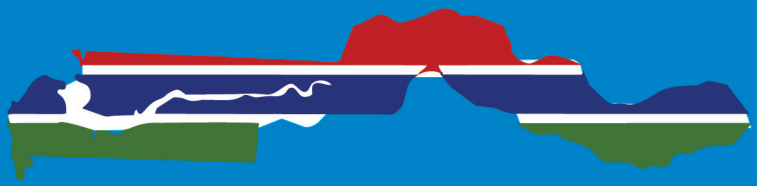
WANEP ALERT AND RESPONSE MECHANISM

WARM Policy Brief

October 2026



THE GAMBIA 2026 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:

NAVIGATING ELECTORAL RISKS AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING
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THE GAMBIA 2026 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: NAVIGATING ELECTORAL RISKS AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gambia's presidential election scheduled for 5th December 2026 represents an opportunity to consolidate the democratic governance gains achieved since the historic political transition of 2016. Its significance is heightened because it will be the first presidential election held after two failed attempts at constitutional amendment and because the incumbent is seeking a third term under rules that many citizens wish to change.[1] Within this sensitive political context, shortcomings in the management of the electoral process could amplify existing political tensions, weaken public confidence in democratic institutions, and undermine the democratic gains achieved over the past decade.

Notwithstanding the significant democratic advances made since the 2016 political transition, including the expanded political participation and progress in national reconciliation through the work of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC),[2] The Gambia continues to face persistent governance and institutional challenges that could threaten the consolidation of its democratic gains. The unresolved governance and democratic challenges, including restrictions on civic freedoms,[3] corruption, weak institutional accountability, and concerns regarding the rule of law, continue to erode public trust in state institutions.[4]

Furthermore, the continued use of the Public Order Act to regulate protests also remains contentious. In 2025, the police arrested more than 16 people at a protest over forfeited assets and 23 people at a protest over mobile data prices, and in September 2026 used tear gas against demonstrators protesting electricity outages.[5] The rejection of the Constitution (Promulgation) Bill 2024 by the National Assembly on 7th July 2025 left presidential term limits, executive powers, institutional checks and balances, and political accountability unresolved.[6] As the country approaches the 2026 presidential election, this constitutional uncertainty remains a significant governance concern, with potential implications for electoral credibility, democratic legitimacy, political stability, and public confidence in state institutions.[7]

This brief analyses how these factors could generate or reduce electoral tension. It sets out the context, distinguishes structural and immediate drivers from vulnerabilities and triggers, maps risks geographically, derives three scenarios from that analysis, and proposes recommendations. It is intended for national institutions, political actors, civil society, and regional and international partners engaged in preventing violence and mitigating emerging risks before and after the 2026 presidential election.

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1. World Bank. (2025). The Gambia Country Overview. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: *https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia (Accessed May 12, 2026).*
2. Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). (2021). Final Report of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission of The Gambia. Banjul: Government of The Gambia. TRRC / Ministry of Justice, The Gambia?.
3. U.S. Department of State. (2024). Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: The Gambia. Available at: *https://www.state.gov (Accessed May 12, 2026).*
4. Freedom House. (2025). Freedom in the World 2025: The Gambia; Available at: *https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2025 (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
5. Reuters (2026). Gambia protesters burn tyres to denounce power cuts. Available at: *https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/gambia-protesters-burn-tyres-denounce-power-cuts-2026-09-08/ (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
6. Satang N (2025). Constitution Bill Rejected at Second Reading: Halting the Reform Process in The Gambia? Available at: *https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/constitution-bill-rejected-second-reading-halting-reform-process-gambia (Accessed May 12, 2026).*
7. Satang, N (2025). The Gambia's new constitution has stalled again – 5 reasons why and what that means for democracy. Available at: *https://theconversation.com/the-gambias-new-constitution-has-stalled-again-5-reasons-why-and-what-that-means-for-democracy-261809 (Accessed September 11, 2026).*

WANEP Alert and Response Mechanism (WARM)

The WANEP Alert and Response Mechanism (WARM) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARM Program, WANEP is setting the stage for civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARM covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in the West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

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2. POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL CONTEXTS

The political landscape ahead of The Gambia's 2026 presidential election remains influenced by the legacy of the 2016 general elections and unresolved governance reform issues, particularly the stalled constitutional reform process.[8] The 2020 draft Constitution included a two-term limit and a clause that would have counted the incumbent's first term, precluding a 2026 candidacy. The 2024 Bill omitted that clause and was in turn rejected on 7th July 2025 by 35 votes to 21, short of the three-quarters majority required.[9] For many critics, the issue extends beyond the President's candidacy itself and reflects the broader failure of constitutional reform efforts to address longstanding concerns regarding presidential term limits, executive power, institutional checks and balances, and political accountability.[10]

The prevailing political context is becoming increasingly competitive and more fluid than in 2021. Currently, political parties and candidates are pursuing coalition-building strategies and expanding their support bases ahead of the 2026 presidential election, reflecting the growing significance and competitiveness of the electoral contest.[11] Notable alliances include the ruling National People's Party (NPP) coalition, the United Democratic Party (UDP)-led Gambia First Coalition, and Coalition 2026 led by Talib Ahmed Bensouda of Unite Movement for Change (UMC).[12] While there is a broad recognition among political actors that coalition-building is essential in a fragmented political landscape, no consensus has emerged on a single opposition coalition. The 2021 results provide a useful but imperfect baseline: Barrow won 53.2 per cent, Darboe 27.7 per cent, Kandeh (Gambia Democratic Congress) 12.3 per cent and Halifa Sallah 3.8 per cent, on a turnout of 89.3 per cent.[13] On paper, the NPP-GDC alliance combines about two-thirds of the 2021 vote, but alliance arithmetic rarely transfers fully, and new actors such as UMC have no electoral baseline. The analytical implication is that each camp can plausibly claim a path to victory. Where supporters are told that victory is certain, an adverse result is more likely to be read as fraud. This, rather than competition itself, is the mechanism through which a competitive environment can produce polarisation, heightened rhetoric and tension among supporters.

Coalition volatility is itself a source of local friction. The withdrawal of the Gambia Movement for Progress (GMP) from Coalition 2026 on 29th September, reportedly after being denied a speaking slot at a rally in Brikama, and its immediate move to the NPP alliance illustrate how disputes over status within coalitions can quickly become public.[14] Defections of this kind are legitimate political choices, but they can generate confrontations between former allies at community level, particularly in constituencies where margins are narrow.

The electoral environment is also shaped by the rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media. While these platforms have widened access to information and created new opportunities for civic engagement and political participation, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and other forms of harmful online content.[15] The growing use of artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and coordinated digital campaigns further complicates efforts to verify information and maintain public trust in electoral processes. If left unchecked, these developments could distort public discourse, deepen political polarisation, and undermine public confidence in electoral institutions and electoral outcomes.

Headline economic performance and household experience diverge. The economy grew by an estimated 5.9 per cent in 2025, but public debt stands at 76.4 per cent of GDP, 81 per cent of workers are informally employed, and 41.3 per cent of those aged 15 to 34 are not in employment, education or training.[16] Inflation eased from 17 per cent

8. Ousjah (2025) A Threat to Gambia's Hard-Won Democracy: President Barrow's Pursuit of a Third Term. Alkamba Times, 18December. Available at: https://alkambatimes.com/a-threat-to-gambias-hard-won-democracy-president-barrows-pursuit-of-a-third-term.
9. Toupane, P., Kwarkye, S., & Daffe, S. (2024). Lack of Constitutional Reform Stalls The Gambia's Democratic Transition. Institute for Security Studies (ISS).
10. Nabaneh, S. (2025) 'Constitution Bill rejected at second reading: Halting the reform process in The Gambia?', ConstitutionNet, 8 July. Available at: https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/constitution-bill-rejected-second-reading-halting-reform-process-gambia (Accessed September 11, 2026).
11. Gambiana. (2026). GFC–UDP Alliance Signs MoU to Formalise Opposition Cooperation Ahead of 2026 Election. 14 August 2026. Available at: https://gambiana.com/gfc-udp-alliance-signs-mou-to-formalise-opposition-cooperation-ahead-of-2026-election/ (Accessed September 11, 2026).
12. The Alkamba Times. (2026). UDP-led Opposition Coalition Vows Reforms, Jobs and Accountability Ahead of 2026 Poll. 14 August 2026. Available at: https://alkambatimes.com/udp-led-opposition-coalition-vows-reforms-jobs-and-accountability-ahead-of-2026-poll/ (Accessed September 11, 2026).
13. The Point (2021). Barrow re-elected with over 53% of votes. Available at: https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/barrow-re-elected-with-over-53-of-votes (Accessed May 26, 2026).
14. The Alkamba Times (2026). Prof. Yaffa GMP Quits Coalition 2026, Joins NPP Alliance. Available at: https://alkambatimes.com/prof-yaffa-gmp-quits-coalition-2026-joins-npp-alliance/ (Accessed September 30, 2026).
15. Toupane, P., Kwarkye, S. and Daffe, S. (2024) Lack of Constitutional Reform Stalls The Gambia's Democratic Transition. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies (ISS).
16. The Point (2025). 2025 labour survey reveals unemployment rate stands at 8.3%. available at: https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/2025-labour-survey-reveals-unemployment-rate-stands-at-8-3 (Accessed June 26, 2026)

in 2023 to about 10 per cent in late 2024, but prices remain a leading concern.[17] The Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies (CepRass) survey reported in April 2026 that 75 per cent of respondents considered the government's handling of the economy to be very bad.[18] Electricity outages of up to 48 hours in parts of the Greater Banjul Area since June 2026 have turned these grievances into a visible, daily and politically attributable issue.

3. RISK ANALYSIS: DRIVERS, VULNERABILITIES AND TRIGGERS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE AHEAD OF THE 2026 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

3.1 Constitutional deadlock and the third-term candidacy

The unresolved constitutional reform process remains a key political risk. The rejection of the 2020 draft and of the 2024 Bill on 7th July 2025 left term limits, executive accountability, separation of powers and electoral governance unresolved, and the continued reliance on the 1997 Constitution has fuelled contentious political debate.[19] The deadlock does not in itself generate violence; the 2021 election took place under the same Constitution without major unrest. Its significance lies in how it frames the 2026 result. If the incumbent wins, a section of the opposition and civil society may interpret the victory as the product of a process they consider unfair from the outset, which lowers their willingness to accept the result even if polling is technically sound. If the incumbent loses, the question will move to the smoothness of transfer, for which 2016 offers both a positive and a cautionary precedent.

3.2 Confidence in the IEC and Integrity of the Voter Register

Public confidence in the independence of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) remains a concern. Although the appointment process includes consultations with the Judicial Service Commission and Public Service Commission, the President retains a central role in appointing commissioners, leading some stakeholders to question the Commission's independence. The current leadership of the IEC was appointed in July 2025, about seventeen months before the election, which has further increased political scrutiny.[20] These concerns are reinforced by findings from a 2026 CepRass survey indicating that only 27 per cent of Gambians trust the IEC and only 18 per cent were very confident that the election would be free and fair.[21] It is consistent in direction, however, with Afrobarometer data showing trust in the IEC falling from 64 per cent (2018) to 49 per cent (2021) and 41 per cent (2024), with lower trust in urban areas (38 per cent) than rural areas (46 per cent) and among women (39 per cent) than men (43 per cent).

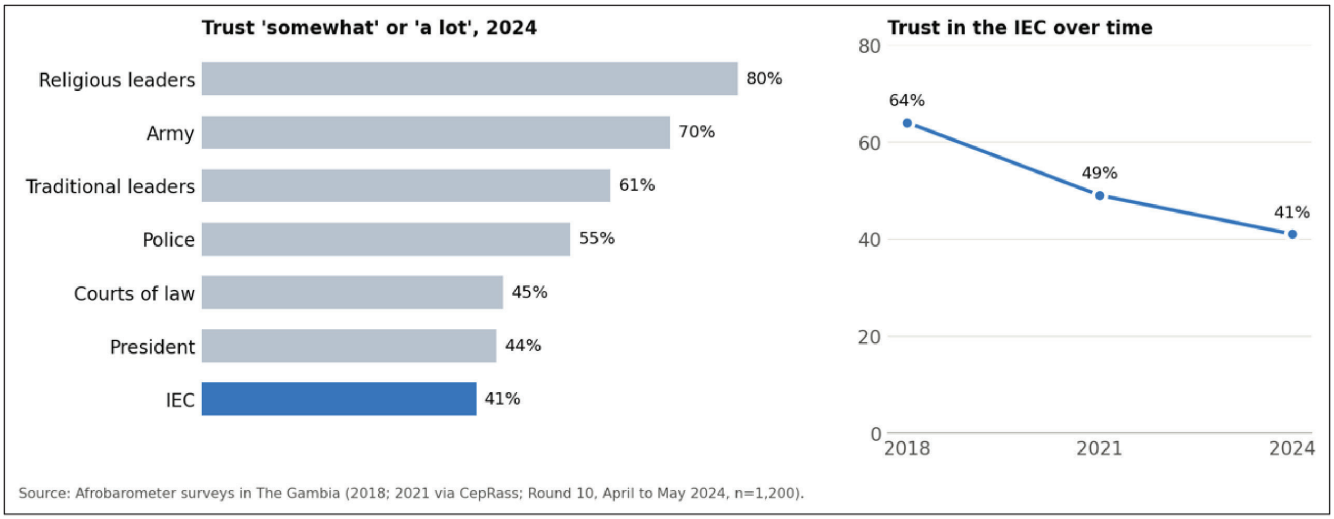


Figure 1. Trust in institutions and in the IEC over time (Afrobarometer)

17. Bertelsmann Stiftung (2026) BTI 2026 Country Report: Gambia. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: h*ttps://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GMB (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
18. The Point (2026) 'Faal says survey exposes deep cracks in governance record', 21 April. Available at: *https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/faal-says-survey-exposes-deep-cracks-in-governance-record*
19. Nabaneh, S. (2025) 'Constitution Bill rejected at second reading: Halting the reform process in The Gambia?', ConstitutionNet, 8 July. Available at: *https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/constitution-bill-rejected-second-reading-halting-reform-process-gambia (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
20. Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) (2025) Newly appointed Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) The Gambia: Mr. Joseph Colley. Available at: *https://iec.gm/2025/07/ (Accessed: 12 August 2026)*
21. Bah, O. (2026) Gambians' trust in IEC plummets ahead of 2026 polls. The Standard, 30 January. Available at: *https://standard.gm/gambians-trust-in-iec-plummets-ahead-of-2026-polls (Accessed September 11, 2026).*

Furthermore, controversy around the voter register is a cause for concern. The IEC received 1,694 objections after the 2026 supplementary registration. They are concentrated in Wassu (425), Mansakonko (391), Kerewan (323) and Basse (236), with far fewer in Kanifing (130) and none in Banjul.[22] The National Democratic Institute (NDI) mission reported concern that irregularities in citizenship attestations by some local authorities may enable underage or non-citizen registration.[23] These concerns and allegations about 'foreign voters' deserve investigation by the Revising Court, and the process should be opened, and its outcomes published.

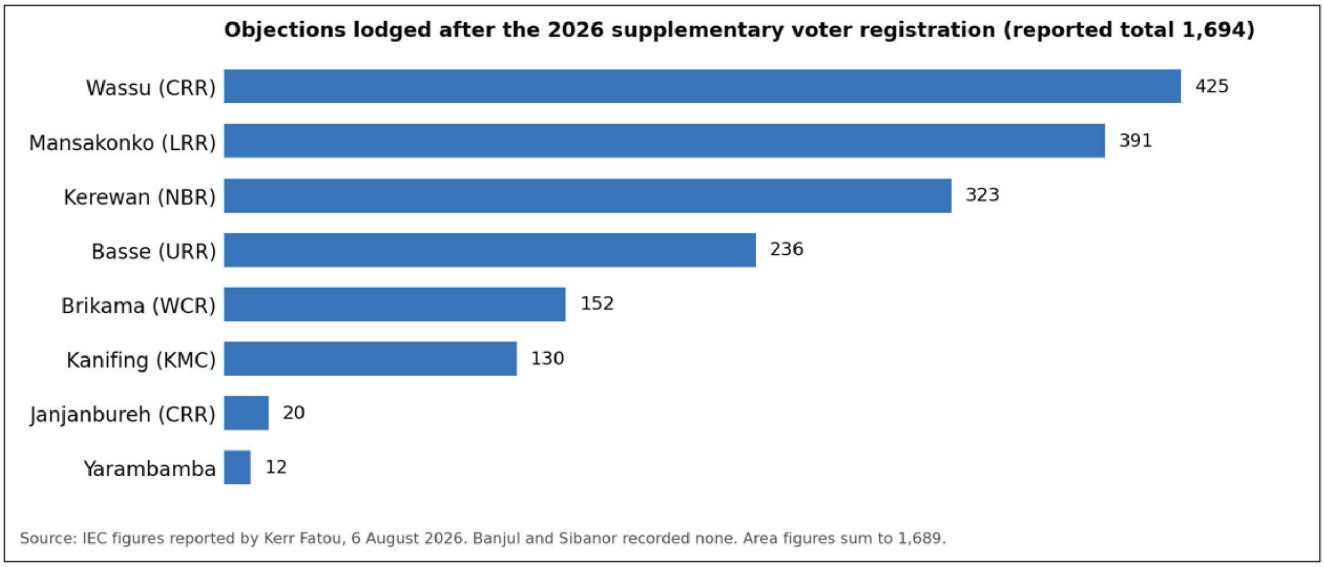


Figure 2. Register objections by registration area, 2026

3.3 Nomination Thresholds, Party Registration and Exclusion

The Elections Act 2025 left key inclusion concerns unresolved, particularly regarding women's political participation, diaspora voting, and the ability of smaller parties to compete.[24] The presidential deposit of D1 million, the 5,000-signature requirement and stricter party compliance obligations (audited accounts, national congresses and internal democracy), which the IEC has said it will enforce through suspension or deregistration, raise the cost of entry.[25] Unite's registration was initially refused and granted only on 1st July 2026.[26] The clause operationalising diaspora voting was removed from the Bill in March 2025, despite a 2021 Supreme Court ruling affirming the voting rights of Gambians abroad.[27]

3.4 Economic Hardship and the Electricity Crisis

Economic hardship has emerged as a significant risk ahead of The Gambia's 2026 presidential election, driven by rising prices, inflation, unemployment, and inadequate public services, including prolonged electricity shortages.[28] Public discontent was evident in September 2026, when protests over widespread power outages spread across the Greater Banjul Area and West Coast Region, including Westfield, Serrekunda, Brikama, Brufut and Brusubi. As economic grievances increasingly shape political debate, anti-Government sentiment and social tensions are likely to intensify. If left unaddressed, these pressures could contribute to public unrest, electoral disputes, and increased vote-buying. Strengthening economic management, improving essential services, and reinforcing electoral

22. Kerr Fatou (2026). IEC Reports 1,694 Objections in 2026 Voter Supplementary Registration Exercise. Available at: h*ttps://www.kerrfatou.com/iec-reports-1694-objections-in-2026-voter-supplementary-registration-exercise/ (Accessed September 30, 2026).*
23. National Democratic Institute (2026). STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION TO THE GAMBIA. Available at: *https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/2026-08/Gambia-PEAM-Statement-2026-08.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com*
24. Sillah, F. (2025) New Elections Bill Raises Financial Bar for Political Parties and Candidates. Kerr Fatou, 29 September. Available at: *https://www.kerrfatou.com/new-elections-bill-raises-financial-bar-for-political-parties-and-candidates/.*
25. Op. Cit. The 2025 Elections Act
26. The Voice (2026). IEC registers Unite Movement for Change as Political Party. Available at: *https://www.voicegambia.com/2026/07/01/iec-registers-unite-movement-for-change-as-political-party-ahead-of-2026-polls/ (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
27. Bojang, T. (2025) Deposit for Presidential Candidates Goes Back to D1M. The Standard, 9 July. Available at: *https://standard.gm/deposit-for-presidential-candidates-goes-back-to-d1m (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
28. World Bank (2026) The Gambia Economic Update: Learning Without Earning: Women's Educational Gains and Labor Market Constraints in The Gambia. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: *https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/44da8681b95e45877a410fd5c6b80212-0360012026/original/17560-WB-Gambia-Economic-Update-June-7-2026.pdf (Accessed September 11, 2026).*

safeguards will therefore be critical to sustaining public confidence and ensuring a peaceful and credible election.

3.5 Identity Politics, Hate Speech and Information Disorder

Although The Gambia has a long history of peaceful coexistence among its ethnic communities, ethnic identity remains a potential source of electoral tension.[29] While political support generally cuts across ethnic lines, political discourse has at times been influenced by identity-based narratives rather than policy issues.[30] Past instances of ethnically charged rhetoric, including remarks by former President Yahya Jammeh,[31] as well as more recent controversies involving political figures,[32] such as allegations of tribal and politically discriminatory remarks by Deputy Speaker Seedy Njie, have raised concerns about the potential for identity-based politics to deepen divisions, undermine social cohesion, and distract from governance and development issues.[33] These risks may become more pronounced in the lead-up to the 2026 presidential election, particularly through social media platforms that can rapidly amplify misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and divisive ethnic narratives, potentially heightening polarisation and electoral tensions.

3.6 Party Conduct, Intra-coalition tension and Campaign Regulation

Recent developments have raised concerns about inclusivity, fairness, and social cohesion in The Gambia. The increased party registration and compliance requirements, disputes over party registration decisions, and allegations of unequal access to State-owned media have reinforced perceptions of exclusion and unfair competition.[34] These concerns are further compounded by the growing use of hate speech, tribal narratives, inflammatory rhetoric, and social media-driven misinformation, which risk deepening political polarisation and undermining public trust.[35] Coupled with concerns over the inconsistent enforcement of campaign regulations and the Electoral Code of Conduct, these dynamics could heighten electoral grievances, increase tensions among political actors, and raise the risk of electoral disputes and localised violence during the 2026 election period.

3.6 Ballot Box Placement and Perceived Political Advantage

The unusually high number of 27 registered political parties presents a logistical and political risk ahead of The Gambia's 2026 presidential election, as the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) may need to adopt non-standard ballot box arrangements, such as vertical stacking or reduced spacing, to accommodate all parties at polling stations.[36] Although such adjustments may be necessary for practical reasons, they could raise concerns about fairness if the positioning of ballot boxes is perceived as favouring certain parties, potentially triggering allegations of manipulation. Given the importance of public confidence in the perceived impartiality of the electoral process, the IEC should ensure that any changes are clearly communicated, consistently applied, and developed through broad stakeholder consultation. These measures would help minimise suspicion, reinforce trust in the Commission, and safeguard the credibility of the election.

3.7 Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanisms Vulnerable to Political Contestation

The Gambia has experienced numerous election-related court cases involving parties, procedures, and electoral institutions. The most relevant precedent is 2021, when the UDP filed a petition

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29. Saine, A. (2020). Ethnicity and political polarization in The Gambia. Journal of Modern African Studies
30. Hughes, A. and Perfect, D. (2006) A Political History of The Gambia, 1816-1994. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
31. Adama Dieng, the UN Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, said that on 3 June in Tallinding, President Jammeh allegedly referred to the Mandinka as "enemies, foreigners" and threatened to kill them one by one and place them "where even a fly cannot see them."
32. United Nations (2016) Note to correspondents: Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. New York: United Nations, 10 June.
33. The Standard Newspaper (2026). Activists petition NA over Deputy Speaker's tribal remarks. Available at: *https://standard.gm/activists-petition-na-over-deputy-speakers-tribal-remarks/ (Accessed May 17, 2026).*
34. The Point (2025) IEC registers 2 new political parties: GPAP and APC; Nov 7, 2025, The Point; *https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/iec-registers-2-new-political-parties-gpap-and-apc?utm_source=chatgpt.com#:~:text=GPAP%20and%20APC-,Nov%207%2C%202025%2C%202%3A03,-PM (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
35. Favouritism shown by public and private media towards candidates and parties in power (biased reporting, gender discrimination in coverage and reporting, media airtime, discrimination against opponents, unethical reporting, etc.) can complicate relations during the process and fuel electoral tensions and violence.
36. Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) The Gambia. Registered Parties. Available at: *https://iec.gm/registered-parties (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
37. Aljazeera (2021). Gambia court rejects challenge to Barrow election victory. Available at: *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/28/gambia-court-rejects-challenge-to-barrow-election-victory (Accessed September 11, 2026).*

on 14th December alleging vote-buying and participation of ineligible voters, and the Supreme Court struck it out on 28th December because the petition had not been served on the respondent within five days, as required by the Election Petition Rules.[37] Other incidents around candidate nominations and party registration demonstrate the extent to which electoral grievances can become politically contentious.[38] Although the Elections Act 2025 establishes procedures for adjudicating disputes through the Supreme Court and High Court, concerns remain regarding procedural delays, limited appeal mechanisms, and public confidence in judicial independence. The existence of legal mechanisms is a positive safeguard. However, the effectiveness of dispute resolution depends largely on public confidence that institutions can resolve complaints fairly, impartially, and promptly. Any perception of judicial bias or political interference may increase tensions and undermine confidence in electoral outcomes.

3.8 Gender and Youth Dimensions

Women made up about 57 per cent of registered voters in 2021 and 54 per cent of new registrants in 2026, yet hold 5 of 58 National Assembly seats.[39] A constitutional amendment for 14 reserved seats for women and two for persons with disabilities completed committee review in January 2026 but has not been enacted.[40] Dr. Isatou Touray, a former Vice President, is the most prominent woman aspirant for 2026.[41] Gender-related electoral risks include intra-party violence against women activists, online harassment and gendered disinformation targeting women candidates and officials, and pressure on women voters through family and community networks. Women are also central to prevention through women's peace platforms and as polling staff. Afrobarometer data showing lower trust in the IEC among women (39%) than men (43%) suggests that voter education should be targeted. Gender-disaggregated data on election-related incidents are not currently available; WANEP should collect them through its monitoring.

Young people (under 35) make up more than three-quarters of the population but remain under-represented in party leadership. With 41.3 per cent of young people not in employment, education or training,[42] they are the most likely participants in protests, the most exposed to recruitment for intimidation or vote-buying, and the heaviest users of social media. The 2025 and 2026 protests were largely youth-led. Framing young people only as a risk is inaccurate and counter-productive: they are also the core of domestic observation, fact-checking and peace campaigns, and their grievances are substantive.

3.9 Emerging Digital and Technological Threats to Electoral Integrity

The rapid growth of digital technologies and social media platforms in The Gambia has expanded access to political information and strengthened citizen participation in democratic processes. However, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, blogs, and diaspora-based social media platforms could be misused to spread hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, ethnic stereotyping, inflammatory rhetoric, and manipulated content, including AI-generated media and deepfakes. These developments can fuel political polarisation, deepen social divisions, and erode public trust in democratic institutions and electoral processes.[43] While the Government, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and civil society organisations have taken steps to enhance digital literacy, cyber resilience, and information integrity, significant challenges remain in addressing emerging cyber threats and online information disorder.[44] As the 2026 presidential election approaches, the unchecked dissemination of harmful digital content could undermine public confidence, distort political discourse, and negatively affect the credibility and acceptance of electoral outcomes.

The table below presents a summary of critical conflict drivers around the 2026 election cycle in The Gambia.

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37. Aljazeera (2021). Gambia court rejects challenge to Barrow election victory. Available at: *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/28/gambia-court-rejects-challenge-to-barrow-election-victory (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
38. Freedom House (2017) Freedom in the World 2017: The Gambia. Available at: *https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2017 (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
39. Women's share of seats as reported by the NDI pre-election assessment (5 of 58). Available at: *https://data.ipu.org/parliament/GM/GM-LC01/data-on-women/ (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
40. International IDEA (2026) 'National Assembly concludes review of draft Constitution Amendment Bill 2026 on reserved seats for women and persons with disabilities', January. Available at: *https://www.idea.int/news/national-assembly-concludes-review-draft-constitution-amendment-bill-2026-reserved-seats-women (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
41. The Point (2026). Former VP Dr Touray enters 2026 race as independent. Available at: *https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/former-vp-dr-touray-enters-2026-race-as-independent (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
42. THE GAMBIA BUREAU OF STATISTICS (2025). The Gambia Labour Force Survey GLFS 2025. Available at: f*ile:///C:/Users/MALANG%20B.S.%20BOJANG/Downloads/GLFS%202025%20Labour%20Force%20Snapshot.pdf (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
43. UNESCO. (2023). Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms: Safeguarding Freedom of Expression and Access to Information. Paris: UNESCO.Available at: *https://www.unesco.org (Accessed September 11, 2026).*
44. The use of social media, the infodemic, disinformation, misinformation, natural and man-made hazards, and cyber-attacks are all dynamic issues that can complicate the conduct of elections. Faced with these challenges, legal and institutional frameworks that are rigid, obsolete, overly prescriptive or too generic can make it difficult, or even impossible, to adapt electoral processes, potentially leading to electoral violence.

Category	Existing (documented)	Emerging (developing, requires monitoring)
Structural Drivers	No term limits in 1997 Constitution; presidential control of key appointments; fiscal strain and youth exclusion; identity cleavages in party support	Erosion of trust in state institutions since 2018
Immediate Drivers	Third-term candidacy; electricity crisis and protests; coalition realignments	Intensifying online identity rhetoric; campaign finance imbalance
Vulnerabilities	Third-term candidacy; electricity crisis and protests; coalition realignments	Intensifying online identity rhetoric; campaign finance imbalance
Vulnerabilities	Low IEC trust; 1,694 pending register objections; restrictive Public Order Act; procedural rigidity in petitions	Wind-down of ECOMIG; results communication capacity untested under new Act
Potential Triggers		Rejected nomination; campaign clash; security incident at rally; delayed or disputed results; premature victory claim; viral fabricated content; arrest of a party figure
Mitigating Factors	High societal support for elections; trusted religious and traditional leaders; 2016 and 2021 precedents; IPC; domestic observers; regional engagement	IEC compliance units and results projection; coalition codes of conduct; UNESCO anti-hate speech forums

Table 1. Classification of electoral risk factors

4.0 HOTSPOT MAPPING AND GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSION OF ELECTORAL RISK

WANEP's Electoral Violence Hotspot Mapping indicates that electoral risks in The Gambia range from moderate to high and are concentrated in specific geographic locations where political competition, socio-economic grievances, demographic pressures, institutional weaknesses, and information disorder intersect.[45] No constituency was rated very high risk. Of the 53 constituencies, 33 were rated high, 12 medium and 8 low. At the regional level, Banjul and the West Coast Region share the highest risk index (80), followed by Kanifing and the Upper River Region (74), with the North Bank, Lower River and Central River regions at 60. These areas will require enhanced monitoring, civic engagement, and timely security deployment throughout the electoral cycle.

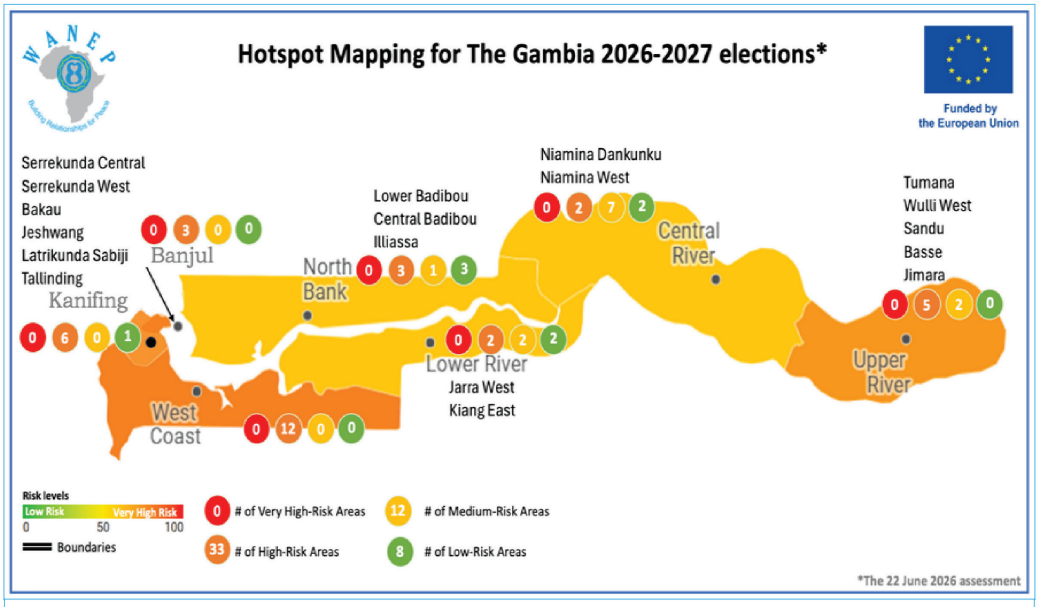


Figure 3. WANEP Hotspot Mapping for The Gambia 2026 to 2027 elections (22 June 2026 assessment)

[45] WANEP's Election Internal Risk Factors Assessment of The Gambia, June 2026, as part of part of Election Violnce Monitoring and Mitigation Project (E-MAM) funded by the EU: The Internal risk factors are related to electoral actors, events, practices, and materials that can undermine the credibility of electoral processes or, in the worst-case scenario, trigger or contribute to triggering election-related violence. They are election-specific and do not exist outside the electoral context.

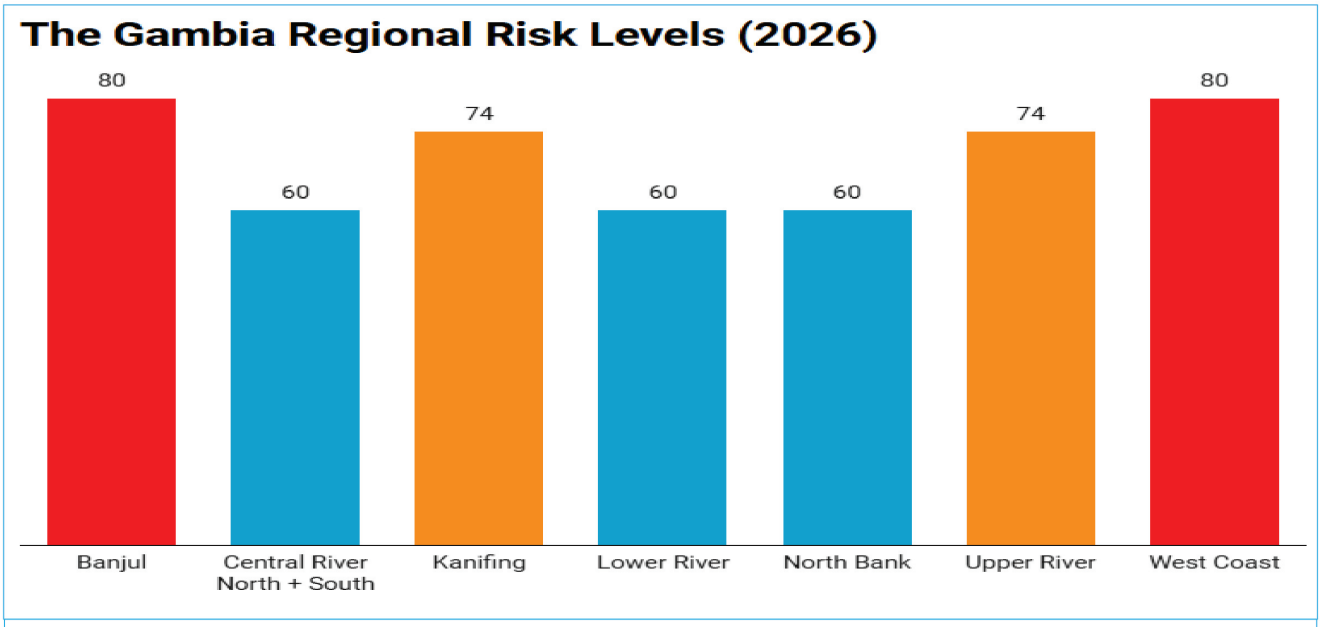


Figure 4. Regional risk index, 2026 (WANEP)

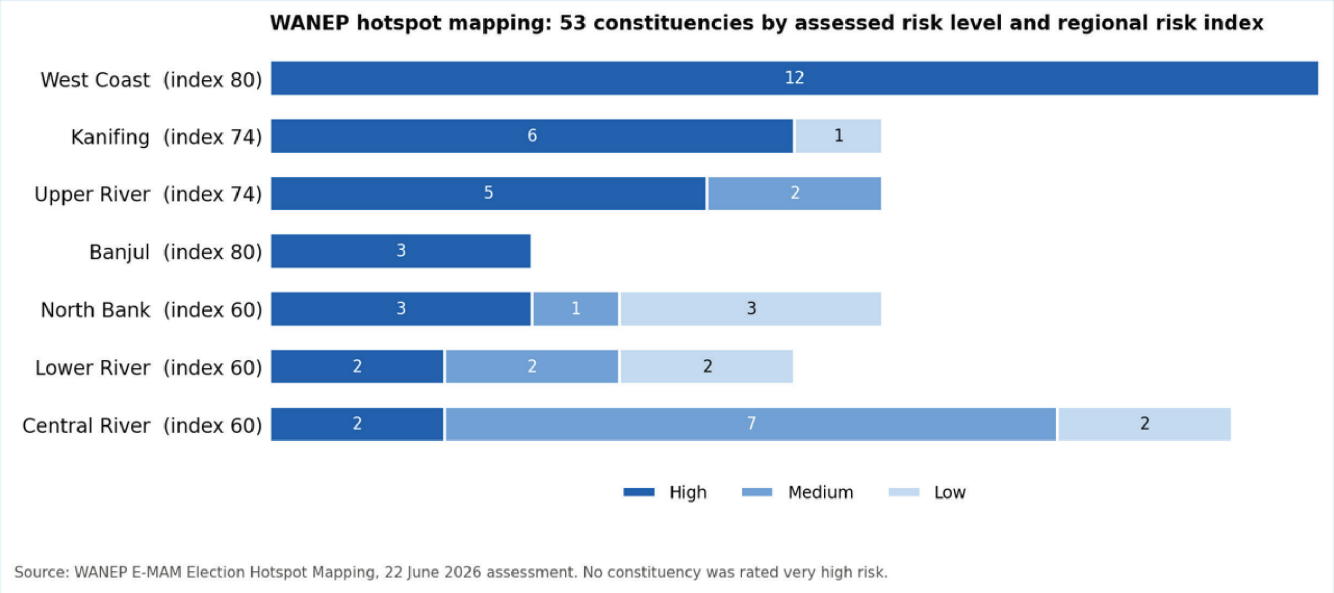


Figure 5. Distribution of constituency risk ratings by region

The **Greater Banjul Area,** particularly Banjul, Serrekunda Central, Serrekunda West, Bakau, Jeshwang, Latrikunda Sabiji, and Tallinding, represents the country's highest-risk electoral zone. High population density, intense political competition, high concentration of youth, and widespread access to social media made these locations a conducive environment for the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, premature victory claims, and politically motivated propaganda. Campaign rallies, motorcades, and political gatherings in these urban constituencies could become flashpoints for confrontation if tensions are not effectively managed.

The **West Coast Region** - All twelve West Coast Region constituencies assessed were rated high, including Brikama North and South, Foni Kansala, Kombo South, Busumbala, Old Yundum, and surrounding peri-urban communities, emerges as another critical hotspot owing to its electoral significance, rapid urbanisation, growing youth population, border tensions and intense competition among major political parties. Anticipated risks in the region include vote-buying, campaign finance irregularities, selective enforcement of electoral regulations, youth mobilisation for political purposes, and disputes arising from voter registration, polling station management, and electoral logistics. Socio-economic grievances, unemployment, and inequality

could further increase the potential for election-related demonstrations and post-election protests.

In the **Upper River Region,** particularly Tumana, Wulli West, Sandu, Basse, and Jimara, concerns are centered on electoral legitimacy, voter registration controversies, voter eligibility disputes, and perceptions of electoral fraud. The region's cross-border ties make eligibility a sensitive issue. Delays or inconsistencies in voter registration, vote counting, or results transmission could potentially trigger disputes and undermine confidence in electoral outcomes. The GDC's move into the NPP alliance may create friction in its traditional base, where some supporters opposed the shift.

The **North Bank Region,** including Lower Badibou, Central Badibou, and Illiasa, faces risks linked primarily to voter registration disputes, information gaps, rumour propagation, and weak public confidence in electoral processes. Limited access to timely and credible information increases vulnerability to misinformation, while concerns over administrative impartiality could generate tensions if complaints are not addressed transparently.

The **Lower River Region** has Jarra West and Kiang East rated high. Mansakonko recorded the second-highest number of registered objections nationally, pointing to eligibility disputes and the need for targeted voter information.

In the **Central River Region,** particularly Niamina West and Niamina Dankunku, the principal concerns relate to operational and administrative challenges. Inadequate logistical preparations, staffing constraints, insufficient training of electoral personnel, and delays in the deployment of electoral materials could lead to disputes and perceptions of electoral manipulation, particularly in communities where trust in institutions is already fragile. The high number of objections in Wassu indicates that register disputes are also a significant concern in the region.

Cross-cutting threats: Across all regions, several threats could amplify local vulnerabilities and turn isolated incidents into national crises. These include digital disinformation, hate speech, weak results communication, selective enforcement of electoral laws, grievances over the exclusion of diaspora voters, and declining confidence in the judiciary and electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms. The period between polling day and the official declaration of results is likely to represent the most critical phase of the electoral cycle, as uncertainty, public expectations, and competing information narratives converge.

Overall, the assessment suggests that the greatest threat to electoral stability may be declining public confidence in the integrity, impartiality, and credibility of electoral institutions, particularly the management of election results and dispute resolution processes. Effective mitigation will therefore require targeted interventions in hotspot constituencies, strengthened electoral communication, impartial enforcement of regulations, robust conflict-resolution mechanisms, and sustained engagement with political parties, civil society organisations, traditional leaders, women, and youth groups to prevent localised tensions from escalating into broader electoral violence.

5.0 KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE ELECTION

The table below focuses on what each actor can do to increase or reduce risk in 2026 and what should be watched.

Actor	Influence on risk	Risk-relevant concern	What to watch
IEC	Decisive: register, nominations, results	Low trust; untested results system; appointment by the President	Timeliness and transparency of results; handling of nomination rejections
Political parties, candidates and IPC	Decisive: rhetoric, supporter conduct, acceptance of results	Expectations of certain victory; incumbency advantages; coalition defections; identity rhetoric	Premature claims; rally language; IPC participation
Judiciary	High in post-results phase	Procedural dismissal; perceived bias	Practice direction; speed and reasoning of rulings
Gambia Police Force and security services	High: public order and protection	Permit refusals; use of force; perceived partisanship	Conduct at protests; deployment in hotspots

Actor	Influence on risk	Risk-relevant concern	What to watch
NHRC and NCCE	Medium: monitoring and education	Resource limits	NHRC incident reports; NCCE reach in LRR and CRR
Media and platforms	High on information space	State media imbalance; spread of unverified results	Fact-checks; equitable airtime; takedown response times
Religious and traditional leaders	High on de-escalation	Perceived partisanship	Joint statements; mediation in hotspots
Women's and youth organisations	High on mobilisation and prevention	Exclusion; youth recruitment for intimidation	Youth peace pledges; reports of gendered harassment
ECOWAS, AU, UN, EU and partners	Medium to high in a crisis	Limited leverage if engaged late	Stand-by envoys; observer statements

Table 2. Stakeholder influence matrix

6.0 RESILIENCE AND MITIGATING FACTORS

Despite the challenges and risks surrounding The Gambia's 2026 presidential election, the country benefits from strong institutional, societal, and international resilience factors that can help prevent electoral violence and political instability. Through effective stakeholder engagement, accountability mechanisms, conflict-prevention initiatives, and broad democratic participation, these safeguards can strengthen electoral credibility, enhance public trust, and support a peaceful, inclusive, and transparent electoral process. Continued coordination and support among key actors will be critical to maintaining stability throughout the electoral cycle.

6.1 Internal Resilience and Mitigating Factors

6.1.1 Democratic Gains and Social Cohesion

The Gambia's democratic progress since the 2016 political transition remains a key source of resilience ahead of the 2026 presidential election.[46] Expanded political freedoms, increased civic participation, greater media openness, and the successful conduct of recent elections have contributed to strengthening public confidence in democratic processes as the primary means of political competition and leadership change.[47] The transfer of power following the defeat of former President Yahya Jammeh established an important precedent for resolving political disputes through constitutional and institutional mechanisms. This resilience is further reinforced by social cohesion and widespread public support for democracy, constitutional rule, accountability, and presidential term limits.[48] Together, these factors strengthen democratic norms and enhance the prospects for a peaceful 2026 presidential election.

6.1.2 Functioning Institutions and Security Sector

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the judiciary, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE), and the security services remain critical pillars of resilience ahead of The Gambia's 2026 presidential election. The IEC is responsible for the administration of the electoral process, while the judiciary, including the Supreme Court, provides constitutional and legal mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes. The NHRC is expected to monitor and promote the protection of political and human

46. Afrobarometer (2024) Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey: The Gambia. Accra: Afrobarometer. Available at: https://www.afrobarometer.org (Accessed September 11, 2026).
47. Freedom House (2025) Freedom in the World 2025: The Gambia. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2025 (Accessed September 11, 2026).
48. ECOWAS (2016) ECOWAS concludes 50th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government with a 67-count communiqué: Gambia, peace, security, democracy and institutional matters top decisions. Available at: https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-concludes-50th-ordinary-session-of-the-authority-of-heads-of-state-and-government-with-a-67-count-communique-gambia-peace-security-democracy-and-institutional-matters-top-decisions (Accessed September 11, 2026).

rights, while the NCCE supports voter education, civic awareness, and informed citizen participation. Equally important, the Gambia Police Force (GPF), supported by the Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) and intelligence services, is expected to maintain public order, secure electoral personnel and materials, protect polling stations and electoral infrastructure, monitor and respond to emerging security threats, prevent electoral violence, and ensure a safe environment for campaigning, voting, and the announcement of results. Security sector reforms since 2017 have laid the foundations for professionalism, accountability and neutrality, but remain incomplete, and the credibility of these institutions will be tested most in the handling of protests and the results period.

6.1.3 Civil Society, Media, and Electoral Peace Infrastructure

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) remain a key pillar of electoral resilience in The Gambia, contributing to voter education, election observation, conflict prevention, and early warning through initiatives such as the CSO Coalition on Elections, which has played a significant role in promoting electoral transparency, public trust, and peaceful participation.[49] Their efforts are complemented by institutions such as the Inter-Party Committee (IPC), the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE), and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which support dialogue, civic education, human rights protection, and confidence-building among political stakeholders. Additionally, independent media outlets including The Standard, Foroyaa, The Point, Kerr Fatou, and The Fatu Network, together with initiatives such as Gambia Participates and the Election Watch Committee (EWC), help promote access to credible information and counter misinformation.[50] The WANEP-facilitated National Election Response Group (NERG), launched with EU support, provides a platform linking early warning to response.

6.1.4 Religious, Traditional, and Community-Based Peace Actors

Religious and traditional leaders remain important sources of peace and stability in The Gambia due to their broad community influence and credibility across political, ethnic, and regional divides. The Gambia Inter-Religious Council (GIRC), together with Muslim and Christian leaders, has contributed to promoting interfaith dialogue, social cohesion, peace messaging, and respect for democratic processes through nationwide outreach and community engagement. Religious leaders also played an important role in supporting dialogue and peaceful constitutional processes during The Gambia's democratic transition following the 2016 electoral crisis. In addition, traditional authorities, community elders, women's groups, youth organisations, and community peace networks help mediate local disputes, promote civic engagement, counter misinformation, and encourage peaceful political participation. Collectively, these actors form an important community-based peace infrastructure that strengthens social cohesion, conflict prevention, and the prospects for peaceful, credible, and widely accepted electoral outcomes

6.2 External Resilience and Mitigating Factors

Regional and international actors remain important external sources of resilience for The Gambia's 2026 presidential election. Organisations such as ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth, UNDP, International IDEA, and other development partners contribute to electoral stability through preventive diplomacy, mediation, election observation, technical assistance, voter education, and institutional capacity-building. Their support strengthens the preparedness and effectiveness of key electoral institutions, enhances transparency and accountability, promotes adherence to democratic norms and constitutional processes, and provides mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution. In addition, sustained international engagement and oversight serve as deterrents against electoral malpractice, political violence, and unconstitutional actions, while reinforcing public confidence in the electoral process. Combined with The Gambia's democratic progress since the 2016 political transition and continued support from development partners, these external interventions contribute significantly to conflict prevention, electoral credibility, and the prospects for a peaceful, transparent, and widely accepted 2026 presidential election.

[49] UNDP (2024) Strengthening Democratic Governance and Peacebuilding in The Gambia. New York: United Nations Development Programme. Available at: https://www.undp.org/gambia (Accessed September 11, 2026).

[50] Gambia Participates, Elections Watch Committee and CSO Coalition on Elections, 2025. Joint Statement by Gambia Participates, the ElectionWatch Committee (EWC) and the CSO Coalition on Elections. The Standard Newspaper, 29 April. Available at: https://standard.gm/joint-statement-by-gambia-participates-the-electionwatch-committee-ewc-and-the-cso-coalition-on-election/ [Accessed 15 September 2026]

7.0 POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

The trajectory of The Gambia's 2026 presidential election will depend largely on how political actors, state institutions, and citizens navigate intensifying political competition, unresolved constitutional issues, and emerging electoral grievances. While the country's democratic transition has achieved significant progress since 2016, the election period presents both opportunities for further democratic consolidation and risks of political instability. Based on the preceding analysis of risks and threats, this policy brief outlines a range of potential electoral scenarios and highlights their implications for peace and stability. It calls on all stakeholders to take proactive measures to prevent electoral violence and mitigate associated risks, considering the scenarios presented below.

7.1 Best Case Scenario (Desirable but less likely)

Despite the challenges accentuated by the failure of constitutional reform, political actors and key stakeholders place national interests above partisan considerations and work collectively to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) successfully administers a transparent, inclusive, and credible election, while political parties engage in peaceful, issue-based competition and respect electoral rules and outcomes. Civil Society Organisations, the media, religious and traditional leaders, and other stakeholders actively promote informed civic participation, counter misinformation, and support peaceful political engagement. As a result, the outcome of the election is broadly accepted as free, fair, and credible, and any disputes are resolved through established legal and constitutional mechanisms. The peaceful management of the electoral process strengthens public confidence in democratic institutions, reinforces social cohesion and political stability, and further consolidates the democratic gains achieved since The Gambia's landmark 2016 political transition.

7.2 Middle Case Scenario (Most plausible)

The 2026 presidential election is conducted largely peacefully and without major disruptions, but is accompanied by heightened political tensions, isolated incidents of confrontation, and the spread of misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric, particularly on social media. Allegations of electoral irregularities, administrative weaknesses, and weak enforcement of electoral regulations fuel opposition complaints and deepen political polarisation. Following the announcement of the results, one or more contesting political parties challenge the outcome through various channels, creating a period of political uncertainty. Nevertheless, state institutions remain functional, and disputes are ultimately resolved through constitutional and judicial mechanisms. The credibility, transparency, and perceived impartiality of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the judiciary contribute to maintaining public confidence, preserving stability, and preventing tensions from escalating into broader conflict.

7.3 Worst Case Scenario (Less Likely but serious)

The unresolved constitutional reforms, governance deficiencies, economic grievances, and growing political polarisation significantly undermine the credibility of the 2026 presidential election. Public distrust is exacerbated by concerns over electoral administration, institutional impartiality, and the spread of misinformation and hate speech. A disputed outcome or delays in the release of election results trigger protests and heightened political confrontation, particularly in urban centers and highly competitive constituencies. Perceived as partisan, security responses fuel localised violence, disrupt economic activity, weaken public confidence in democratic institutions, and threaten the democratic gains achieved since the 2016 transition.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined below are based on an assessment of the key electoral risks and resilience factors shaping The Gambia's 2026 presidential election. Their timely implementation will help support credible and transparent elections while contributing to democratic consolidation, social cohesion, and long-term political stability in The Gambia.

IEC, Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Security Agencies, National Human Rights Commission, National Assembly, Civil Society Organisations, and Media Institutions

- **1. Strengthen Electoral Transparency, Institutional Coordination, and Public Confidence:** The respective institutions should work collaboratively to strengthen electoral transparency, accountability, and public confidence ahead of the 2026 presidential election. The IEC should prioritise impartial enforcement of electoral laws, effective electoral planning and logistics, staff capacity, inclusive voter education, and transparent vote counting, results transmission, and verification processes. Other institutions should reinforce electoral security, ensure the timely resolution of electoral disputes, protect fundamental rights, strengthen legislative and institutional oversight, and support independent electoral monitoring. Civil society and media institutions should also promote public awareness, responsible reporting, and timely dissemination of credible information to counter misinformation and disinformation. A coordinated and inclusive institutional response will be essential to mitigating electoral risks, safeguarding electoral integrity, and ensuring a credible and peaceful election.

The Media Regulatory Bodies, Journalists' Associations and Media Organisations

- **2. Strengthen professional and conflict-sensitive election reporting:** Media regulatory bodies, journalists' associations, and media organisations should ensure compliance with professional and electoral media standards by promoting balanced, accurate, and impartial coverage, while countering misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and inflammatory content. They should also strengthen fact-checking, support voter education and civic awareness, facilitate informed public debate, and provide timely, evidence-based reporting to enhance transparency, public trust, and peaceful electoral competition during the 2026 presidential election.

IEC, NHRC, Media Regulators, Civil Society, Political Parties and Security Agencies

- **3. Strengthen multi-stakeholder mechanisms to prevent and address divisive narratives and identity-based tensions:** The IEC, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), media regulators, civil society organisations, political parties, and security agencies should establish and strengthen multi-sectoral and collaborative efforts for the early identification, monitoring, and mitigation of hate speech, tribal incitement, discriminatory narratives, and other forms of inflammatory rhetoric that could threaten social cohesion and electoral stability. This should include enhanced information-sharing, coordinated risk assessments, community-level engagement, and targeted interventions in identified hotspots and high-risk communication spaces, including online platforms.

IEC, Law Enforcement Agencies and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- **4. Ensure impartial enforcement of campaign regulations and the Electoral Code of Conduct:** The IEC, law enforcement agencies, NHRC, and other relevant institutions should strengthen monitoring, accountability, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure the consistent, transparent, and impartial application of campaign regulations and the Electoral Code of Conduct. Timely investigation of violations, proportionate sanctions, effective inter-agency coordination, and transparent communication of enforcement actions will promote a level playing field, strengthen public confidence, and help prevent electoral disputes, tensions, and violence during the 2026 electoral cycle.

IEC, Security Agencies, Judiciary, NHRC, Political Parties and Civil Society Organisations

- **5. Strengthen Electoral Violence Prevention, Dispute Resolution, and Institutional Coordination:** The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), security agencies, the Judiciary, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), political parties, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and other relevant stakeholders should strengthen coordination, information sharing, and joint action to prevent and respond to election-related tensions and violence. Attention should be given to strengthening early warning and response mechanisms, promoting compliance with the Electoral Code of Conduct, supporting dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives, and ensuring accountability for electoral offences. At the same time, the Judiciary should enhance its preparedness and capacity to resolve electoral disputes in a timely, transparent, impartial, and consistent manner, while improving public

communication on electoral rulings and ensuring accessible legal avenues for addressing electoral grievances. Together, these measures will strengthen public confidence in democratic institutions, reinforce the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, reduce political polarisation, and contribute to peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections throughout the 2026 electoral cycle.

IEC, Political Parties, Civil Society, Media, and Security Agencies

- **6. Promote responsible communication and respect for electoral processes:** The IEC, political parties, CSOs, media institutions, and security agencies should work collaboratively to promote accurate and responsible public communication, counter misinformation and disinformation, and strengthen public understanding of electoral procedures. Stakeholders should discourage premature victory claims and inflammatory rhetoric, while encouraging the peaceful resolution of electoral grievances through established legal and institutional channels. These efforts will strengthen public confidence, reduce tensions, and support the credibility and peaceful conduct of the 2026 electoral process.

Traditional and religious authorities, CSOs, Youth Associations, Gender-Advocacy Groups and Community-Based Groups.

- **7. Strengthen Community Leadership and Civic Engagement for Peaceful, Inclusive, and Violence-Free Elections:** Religious and traditional authorities should leverage their moral authority should collaborate with these civic groups to promote peaceful electoral participation, social cohesion, and tolerance. They should actively counter misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric, facilitate community dialogue and mediation, discourage hate speech and electoral violence, and encourage the peaceful resolution of electoral grievances through lawful channels. Particular attention should be given to amplifying the voices and participation of women and young people, as well as addressing the risks of political exclusion and intimidation. By working collectively as neutral advocates for peace and democratic participation, these actors can help reduce polarisation, strengthen public trust, and mitigate electoral risks before, during, and after The Gambia's 2026 presidential election.

National Election Response Group (NERG) and CSOs

- **8. Strengthen election observation, civic engagement, and early warning mechanisms:** NERG and CSOs should enhance domestic election observation, voter and civic education, and community-based early warning and response systems to promote electoral transparency, informed participation, and peaceful democratic engagement. Strengthened citizen monitoring, conflict-risk identification, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders will help counter misinformation and hate speech, address emerging tensions, strengthen public confidence, and contribute to the peaceful and credible conduct of the 2026 electoral process.

International, Regional, and Development Partners

- **9. Strengthen Electoral Integrity, Conflict Prevention, and Inclusive Participation:** Provide coordinated technical, financial, and capacity-building support to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), judiciary, Civil Society Organisations, and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen electoral administration, dispute resolution, transparency, and civic and voter education. Efforts should also promote the participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups, protect human rights, counter misinformation and disinformation, and enhance public trust in democratic institutions. In parallel, support should be provided for election observation, early warning and response mechanisms, preventive diplomacy, stakeholder dialogue, and community-based peacebuilding initiatives to mitigate electoral tensions, prevent violence, promote peaceful political competition, and ensure credible, inclusive, and widely accepted electoral outcomes.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The 2026 presidential election will be a defining moment for The Gambia's democratic trajectory and a critical test of the gains achieved since the 2016 political transition. While the country has made notable progress in expanding political freedoms, civic participation, and democratic governance, the election will take place amid unresolved constitutional reform issues, persistent socio-economic challenges, growing political polarisation, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation. If not effectively managed, these

factors could undermine public confidence in the electoral process, increase tensions among political actors, and heighten the risk of electoral disputes and post-election instability.

Despite these challenges, The Gambia benefits from important sources of resilience, including active civil society organisations, functioning electoral and judicial institutions, expanding peacebuilding mechanisms, and sustained support from regional and international partners. The peaceful and credible conduct of the election will depend on the commitment of stakeholders to uphold democratic principles, strengthen electoral integrity, promote inclusive dialogue, and resolve disputes through constitutional and legal channels. With effective electoral management, responsible political leadership, and adequate preventive measures, the 2026 election can reinforce democratic consolidation, strengthen public trust, and safeguard the progress achieved since the landmark 2016 transition.

THE GAMBIA

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