

# Long-time leader loses election in The Gambia

Eddie Haywood  
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The president of The Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, was defeated by real estate tycoon Adama Barrow in presidential elections held Friday.

Jammeh conceded late Friday night on state television, stating "I told you, Gambians, that I will not question the outcome of the results and will accept it." In a concession call to Barrow, Jammeh stated, "Congratulations. I'm the outgoing president; you're the incoming president."

Masses of Gambians celebrated in the capital city Banjul on the news of the autocratic president's defeat.

The presidential elections were held under the shadow of political repression and intimidation. In the months preceding the election, several opposition figures were beaten, arrested, and detained, and international telephone and Internet services were shut down during the election poll. There were widespread reports of intimidation of the press by the Jammeh government.

In April and May, dozens of protesters were beaten and arrested, along with 51 officials of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), who are still awaiting trial. The UDP Organizing Secretary, Solo Sandeng, has since died in custody after being tortured. The protestors and officials are being held at the infamous Mile 2 prison near Banjul, known for repression and torture.

Nogoi Njie, the vice chairperson of the young women's section of the UDP was arrested at the demonstration, and described in an affidavit her ordeal of being detained, beaten, and tortured at the hands of the National Intelligence Agency, the Gambian security agency responsible for scores of forced disappearances, murder, torture, and intimidation of political opponents.

The Gambia was ruled by Jammeh for more than two decades, after he came to power in 1994 in a military coup. As a commander in the Gambian army, Jammeh led a faction of the military and seized power from Dawda Jawara, the corrupt president who ruled for the three decades since The Gambia gained its independence from

British colonialism in 1965.

Jammeh joined the Gambian armed forces in 1984, rising to the rank of Second Lieutenant in 1989. Just months before leading the military coup that brought him to power, he received military training at Fort McClellan in Alabama; a clear display of Washington's influence in Jammeh's rise to power.

Barrow, the candidate of the UDP and its former treasurer, is a wealthy real estate developer in The Gambia. He received a university education in London, returning to The Gambia where he was employed by the largest real estate firm in the country. Barrow was supported by all opposition parties in his bid for the presidency.

Clearly enunciating the character of his administration in calling for unity in the ruling class, Barrow displayed his cynicism in an interview with the Associated Press the day after his election win, saying, "A new Gambia is born. We want everybody on board now. This is Gambia, politics is over."

What Barrow really means to say is, 'The ruling elite needs to continue the exploitation of The Gambia's resources, so quit the political squabbling.'

The jubilation of the masses at Barrow's election is likely to be short-lived, as he is set to take power in a country influenced by Washington which is seeking to assert American capitalism's hegemony over the entire African continent.

The Obama administration welcomed the newly elected president in an official statement congratulating Barrow on his victory. The administration stated that it "looks forward to being a strong partner in efforts to unify the country, [and] promote inclusive economic development," clearly a reference to maintaining the current capitalist relations Washington has with the country.

Washington has been increasingly dissatisfied with the Jammeh regime, hypocritically criticizing the autocrat on

his repressive rule. In advancing its imperialist aims on the continent, Washington is keen to cultivate an image that it promotes human rights and democratic forms of rule in Africa, and regards various autocratic leaders such as Jammeh as a “stick in its eye.”

The predominately Muslim nation is the smallest nation in Africa, with a population just under two million. It harbors great economic resources mainly in the agricultural sector, tourism, and its special location geographically as a center of trade in Western Africa. It also has an abundance of natural resources such as silica sand, titanium, tin, zircon, clay, and fish.

Despite this, The Gambia is one of the poorest nations on earth, ranking 175th out of 188 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. The vast majority of Gambians subsist in farming and earn around one dollar or less per day.

Like most nations on the African continent, The Gambia is home to crippling poverty and other social ills inflicted on the masses, such as high mortality rates in child birth and diseases due to lack of spending for basic social services. The Gambia has a high HIV prevalence rate at 2 percent. Besides HIV/AIDS, malaria, hepatitis A, typhoid, and animal contact diseases such as rabies ravage the Gambian population.

These intolerable social conditions are rooted in the class structure of the Gambia, in which a tiny corrupt elite controls the country’s economic resources and wields political power in which the great majority have little to no say.

The “scramble for Africa”, aggressively pursued by Washington to assert its geo-political and economic dominance on the continent in furtherance of control by wealthy Western business interests of Africa's economic resources guarantees massive social and political upheavals not only in The Gambia, but across all of Africa.



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