

TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN THE GAMBIA: ASSESSING THE POST-JAMMEH ERA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the state of democratic consolidation in the Gambia. The study uses case study designs to examine the state of democratic consolidation in The Gambia. The study adopted a qualitative research method and used interviews and secondary data sources to generate data for this study. The findings show that the Gambia made significant progress in recent years in their overall democratic performance, yet the finding shows that there are still concerns about popular participation with the Gambia government's delay in setting up an anti-corruption commission and its rejection of the 2020 constitution. While the state of democratic governance in the Gambia is generally admirable, it is telling by the findings of this study that there is still a need for improvement in security and public service delivery for sustainable democratic consolidation and development.

Keywords: Democratic consolidation, Democratic governance, Corruption

1.0 BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

This study explores the state of democratic consolidation in the Gambia. The Article scrutinizes the institutional and policy reform process undertaken by the government of the Gambia since the defeat of former president Jammeh in 2016. The article also examines the performance of public agencies and their contributions towards human and socio-economic development in the Gambia as well as challenges faced by the government's effort towards democratic consolidation.

Daffeh (2018) questions the failure of most African countries to consolidate democracy. Many scholars of governance argue in favor of socioeconomic and cultural preconditions necessary for democracy to be consolidated. Adejumobi (2000) outlined that the rule of law, transparency, and accountability as well as strong democratic institutions are prerequisites essential for democratic consolidation. His argument consolidates the mainstream intellectual thinking on democratic governance. This strengthened the argument that institutional reforms are at the heart of democratic consolidation. This suggests that governments that respect the rule of law are more likely to consolidate their democracies. While the concept of democracy attracts varying interpretations and meanings in Africa, it is obvious that democracy as a system of government can facilitate social cohesion and ensure sustainable development in Africa.

Scholars such as Ndulu and Tennamwenge (2014) point out that consolidated democracies have the potential to ensure sustainable national development and eradicate poverty. Other political scientists suggest that countries need some form of preconditions that will make them practice democracy. Shenhav (2006) suggests that nations can consolidate democracy by strengthening the rule of Law and strong institutions. His arguments are built on the premise that the rule of law and strong institutions facilitate democratic consolidation, not anything else. Laitin (2003) also accentuates that the rule of law is the cornerstone in the process of democratic consolidation. Other political scientists who stressed the importance of democratic consolidation, tied its survival to strong institutions and the rule of law. The failure of many African countries to consolidate democracy is often associated by scholars with the absence of strong institutions and the rule of law.

Scholars such as O'Donnell (1968) point out that African countries should pay attention to strengthening the rule of law to enable them to consolidate their democracies. According to the Democracy Index (2022) since 1996, when the world governance indicator data was published for the first time, the region's average estimated scores for most dimensions except voice and accountability have shown a negative trend. It has been observed that the rule of law continues to decline in most African countries while political stability and government effectiveness have already collapsed in Africa. The report commends that considerable improvement in Voice and accountability have shown slight progress in the last decade. West Africa has only one 'full democracy', Ghana. This shows that the region has not made significant gains in good governance since the turn of the century. The Mo Ibrahim Governance Index (2021), shows that 3% of Africa's population is over 65 years, the lowest of any continent, and 40% of its population is under 15. The report suggests that an estimated 70,000 skilled professionals emigrate from Africa each year. The African Youth Survey (2022) highlighted many African youth are considering immigrating to Europe. According to the survey, the majority of African migrations are driven by the search for jobs and economic opportunities which are perpetuated by a lack of democratic governance in the region. The Ibrahim Africa Governance Index shows that a significant number of Africa's population will be undernourished in 2021 and the majority of this is projected by the survey from West Africa. Findings from the report show that 1 in every 3 of the economically active youth in Africa are unemployed. This is the result of bad democratic governance in the region which pushes many youth to embark on irregular migration to make ends meet. Afrobarometer survey (2022) shows that the high rate of irregular migration of youth and the general underdevelopment in West Africa is the result of decades of unparalleled volatility, lack of democratic governance, and democratic norms in the region which has exposed the region's inability to respond to the development needs of its citizenry. As a result of the failure of most West African Governments to restore democratic governance, many youths lost faith in their countries and took on irregular migration as a last resort. The objective of this article is to assess the state of democratic consolidation in the Gambia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The concept of Democratic Consolidation

Gallie (1956) argues that democracy is a contested concept. He noted for a long time there would never be an agreed definition globally on democracy. However, other scholars point out

that democracy is premised on consensus building and participatory governance. Several scholars pointed out that the concept of democratic consolidation is based on collective decision-making and sustainable development. According to Robert Dahl, the definition of democracy includes procedural democracy, Liberal, and social democracy. Dahl (1971) in his seminal work on democracy as Polyarchy argued that Procedural democracy includes the two dimensions of contestation and participation. He pointed out that Contestation captures peaceful competition necessary for democratic rule, while participation according to him is a principle that advances the legitimacy of opposition existence in a democracy, having the right to challenge the incumbents. The concept of participation he noted also includes protection of the freedoms of expression and association and the existence of democratic instruments that ensure free and fair elections.

According to Dahl Liberal definitions of democracy are based on the concept of popular sovereignty, and accountability. According to him, this promotes universal human rights and the rule of law. Dahl's concentration shows that Democratic Consolidation is premised on the supremacy of the law and the notion of the universality and indivisibility of human rights as a panacea for sustainable development. Democratic Consolidation as hinted by Dahl seeks to protect the social and cultural rights of people. Schumpeter (1950) strengthened the argument of Dahl's on the aspects of democracy. His argument expands the institutional arrangement for democracy to be consolidated. He noted the survival of democratic consolidation and governance is based on institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which to acquire the power to decide using a competitive struggle for the people's vote. Ashcraft (1993) agreed with Schumpeter, that democratic consolidation sets a foundation for the understanding of basic civil liberties that should in principle guarantee the democratic process, his argument underscores the institutional agreement as a cornerstone for democratic consolidation.

2.2 The concept of Democratic Governance

Democratic governance is broadly argued among scholars, yet to this date, there is no shared agreement around a single definition of Democratic governance. Some scholars defined Democratic governance based on rules enforcement mechanisms offered by the World Bank. Other scholars like Salih (2023) define Democratic governance from a public sector management perspective, which is aligned with the definition proposed by the World Bank as "how power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank 2021). Several scholars have disagreed on specific areas of democratic governance, while classical scholars focus narrowly on whether existing rules and laws are enforced, the later scholars emphasize more on the justice of the content of the laws. Rubidge (2023) posited that poor democratic governance was a major contributor to Africa's poor economic health. She contends that poor democratic governance is responsible for underdevelopment including the massive rate of irregular migration on the continent.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation Africa Governance Index report (2022) provides that democratic governance is the provision of the political, social, economic, and environmental goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their state, which a state has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens. According to the World Bank Governance Indicators (2021), six dimensions are critical in understanding the concept and the application of

democratic governance, such dimensions include: Accountability, Political stability, Absence of violence, Government effectiveness, Regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. These dimensions according to the World Governance Indicator provide the conceptual and practical basis for democratic governance in all countries across the world.

The African Development Bank (1999) posited that accountability, transparency, combating corruption, stakeholder participation, and a legal and judicial framework provide a conceptual understanding of governance and democracy. The Bank argues that democratic governance is imperative for creating and sustaining an enabling environment for development which will eradicate irregular migration of youth on the continent. It contends that good governance is one of Africa's collective aspirations without which, many of the others are unachievable

3.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

3.1 The Theory of Power and Politics

This theory provides a conceptual linkage for the understanding of democratic consolidation. It provides the basis to see what approach the government of the Gambia follows in the implementation of democracy as a system of governance. According to the writing of Cox (1996), this theory suggests that a democratic government that is necessary for development should ensure equal participation of everyone in the politics of the state. Mills (1956) identified three main aspects of power Pluralism, Elitism, and Marxism. Besides the fact that they all focus on elaborating the distribution of power, he suggested that Marxism elaborates more on class conflict and economics rather than politics. According to the Journal of Sociology (2010), the pluralist theory is a general type of government where all participants share an equal status whether it is in possession, power, or rights.

The work of elites by Wilfredo and Mosca (1983) is cited by Dowse and Hughes in analyzing the Elite theory. They suggest that the Elite theory concerns the nature and distribution of power it was originally developed by Pareto and Mosaca in their works "The Mind and Society" and "The Ruling Class". Mosca tried to distinguish between democratic and totalitarian societies. He believed that democracy could never be anything more than a manipulative, legitimating process. Through such a process, elites consolidated their power by designating the masses to support the interests of the powerful rather than representing the interests of the masses. This theory states that a representative democracy is not based on the will of the citizens, but that there is a cohesive elite group that makes almost all the important decisions. Ross (2006), argues that the formal structures of government explain 'who gets what, when and how'. He pointed out that the investigation and significance of the elite in the policy process are in the same way important. He argued that elites control the formal institutions of government and are influential elements in government and the whole decision-making process. There are different views on the role of elites in democracy. Some scientists like Dowse and Hughes believe that elites are guards of democracy protecting it from the dangers of totalitarianism, while others believe that elites are the main threat to the survival of democracy. In the case of the Gambia, the assumption of the elites and democracy is more applicable in this study.

3.2 Materials and Methods

In this study, I used the Qualitative research method and employed a case study as the research design. The selection of this design is based on the fact that it has been much-admired by many social science scholars as a dominant tool in the field of social science to study human phenomena. I selected a case study research design because it provided me an opportunity to explore multiple phenomena in the context of the democratic consolidation process of the Gambia, using a variety of data sources in Africa relating to the democratic process. I have also used interviews to enrich the findings of this study. I also explored individuals, and organizations to deconstruct and reconstruct various phenomena within the parameters of this study. I made use of secondary data for this study and also engaged specific country reports and case studies. Data analysis in this study was based on content analysis According to Schilling (2006), content analysis is the systematic analysis of the content of the data. In this study, the data analysis process took place after each stage of the data obtained.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Democratic Consolidation in the Gambia

According to the findings of this study, the political transition of 2017 ushered in a new democratic dispensation, the findings show that the Gambia shows promising good governance, inclusive growth, and enhanced citizen participation in the democratic process. The findings show that the Presidential elections of December 2021 and parliamentary elections were peaceful and have further consolidated the democratic gains since 2020 and transitioned the country from budding to a stable democracy. The findings revealed that the elections were considered free and fair by local and international observers. According to the findings, the Gambia has transitioned from a repressive regime to a stable democracy and fostered resilience, stabilizing the economy in the face of multiple shocks. The findings show that the Gambia is attracting international investors and Development Partners.

The findings indicated that the Gambia has improved governance through public sector reforms and shows that the country has progressed satisfactorily since the democratic transition in 2017. According to the findings, The Gambia was singled out in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) 2020 report as having one of the most improved overall governance performances within a relatively short period with a 9% increase from 46% in 2016 to 55.1 in 2020 and 55% in 2021. According to the findings since the transition, the social contract between citizens and the state has improved, with increased citizen and civil society participation in the governance process and an improvement in the human rights record.

4.2 The governance score of the Gambia based on the Mo Ibrahim Index

Year	Score (out of 100)	Rank (out 54)
2012	45.8%	33
2013	45.5%	33
2014	45.2%	34
2015	44.9%	34
2016	44.8%	35
2017	52.8%	21
2018	54.9%	18
2019	54.6%	18
2020	55.1%	18

2021	55.3%	16
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Table 1: Source, MIF Data

The findings show that The Gambia has improved the most in Participation, Rights & Inclusion in 2017-2021 and the trends have increased slightly more in 2021. The table shows that the country has improved in 12 out of the 20 categories in 2020 and 15 out of 20 in 2021. According to the findings, it has improved in all categories of the Security and rule of Law and Participation, Rights, and inclusion. However, the finding shows that the country has witnessed a slight decrease in Human Development from 2021. The finding shows that the Gambia scores above the continental average for 11 categories in 2020 and is among the top ten for one of the 16 categories in 2021. Based on the findings, the trend of the Gambia in all categories of the democratic governance framework has been better in the last five years (2017-2021) compared to the period of 2012-2016, with the rate of improvement increasing since 2017.

4.3 State of Corruption in the Gambia

Year	value	Change in %
2022	34.00	-8.11%
2021	37.00	0.00%
2020	37.00	0.00%
2019	37.00	0.00%
2018	37.00	23.33%

Table 2: Source: Corruption Perception Index

The table shows that the Gambia has improved significantly in the fight against corruption. Between 2017 and 2021 from 26% in 2016 to 37% in 2021, this marked an 11-percentage increase in the score within the past five years. The findings noted that improved transparency and accountability have led to improvements in the fight against corruption, accounting for an increase in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score. However, the findings revealed that due to delays in approving the anti-corruption bill in parliament, there has been a slight decline in the scores from 37 in 2021 to 34 in 2022 partly reversing initial gains made in the fight against corruption.

4.4 Security and Rule of Law in the Gambia

Year (2021)	Score 100%	Rank 54
Security & Rule of Law	58.6	15
Security & Safety	84.9	16
Absence of Armed Conflict	99.7	21
Absence of Violence against Civilians	99.9	2
Absence of Forced Migration	93.3	40
Absence of Crime	52.6	18
Executive Compliance with the Rule of Law	63.2	10
Impartiality of the Judicial System	76.8	9

Table 3, Source: MIF

The table shows that The Gambia has increased considerably as one of the most secure countries in Africa that respects the rule of law and provides security for the people in the

country. The table shows that in 2021 the Gambia ranked 15th most secured countries in Africa. Gambia is also ranked 2nd in Africa where there is an absence of violence against civilians with a score of 99.9%. The table shows that the Gambia ranked 10 in Africa with executive compliance with the rule of law and 9th in Africa where the Judiciary is impartial. The findings show that since 2020, The Gambian government has exhibited a strong democratic governance reform appetite and has the momentum to advance structural reforms across a wide variety of sectors. The finding revealed that the Government has initiated a security sector reform policy since 2018 which has transformed all security apparatus in the Gambia.

4.5 Factors that influence the Democratic consolidation in the Gambia

The findings of this study show that after a democratic change of power in The Gambia in 2017, the country embarked on a transitional journey. According to the findings, the government of the Gambia developed a three-year development Plan, the National Development Plan (NDP, 2018-2021). UNDP. The findings show that in 2018, the Gambia Government set up a Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission to establish an impartial record of the human rights abuses of former President Yaya Jammeh to provide justice and reconciliation. According to the findings, a commission for the review of the new constitution was established to provide term limits for the government. The findings show that the report of the Truth Commission has faced major setbacks since 2020 due to political differences. The findings revealed that other Government reform institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission were established in 2020 to strengthen the governance performance and the democratic gain of the Gambia. According to the findings of this study, the government identified Security Sector Reform as one of the key priorities in its National Development Plan. The findings show that the government identified five priority areas of reform, such as civil service reform, judicial sector reforms, and institutional capacity building including a comprehensive Security Sector Reform. According to the findings, the 2018 and 2021 Presidential and Parliamentary elections are generally described as free and fair, without any interference in ballot casting. The findings show that the introduction of spot counting of votes during the election increased the trust in Gambia's electoral system during the 2018 Parliamentary election and the 2021 Presidential election and shows that this strengthened democratic consolidation in the Gambia.

The findings show that The Gambian government has exhibited a strong democratic governance reform appetite and has advanced structural reforms across a wide variety of sectors. The findings show that the Government has initiated a security sector reform policy since 2018 which has transformed all security apparatus in the Gambia. The findings revealed that capacity building for the security Sector has been reinforced both nationally and internationally. The findings show that the State Intelligence Agency which was characteristic of human rights abuse has been transformed and limited to only intelligence collection. The findings also show that The Public service reform programs by the government have also transformed the public service to become vibrant and effective. The findings show that the creation of a new ministry of public service and reforms as well as the widening of both political and development space for women have consolidated democracy in the Gambia.

4.6 Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in the Gambia

The findings of this study show that despite this notable progress across several governance indices of the Gambia, the findings revealed that there are profound challenges in democratic consolidation in the Gambia. The findings indicated delays in the constitutional review process and the need to reopen discussions in reviewing the 1997 constitution provided setbacks for democratic consolidation in the Gambia. The findings also show the need to advance security sector reforms and progress with the Anti-Corruption Commission. The findings revealed that a new anti-corruption bill with provisions to establish an anti-corruption agency with prosecutorial powers which is still awaiting approval at the National Assembly for almost two years has constrained efforts towards democratic consolidation in the Gambia.

The findings show that macroeconomic stability in the Gambia also remains a critical challenge with high debt (82%) and low revenue (11%) coupled with high inflation (18%). The findings show that the Central Bank increased interest rates from 10% to 14% within the past year to contain rising inflation. According to the findings of this study, State Owned Enterprise (SOE) reforms are progressing slowly. The findings show that the Gambian Ports Authority (GPA) a strategic SOE in the economy responsible for 90% of trade volumes and contributes 20% of GDP is ailing, lags behind its regional peers, and is in dire need of reforms despite being one of the most profitable SOEs. In addition, the finding revealed a serious need for exploring private sector investment opportunities using the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model to close the infrastructure gap and put less pressure on the government balance sheets as it undertakes an extensive public investment program. According to the findings of this study, the lack of action for a comprehensive social protection and accountability mechanism is responsible for the democratic backsliding of the country in the last two years. The findings show that the unwillingness of the government to legislate the anti-corruption bill and the failure of the Government of the Gambia to implement the Covid-19 audit findings of the National Audit despite the many corruption allegations flagged by the National Audit since 2020 has affected democratic consolidation in the Gambia.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Despite some of the internal challenges in the Gambia, the country made significant progress in Democratic Governance in the last decade. The country has opened- up democratic space and allowed popular participation of the citizenry. However, for the Gambia to make further gains in Democratic governance the government should hasten on institutionalizing the Anti-corruption commissions which is a major catalyst for democratic consolidation in the Gambia. The government of the Gambia should re-introduce the 2020 draft constitution which was initially rejected by the National Assembly in 2021 and work on the implementation of the report of the Truth and Reparation Commission which was launched in 2018.

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