The former Director of GCDB became Managing Director of a foreign exchange bureau. By incorporating these critical urban supporters into activities supervised by the government, their Opposition to its economic reform policies was neutralised.

The resultant 'politics of non-confrontation' led many scholars to suggest that domestic consensus on the government's economic reforms may have been achieved (Radelet 1992; McPherson and Radelet 1995; Wiseman 1996; Cooke and Hughes 1997). Was this really a 'politics of non-confrontation' or a 'politics of suppression?' How was PPP able to stay in power for almost three decades and remain unable to improve the standard of living of the Gambian people? How did PPP prevent political conflict

⁸The literature on this subject is extensive. For a variety of perspectives on the difficulties of implementing adjustment policies, see the World Bank study—*Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead* (1994); Thomas Callaghy and John Ravenhill, eds., *Hemmed In: Responses To Africa's Economic Decline* (1993); Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, eds., *Governance and Politics in Africa* (1992); Jennifer Widner, ed., *Economic Change and Political Liberalization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1994); Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (1997).

generated by price increases in the urban areas? Conversations with Gambians over the 1990-1993 period indicated that there was growing dissatisfaction among many sectors in the urban areas over the fact that economic hardships had not been erased, while government ministers' salaries and perks had been increased⁹. Dissent was suppressed because of the absence of powerful independent media and autonomous interest groups, demobilized and weak unions, and paralysed Opposition parties. Public debate on economic reforms was discouraged, as PPP did not want to create a contentious environment in which its support would further diminish. It would not engage in debates with PDOIS, the only Opposition party that was critical of its neo-liberal policies.

Living standards of the rural population fell behind those of their urban counterparts throughout the 1980s. The reduction of budget allocations to many of the government departments operating in rural areas under the ERP was largely responsible for this (Ahmed *et al.*, 1992). During periods of critical food shortages in 1989, over 75 percent of rural Gambians were not consuming enough food to meet minimum caloric requirements (Ahmed *et al.*, 1992:ix). Health delivery systems deteriorated to the point where horse-drawn carts were reportedly used as ambulances in certain villages (FOROYAA, August 12, 1992:6). Villagers perceived non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as key agencies in the development process at the village level. During the ERP period, villagers looked to NGOs for assistance as they had little faith left in the government. NGOs were very effective in providing water, health centres, credit schemes, day care centres, adult literacy classes, skills development initiatives, horticultural projects and other income-generating activities for the rural population. NGO-funded schools and health care centers were used more than those that the government provided, as they were said to have better equipment and did not suffer from shortage of drugs and basic medical provisions. By the beginning of the 1980s, NGOs and international charity groups collaborated with the State, assumed the latter's developmental role and provided most of the development initiatives in the rural areas (Davis *et al.*, 1994; Yeebo 1995).

⁹ Personal interviews and conversations with many Gambians. Banjul, Bakau, Serrekunda. July and August, 1990, 1991, 1992.

The Gambia's economic reform programme has often been cited as one of the most successful among Sub-Saharan African countries in the 1980s. The reason was that budgetary targets were achieved, credit policy restraint was maintained, real GDP grew by 3.3 percent between 1986 and 1993, inflation hovered around a mere 5-7 percent, and the gross foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank improved (Jabara 1994; McPherson and Radelet 1995). But, given its rising population growth rate at 4.1 percent, income per capita had not grown (UNDP 1997:3). The country's external debt (which was responsible for the moderate growth levels in the economy) had risen from US\$100 million in 1979 to over US\$350 million in 1988. By 1996, debt service obligations accounted for 34 percent of the government's budget. This constrained public sector savings and weighed heavily on the economy (Jabara 1994).

An improvement in the country's macroeconomic indicators under neo-liberal economic reforms was meaningless if the standard of living of the majority of the Gambian people remained as low as it was for more than three decades. The Gambia's dismal social indicators are revealing: by 1992, The Gambia was still one of the poorest countries in Africa and the world, with a 45-year life expectancy at birth, an infant mortality rate of 130 per 1,000 live births, a child mortality rate of 292 per 1,000 and an under-five mortality rate of 227 per 1,000; 120 out of every 1,000 live births died of malaria; other aspects were 75 percent illiteracy rate, 40 percent of the population having access to potable water supply and over 75 percent of the population living in absolute poverty (ECA 1993). The country had 2 hospitals, 20 health centres and 30 village health posts for a population of about 1.4 million people (Yeebo 1995). At the same time, the political elite and its allies had access to expensive and secluded homes, good schools for their children, good health care, private doctors and overseas travel. This was the profile during the years leading to the military coup d'état of 1994.

In discussions on the relative failures and successes of The Gambia in the era of political independence, the issue of development is at the heart of all concerns. Among ordinary Gambians, the priority emphasis has been on hopes for economic and material gains. Expectations of improvement in the standard of living for the majority were not realised. Structural adjustment programmes implemented in response to the economic crisis resulted in

government fragmentation, privatization, less patronage in co-opting various groups and growing corruption. The 29-year PPP regime operated with diminished resources and therefore could no longer rule as it always did. The credibility of the competitive party system was severely challenged as Jawara's PPP was unable to show that good economic management could lead to benefits for the majority of the society.

Military Interlude

Since independence, the military has played a more significant role in African politics than in any other segment of the State. In most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, the military seized power in the 1960s and 1970s. The Gambia had no army following the 1958 decision by the British Colonial Administration to place Gambian security in the hands of a small paramilitary Field Force and the Police Force. In 1981, a mixed group of lower rank members of the paramilitary Field Force and discontented urban youth staged a coup d'état while President Jawara was in London attending the royal wedding of Prince Charles. Senegal came to The Gambia's assistance, put down the coup-makers and restored the PPP government to power (Wiseman 1981; Hughes 1991).

PPP's response to the crisis of the 1981 attempted coup d'état was largely focused on security and increasing the State's coercive apparatus, as regime survival became an urgent priority. The government did not seize the opportunity to grapple with the issue of eradicating poverty in the society. Instead, the attempted coup was blamed on external forces linked to potential internal enemies. President Jawara immediately imposed martial law, arrested and detained thousands of Gambians, as the government expanded the powers of the State. The decision not to have an army was immediately reversed. The Police Force and the Paramilitary Field Force were no longer seen as adequate security. The latter was disbanded and the Gambia National Army (GNA) and a Mobile Police Force were subsequently created in response to the coup and based on the requirements of the Defence Protocol of the Treaty establishing the Senegambian Confederation and the Confederal Army. Nigerian military assistance was sought, following the expiration of the agreement for technical assistance

and training by the British Army Training Team and the dissolution of the Senegambia Confederation in 1989 (Wiseman 1996).

With the creation of the GNA, the military became a new power contender in the political system. The military's political influence was increased, as evidenced by the increase in size and allocations from a percentage of the national budget. The 1988/89 budget showed rapid military growth; there was a 102 percent increase in military spending, debt servicing and external affairs while, in contrast, education received a mere 25 percent increase and expenditure on agriculture reduced (Sallah 1990:645). By 1994, the GNA had 800 soldiers. The security threat posed by the aborted coup was advanced as the major justification for an expanded army. The political system became less secure from within, as Opposition parties became more marginalized and the military gained more strength. The strengthened army was a potential threat to the security of the civilian government as it became a new power contender with the ability to seize power in the one-party dominant system.

On July 22, 1994, the GNA led by Lt. Yahya Jammeh overthrew the Jawara-led PPP government that had been in power for three decades. The immediate issues, which seemed to have sparked off the coup d'état surrounded grievances within the military with regard to the appointment of Nigerians to senior command positions, late salary payments and poor living conditions in the barracks, and displeasure over increased corruption, especially within the senior ranks of the Army (Radelet and McPherson 1995a; Wiseman 1996). Yahya Jammeh allegedly had a personal grievance against President Jawara for transferring him from his position as Commander of the Presidential Guard after only four months, disarming and returning him to the barracks a day before the coup (Wiseman 1996).

The 1994 GNA coup d'état easily succeeded because there was no resistance from both domestic and external sources. Media reports suggested that the coup d'état was greeted with enthusiasm by many Gambians, including some PPP supporters (Da Costa 1995). The public response was a very complex one. It was neither an endorsement of military rule, nor necessarily empathy with the grievances of the military. It appeared to have more to do with support for the idea that PPP had finally been removed. Certain segments of the urban professional classes were deeply

disturbed by the shift to military rule and they urged the military to make a quick transition back to civilian rule (Wiseman 1996). Neither Senegal, Nigeria nor any other country in the region offered assistance. U.S.A. refused to intervene directly, but allowed the deposed President, his family and ministers to take refuge on a U.S. naval ship. They subsequently landed in Senegal, where they were granted political asylum.

Promising to be 'soldiers with a difference', the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC), consisting of Lts. Jammeh, Hydrara, Sighatey (Yankouba Touray later joined) set up The Gambia's first military government. The military leaders thought that their undemocratic seizure of power would be legitimized if they played on public disaffection for the overthrown regime. The primary reason given for the coup d'état was that the PPP government was steeped in rampant corruption. Days before the coup, the economic difficulties in the country had also been of grave concern. Several hundreds of civil servants were laid off as part of PPP's efforts to reduce its budget. Electricity, water and basic services were privatised, with high costs for consumers. School and hospital fees also tripled.

While promising that a dictatorship would not be imposed in the country, the AFPRC members clearly demonstrated that they were not 'soldiers with a difference'. Like all military officers who seize power, they suspended the Constitution, banned all political parties and imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Furthermore, they arrested political opponents and banned the Press. Editors of *FOROYAA* were arrested and charged with engaging in political propaganda contrary to Section 5 (1) and punishable under Section 5 (2) of the Political Activities Suspension Decree No. 4 (*Daily Observer*, September 15, 1994:1, 10). The Liberian founder of *The Daily Observer* was deported; the newspaper continued to exist but in a hostile atmosphere. Why would this authoritarian government be expected to create an environment conducive to democratic rule?

AFPRC lacked its own economic programme and vision, but was committed to continuing the neo-liberal policies of the civilian regime it had replaced. Like PPP, it envisioned eliminating poverty in The Gambia by trickling down economic benefits to the majority of the population, economic benefits derived from a dynamic free market and export-oriented

economy. AFPRC presented a 'Vision 2020' proposal aimed at transforming The Gambia within twenty-five years 'into a financial centre, a tourist paradise, a trading, export-oriented agricultural and manufacturing nation thriving on free-market policies and a vibrant private sector sustained by a well-educated, trained, skilled, healthy, self-reliant and enterprising population, and guaranteeing a well-balanced eco-system and a decent standard of living for one and all, under a system of government based on the consent of the citizenry' (Gambia 1996:ix).

This economic plan could not get off the ground because of the aid suspensions protesting the removal of PPP and continuous pressure to end the military rule. As one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world, The Gambia has had one of the highest level of per capita external aid in Sub-Saharan Africa, averaging about US\$95 per person from 1992 to 1994 (UNDP 1997b:27). Major financial supporters of the deposed civilian government suspended aid and imposed other penalties on the military regime. Japan suspended aid, the European Union cut its assistance by half and, on instructions from Washington, the Financial and Private Enterprise Project, the Banjul International Airport Phase II Expansion Project and the Women's Horticultural Project were all suspended (*Daily Observer*, September 15, 1994:1, 10). Britain, Sweden and Denmark discouraged their citizens from visiting The Gambia, advising them that it was an 'unsafe' destination. Tourist numbers for 1994-1995 dropped to around one-third of the figures for 1993-1994 and this caused the closure of many hotels and high unemployment among workers in tourist-related occupations. The aid suspensions, combined with the shortfall in earnings from tourism, created an economic crisis for the military regime. Under pressure, it sought alternative sources in Libya and Taiwan while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia continued their assistance. However, these sources of aid could not fill the vacuum created by the suspensions from the U.S.A., Britain, Japan and the European Union (Wiseman 1996).

AFPRC was forced to address the issue of restoring civilian rule if it expected any relief from the economic difficulties caused by Western aid suspensions. It revised to two years its initial four-year Transitional Programme aimed at restoring civilian rule in 1998. In March 1995, the government reluctantly established a Task Force to oversee the

implementation of the transitional programme. While addressing the concerns of international donors, the Transitional Programme allegedly had 'to ensure that a comprehensive system of democratic governance in The Gambia will attain national progress and sustain human development' (UNDP 1997:13). The developmental objective of this governance programme was 'to establish and strengthen democratic and administrative institutions and processes with a view to promoting popular participation, especially that of women, and accountability in a democratic system of government. This specifically entailed strengthening the government's policy-making capacity, reinforcing participatory democracy, decentralising authority and responsibility, restructuring public administrative institutions and strengthening the judicial system' (UNDP 1997:13). The government's objective was to be achieved through a strategy focusing on six inter-related sub-programmes:

- Reform of Parliamentary Structures and Processes
- Institutional Arrangements for Civic Education
- Reform of the Legal and Judicial Processes
- Public Management and Administrative Reform
- Local Government and Decentralisation of Powers, and
- Popular Participation.

The Transitional Programme was to be implemented in two phases: Phase One included activities leading to the return to democratic constitutional rule and Phase Two was to address the medium- and long-term aspects of good governance by strengthening government institutions and promoting popular participation. This second phase was targeted for implementation later, during the Second Republic (UNDP 1997b:13).

The Gambia's traditional donors gave financial support to the Transitional Programme. However, they had a limited concern: an end to the military rule, completion of multiparty elections and restoration of the formal institutions of liberal democracy. For several months, international donors put pressure on the military government to implement a Transitional Programme, but they did not insist that the process leading to the transition must be democratic. Yahya Jammeh was not accountable to anyone. He had

complete control over the transitional programme and process. He appointed a 23-member National Consultative Committee (NCC) to examine the transitional timetable and a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) to conduct open hearings designed to encourage public participation in the preparation of the new Constitution. Much of the public debate reportedly centred on the question of legal minimum age for presidential candidates. The minimum age of 30 was subsequently adopted, regardless of what may have been advocated. The CRC's findings were not made public until three months after they were submitted to the AFPRC (Wiseman 1996). The process was not 'transparent'. Yahya Jammeh had no intention of complying with the recommendations made by the public. He wanted to stay in power and therefore manipulated the constitutional review process which led to the adoption of an age that made him eligible to contest the elections.

AFPRC approached the transition in a very half-hearted way. The new Constitution and arrangements for elections were slowly announced. Moreover, there were also many features that were designed to discourage broad-based participation. First, the deposit required from parliamentary candidates was increased from D200 to D2,500 and for presidential candidates from D2,500 to D3,500 (D=dalasi; 9D=US\$1.00). If a candidate did not get 40 percent of votes cast, his deposit would be lost. The cost of participating in a national election therefore precluded all but the wealthiest (Wiseman 1996). Secondly, AFPRC appointed all the members of the Provisional Independent Electoral Commission (PIEC), a group entrusted with electoral reforms. This group did not have autonomy: it was under the authority of Yahya Jammeh and AFPRC and could not challenge the military's undemocratic decision to ban all political parties and persons who served in public office in the Jawara era. Elections cannot be free and fair with the political Opposition banned from competition. This attack on the Opposition should have been condemned by a truly independent Electoral Commission. It was condemned by some of the international donors, but further aid was not suspended. Thirdly, the issue of term limit was salient in a population concerned about Jawara staying in power for three decades. In the 1970 Constitution, term limit was absent and the new Constitution lacked any reference to it. This omission was not accidental, for it reinforced the fact that Jammeh wished to stay in power for a long time and did not want

the Constitution to get in his way. The omission left open the possibility for continued one-party domination in The Gambia. Given the authoritarian climate in the country under the military regime, it was surprising that international donors expected the military to preside over a transition programme leading to democratic rule.

On August 8, 1996, a referendum was held and it was stated that 70 percent of the registered voters approved a new Constitution (UNDP 1997b). The Constitution was subsequently adopted and the ban on political parties was partially lifted. The three major parties of the Jawara era (PPP, NCP and GPP), and anyone who held a ministerial position in the last thirty years were barred not only from participating in the transitional process, but also from holding public office for several years afterwards. The banning of the main political parties as well as former ministers undermined the democratic climate that was sought. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group protested, but the military government stuck to its position and insisted that those banned from participating were dealt with as such in accordance with recommendations of NCC and the Commissions of Enquiry, bodies that were under AFPRC authority. Rather than condemning the banning of the parties, the Jammeh-appointed PIEC advised supporters of the banned persons and parties that they could regroup to form a new party.

Yahya Jammeh resigned from the Army so that he could stand as a candidate in the Presidential Election of 26 September 1996. Resignation was necessary as the new Gambian electoral law banned soldiers from standing as candidates in elections. As the 30-year old Jammeh had changed the age requirement for presidential candidates in the 1996 Constitution to age 30, there was nothing standing in the way to his victory in the polls. Limited campaigning was done in the weeks leading to the election. Jammeh focused on his two-year record, suggesting that he had achieved more during his time than President Jawara had done in three decades. With the support of funds from external donors, the Jammeh-led military government built miles of new roads, established a TV station, established new schools and built several new hospitals. The streets of the capital city of Banjul were cleaned up and this won Jammeh a great deal of support from the urban residents. Jammeh emphasised continued economic growth reflecting the increase in The Gambia's foreign exchange reserves from

US\$90 million in June 1995 to US\$112 million in March 1996 (*West Africa*, October 21-27, 1996). There were no reported debates among the four contenders: Yahya Jammeh, Ousainou Darboe, Hamat Bah and Sidia Jatta.

Pushed by external pressures to restore civilian rule within a competitive party system, Jammeh took action that accommodated their interests as well as his own. The outcome of the elections should not have come as a surprise to those familiar with the transitional process. The Chairman of PIEC declared Yahya Jammeh of APRC winner, Ousainou Darboe second, Hamat Bah third, and Sidia Jatta fourth. With the elections behind him, Yahya Jammeh dissolved AFPRC, and continued to lead the government of The Gambia under a party with a new name—APRC. The post-September 1996 period has been widely regarded as the beginning of The Gambia's Second Republic.

Military Rule: Phase two or The Second Republic?

There is little reason for optimism that a democratic political culture can evolve in The Gambia's Second Republic as the transitional programme had its roots in authoritarian military rule. Yahya Jammeh organised the programme, presided over the transition, contested the elections after manipulating the Constitution and won the elections. This process was neither free nor fair and cannot possibly lead to a democratic climate.

Bent on maintaining himself in power, like Ghana's Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings and General Ibrahim Mainassara in Niger, Captain Yahya Jammeh conveniently resigned from the military and became a civilian so that he could bypass the new election rules banning soldiers from office. Like Rawlings and Mainassara, Yahya Jammeh secured an 'electoral victory'. Can this transition from AFPRC to APRC be recognised as a restoration of civilian rule? The 'soldier-turned-civilian' model of civilian leadership can bind the military to the State and thus immortalise the military agenda. The Jammeh government did not announce a strategy for political subordination of the military in The Gambia. Instead, Yahya Jammeh announced, in his 1999 Budget Speech, that his government was involved in the reorganisation of the Armed Forces and the expansion of its roles and functions, particularly in the areas of territorial defence and security maintenance. There is no evidence that APRC intended to put the military

under civilian control. There is no external pressure on Jammeh to do so, although civilian control of the military is as vital to democratic governance in Africa as the holding of elections. Expanding the role and functions of the military is contradictory to keeping the military under civilian control, unless the objective is to keep Jammeh in power at the expense of the Opposition.

International donors and supporters of the APRC believed that Phase One of the Transitional Programme ended with the completion of presidential, legislative and local government elections but elections alone do not make a democracy. The electoral reforms have clearly not improved the level of representation of the Opposition in the National Assembly or in municipal government. If the electoral process had been democratised and the Opposition had not been suppressed, genuine competition should have increased the Opposition's level of representation. The Opposition's representation in the National Assembly remained stable from Jawara to Jammeh, indicating that the Opposition experienced little growth. Both leaders' attitude towards the Opposition was similar. They were both unwilling to tolerate a strong Opposition. Gambian political history showed that it has been extremely difficult to establish a major opposition party since the older political parties with a relatively long history were banned from participating in the transitional elections. There was no chance for the newly-created parties with short histories of perhaps several months. Not only did their leaders not have national recognition; they also did not have a broad base developed through a process of party institutionalisation. PDOIS, a leftist party, has been very weak nationally. Although it has had a longer history than the other three parties, its support is very limited and has been restricted to intellectuals in the urban areas of Banjul and Serrekunda. Realising that PDOIS did not have much popular support, had never won a single seat in any elections, and certainly could not be a serious contender in the elections, the military government allowed it to participate.

The transitional process did not provide the opening necessary for the success of Opposition parties in The Gambia. There is still a relationship between party and government, whereby the incumbent party gets financial benefits through the government. For example, during the presidential campaign, APRC had access to Army troops who carried out many activities

for Jammeh's campaign. The incumbent's monopolisation of government resources provided it with a reward system unattainable by the other parties. Opposition parties do not have access through the legislative branch to rewards for their leaders and supporters. Can these newly-created opposition parties sustain themselves beyond the transitional elections, given their lack of access to government finances? To capture an overwhelming majority of the electorate, Opposition leaders have to be populist in their appeal (yet, they are ideologically centrist), significantly different from the incumbent, with a programme calling for radical changes that would transform the society and improve living conditions for the majority of the population. The transitional elections indicated the possibility of continued one-party hegemony, as the pattern of electoral competition did not deviate from that of the Jawara period.

APRC seemed to be committed to economic liberalisation more than to political liberalisation. It has been involved in a three-year (1998-2000) IMF Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) Programme. The government qualified for \$157 million in the form of Special Drawing Rights from multilateral and bilateral sources. IMF conditionality required that the government accepted a macroeconomic programme of adjustment and stability to achieve a growth rate of 7.5 percent per annum for the three-year period. Another condition was that the budget deficit be reduced from 7.4 percent of GDP in 1997 to 4.6 percent in 1998, 3.4 percent in 1999 and 1.9 percent in 2000 in order to maintain inflation at 3 percent (Budget Speech 1999). Reduction of the budget deficit was a critical conditionality.

As a result of the government's acceptance of the ESAF Programme, it reportedly received pledges of US\$25 million from IMF as balance of payments support, \$10.8 million from African Development Bank for education and civil service reform, US\$5.5 million from UNDP for use in health, education, governance and economic management, US\$8.3 million from UNICEF for health and education programmes, US\$4.5 million from UNFPA for its population programme, US\$5.5 million from WHO for its health programme, US\$3.1 million from WFP for the school-feeding programme, US\$16 million from the World Bank for economic management and budgetary support, US\$1.5 million from the Italian

government for health programmes, US\$6 million from U.S.A. (to be granted through CRS) for health and education and US\$8.4 million from the European Commission for budgetary support and education. The United Kingdom and IDB gave firm pledges and indicated specific areas for future intervention (Budget Speech 1999).

In his quest to maintain considerable foreign financial support, Jammeh has cautiously pursued economic reforms within the strict guidelines suggested by the multilateral and bilateral donors. For this, he has been rewarded with huge amounts of financial aid from various sources. In 1998, out of a total of D290.6 million in development expenditure, grants were D109.5 million, external loans were D127.6 million and GLF, D53.5 million. The fiscal deficit in 1998, including grants, was 5.3 percent of the GDP, and 7.2 percent if grants were excluded. Foreign borrowing helped to reduce the deficit, but it increased the government's external debt. In 1998, debt servicing payments totaled D333 million, or 27 percent of the total expenditure. Of this amount, interest payments accounted for D234.7 million, thus representing 21 percent of the total expenditure (Budget Speech 1999).

Aid from external donors has not always been used judiciously by the Jammeh government. The building of Arch 22 in the centre of Banjul to celebrate the military's coming to power at a reported cost of US\$1.5 million, was an outrage. The Jammeh government has not been corruption-free despite its public pronouncements against corruption during the Jawara era. With the assistance of the governments of Sierra Leone and Ghana, Commissions of Enquiry were set up to investigate corruption during the Jawara era (Wiseman 1996). However, the Jammeh government also had the shadow of corruption around it in the early years of the military regime. Ousmane Ceesay, the Finance Minister, was found murdered in 1995, and it was widely believed that this resulted from his discovery of dubious financial dealings of members of the Jammeh government. An exiled Captain Jallow released details of the regime's corruption including Jammeh's personal Swiss bank account number, allegedly given to Captain Jallow to deposit a loan amount of more than \$3 million from China. In response to charges of corruption, Jammeh accused Captain Jallow of running away with \$3 million of government money. The Jammeh government has been found guilty of the

very same corruption for which it condemned the Jawara government and the primary justification given to the public for removing the Jawara government. Jammeh's government had the extraordinary privileges it accused the Jawara regime of securing. Huge salaries and perks continued as it did under Jawara. Jammeh's salary was reportedly higher than Dawda Jawara's after thirty years in power.

The continued dependence on foreign funding showed no movement of the economy away from the characteristics of the Jawara era. The main focus has been on maintaining the previous orientation towards export-led development. In that regard, several miles of new roads connecting the capital to the provinces, and new bridges, were completed in 1999 to support socio-economic development efforts. Preparation for free trade and export processing zones have been under way. Three important Fishery Projects have been scheduled for implementation in both the urban and rural areas. The aim is to guarantee food security and develop this export sector as a major foreign exchange earner. There has been continued emphasis on tourism as a foreign exchange earner. Tourist arrivals have increased since 1995 and in 1998 tourism contributed at least 18 percent of the GDP. To strengthen the private sector, the Companies, Partnership and Business Registration Acts have been introduced to guide its operations (Budget Speech 1999). This should lead to more openness and accountability in the business environment.

Public enterprises contributed 18 percent of GDP in 1998, and was estimated to reach 20 percent of GDP in 1999. Out of the total estimated government revenue of D979.5 million for 1998, public enterprises contributed D68.1 million. With a total workforce of 3,817, the public enterprise sector has been the second largest employer after the government (Budget Speech 1999). Rather than abandoning public enterprises, which Western lending agencies almost always perceive as inefficient and wasteful of scarce resources in developing nations, the government has expressed a willingness to reform them. A Memorandum of Understanding has been introduced to ensure that public enterprises meet their fiscal obligations to the government and at the same time contribute to the country's development efforts. As a constitutional requirement, their performance record must be presented to the Public Accounts Committee of the National

Assembly after their accounts have been audited (Budget Speech 1999). Economic liberalisation only occurred to a point, and then stopped. Like most Sub-Saharan Africa governments pressured to carry out neo-liberal economic reforms, the Jammeh government has maintained a relatively large public sector, as the latter still remains the basis of political control in the society.

Generally speaking, the Gambian economy presents a mixed performance over the five-year period since the 1994 coup d'état. Macroeconomic stability may have been achieved with respect to inflation, exchange rate, reserves holdings and fulfilment of debt-servicing obligations but this increased the fiscal deficit from 0.3 percent in 1995 to 1.4 percent in 1997. Borrowing tripled from D324 million in 1995 to D1.025 billion by 1999, increasing debt servicing from 17 percent to 28 percent of government revenues (Budget Speech, 1999). At the same time, GDP was estimated at D637 million in 1998, thus reflecting a real growth rate of 5.4 percent over the 5.1 percent for 1997. Despite this growth, the figure for agriculture declined by about 25.2 percent due to a 48.2 percent decrease in the fisheries sub-sector. Total domestic credit deteriorated by 22.6 percent from a surplus of D39.06 million at the end of September 1997 to D30.23 million at the end of September 1998. Over the 1997-1999 period, total trade was estimated at D1.92 billion in 1997, D2.62 billion in 1998 and D2.75 billion in 1999. Exports increased by D171 million, imports increased by 32.8 percent to D2.36 billion. The re-export trade accounted for 25 percent of total exports. The trade balance deficit further increased by 39 percent, from D1.62 billion in 1997 to D2.01 billion, in 1998 (Budget Speech 1999).

Prospects For Democratic Future

In this paper, I have argued, contrary to most expressed views, that throughout the post-independence period—from Jawara's three decades in power to the present (2000) Jammeh-led APRC government—The Gambia had a democratic façade anchored on one-party domination. One-party domination has been sustained by the incumbent using State resources and various control mechanisms to stay in power: suppressing the Opposition, rigging elections and altering the Constitution. The central questions I raise, in

the context of the future, are: What are the explanations for the failure of democracy to take root in the Jawara era? How strong and stable are the forces for authoritarian one-party domination?

The institutional failure of a stable and genuine multiparty system to take root presents one of the most serious challenges to democratic politics in The Gambia. The causes of its failure to take root can be attributed to a combination of political and economic factors: an inappropriate electoral system of representation based on the winner-take-all principle, a narrow distribution of power, suppression of the Opposition, absence of strong civil society associations, a development strategy favouring domestic elite and external interests and the failure to effectively subordinate the military to civilian direction.

The forces which favour authoritarianism and one-party domination are as strong now as they were in the Jawara era. First, the uneven playing field has been unchanged, thereby favouring the incumbent party, giving it continuous advantage in securing State resources to out-compete the Opposition and to co-opt the opposition party leaders and supporters. Secondly, the fractionalised and almost ideologically uniform opposition parties, weak civil society associations and limited independent media, have all made it virtually impossible to mount effective dissent and/or accountability efforts at the national level. Thirdly, adult literacy, urbanisation, a large middle class and a large wage-earning sector are all social forces that tend to stimulate demands for democratic expression. The Gambia has still been relatively weak in all these social areas. Fourthly, the military has a strong political role: supporting the Jammeh administration. Through a dubious 'soldier-turned-civilian' transfer of power, Yahya Jammeh assumed the leadership of The Gambia within an electoral framework. Pushed by pressures from international donors, on whose support the regime critically depended, the process of democratisation became vital. The transfer of power to APRC has been widely recognised as undemocratic, unfree and unfair, but Yahya Jammeh has the military behind his administration. The international donors must realise that as long as he maintains himself in power primarily through military support, a shift away from authoritarianism in The Gambia is unlikely.

In light of the countervailing authoritarian forces mentioned above, can the democratic potential of the Opposition be realised? Can a climate for building democracy be created? This may not be possible in the short run. It may be necessary to have a political 'pact'¹⁰ between the elites in support of 'democratic rules of the game'. In many other former British colonies, ranging from Australia, New Zealand, Barbados and Jamaica, a formal role is assigned to the second largest party in Parliament, known as the 'loyal' Opposition, which plays an important role in the maintenance of democratic stability. In these countries, it is accepted that an Opposition party today can become the government party tomorrow. This has still not been accepted in many former British colonies in Africa, including The Gambia. It was for this reason that Dawda Jawara suppressed the Opposition, thereby making it possible for him to remain in power for three decades.

Can The Gambia afford to have another thirty years of one-party domination? Both the 1971 Constitution under Dawda Jawara and the 1996 Constitution presided over by Yahya Jammeh, lacked term limits for a President. The reason for this omission has to do with these leaders' unwillingness to foreclose their option of staying in power for a long time. The consequence of this omission is that if political leaders cannot meet the developmental needs of the population, the Gambian people will have no way of removing them. The Gambia should not be subjected to another thirty years of one-party domination and underdevelopment. This will result in more military coups, which have not benefited any country in Africa.

In the AFPRC's discussion on 'reforming electoral processes in the country', proportional representation ought to have been considered as an option to the 'first-past-the-post winner-take-all' system typical of the

¹⁰ Pact-making is a common feature of Latin American politics, whereby elite consensus is sought in formal agreements to achieve a desirable social order. Coalitions and alliances have been a strategy used by the dominant political elites in The Gambia since the early 1960s. If a durable and meaningful political order is to be built, some core agreements that set the rules of the game could be concluded. For a discussion on pact-making in Latin America, see among others, Rosario Espinal, *Dominican Republic: Electoralism, Pacts and Clientelism in the Making of a Democratic Regime*, pp.154-58 in Carlene J. Fiedie, ed., *Democracy in The Caribbean* (1994); Daniel Levine, *Venezuela: The Nature, Sources, and Prospects of Democracy*, pp. 247-89 in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, Seymour Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*. Vol. 4. (1989).

Westminster Model. At any rate, the Westminster Model's majoritarian method of plurality in single-member districts has led to a concentration of power in the hands of the victorious majority to the virtual exclusion of the losing group. Proportional representation and coalition with small parties could provide the Opposition with a means of defeating the incumbent and breaking the one-party hegemony. Moreover, proportional representation should eliminate the problems of districting and partisan manipulation¹¹. The consequences of the 'first-past-the-post' system will be a continued low profile for the Opposition, with the government party controlling at least 75 percent of the seats (Tables 2 and 3). In this context, the Opposition cannot influence policy-making in any meaningful way. Its voice will hardly be heard.

Also there ought to be State financing of all political parties in order to level the playing field and to remove the advantages of incumbency. In The Gambia, the incumbent party had access to state resources (as all incumbents do elsewhere), as well as support from business groups locked in a patron-client relationship with the government. The Gambian Opposition has not been able to win sufficient support from the business community as the latter has never believed that the incumbent party could ever be beaten at the polls. In addition to finances for all political parties, I believe they should also have equal access to the media (print, broadcast and television) for dissemination of political views to the electorate. This should be available at all times, especially during election campaigns, and the cost should be the same for all parties (including the ruling party).

The 1996 Constitution does not state that the military should be subordinated to civilian direction. But what we now have in Yahya Jammeh is a fusion of authority in the civilian government and in the military, as he is both President and Commander of the Armed Forces. Are there any measures to curb military intervention in the future? Thanks to the success

¹¹ For a useful discussion of size, pluralism and the Westminster Model which may be of relevance to the situation in The Gambia, see Arend Lijphart, *Size, Pluralism, and the Westminster Model of Democracy: Implications for the Eastern Caribbean*, pp. 321-40 in Jorge Heine, ed., *A Revolution Aborted: The Lessons of Grenada* (1990, 1991); for a more general discussion of proportional representation, see Lijphart's, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarianism and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (1984).

of the 1994 coup d'Etat, The Gambia has joined many other African States in inheriting a legacy which makes future military interventions almost a certainty.

The people of The Gambia should have a better way of fulfilling their desire for a change in government other than through military intervention. The country has not benefited from the millions of dollars in development funds contributed by international donors over the last thirty years. Besides, a very tiny elite linked to the State benefited from the export-oriented development model that has been in place from 1985 until now (2000). Thirty five years after independence, the country has just established University of Gambia in year 2000. There is an urgent need for re-evaluation of The Gambia's political and economic needs.

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Abstract: The 1994 military coup d'état removed Dawda Jawara's People's Progressive Party (PPP) government from power, ending twenty-nine years of post-independence electoral politics in The Gambia. Jawara's Gambia has been portrayed in literature as a stable democracy, with a leader who genuinely tried to develop the country, and who enjoyed majority support. This article suggests, instead, that post-independence Gambia lacked democratic stability, and political institutions were used to perpetuate the power of those controlling the State, and not to address the changes necessary to develop the country. This opposing view is supported by an assessment of social, economic and political conditions during and after Jawara's era. Questions are raised about the future prospects for democratic development after the military interlude.
