

# **Asymmetric relations and enforcement of democracy in West Africa: The case of Nigeria and The Gambia**

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## ***Abstract***

Nigeria and The Gambia have been involved in asymmetrical relations since 1965 given the disparity in the material capabilities between them. This asymmetry came to the fore in the role played by Nigeria in resolving the 2016 political impasse in The Gambia when former President Yahya Jammeh refused to accept the results of the elections and quit power, having lost to the opposition. Adopting Krystof Kozák's four behavioural tendencies of asymmetrically stronger states in the theory of asymmetry in international relations, this article notes that Nigeria changed its behaviour towards The Gambia from asymmetric benevolence (B2) to military threat (B4) to oust Jammeh from power. It, however, adds that beyond deploying its asymmetric advantage in resolving the Gambian impasse, Nigeria cannot be of serious assistance to The Gambia in building democratic structures and institutions due to its democratic challenges on B2 terms. The article concludes that Nigeria's action in the Gambian crisis was an end in itself, that is, it was aimed at forestalling threats to regional stability. Nigeria lacks moral and technical wherewithal to deploy its B2 behaviour towards the development of democratic institutions in The Gambia.

**Keywords:** Asymmetric relations; Enforcement of democracy; Nigeria; The Gambia; Foreign policy; West Africa.

## **Introduction**

Nigerian-Gambian relations date back to the 1960s when both countries became independent from the colonial rule of Great Britain. This relationship can be summed up as a case study in asymmetrical relations between African nations. This is given the vast disparity in power coefficients between the countries in terms of geographical size, military might and economy, among other critical factors. Nigerian-Gambian relations find expression in Nigeria's long-held diplomatic philosophy of 'Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, which has seen Nigeria contributing to peace-keeping and peace-building and other diplomatic efforts across the continent. A new dimension was, however, introduced into Nigeria-Gambia relations in the 2016 political crisis arising from the intransigence of President Yahya Jammeh in leaving power upon losing his fourth re-election bid to the opposition. In a display

of the power differentials between the two nations, Nigeria led other countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the deployment of the military to oust Jammeh from power to pave way for a peaceful political transition in The Gambia.

In his seminal work, *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*, Huntington opines that the democratization of the Third Wave is more pervasive than the earlier waves.<sup>1</sup> The “wave” also blew across the African continent, with many countries hitherto given to different forms of illiberal rules yielding to the pressures of democratic forces. The premium on democracy in Africa is seen in the emergence of regional and sub-regional instruments such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the Economic Community of West African States or ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, stipulating it as the only recognised route to power. There is adherence to these instruments in the West African sub-region as noted in the last few years incumbents lost elections, accepted results and paving way for peaceful transitions of power. In Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, presidential elections between 2015 and 2016 show that democracy has become the acceptable system of rule.

Arsing from the above, notably, the transition to democracy in Africa saw many leaders, such as Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, Idris Deby of Chad, Ibrahim Mainasara of Niger and Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, among others circumventing the processes of democratization in their home countries by transforming from being military rulers to democratically “elected” rulers.<sup>2</sup> One of the countries that experienced this phenomenon was The Gambia where the Head of State, Yahya Jammeh won the 1996 Presidential elections after two years of full dictatorship. Despite periodic elections since the first election, governance in The Gambia has been accused of several dysfunctions such as corruption, human rights abuse, weakening of institutions, the decimation of opposition among other problems by the citizens. This situation laid the background to the December 2016 Presidential Election in the country that resulted in dispute following the rescinding of the earlier position of the President of The Gambia, Jammeh to accept the result of the poll that saw his defeat by opposition candidate Adama Barrow.<sup>3</sup>

The position of Jammeh in the election brought renewed attention to The Gambia amid the ensuing constitutional crisis that was brewing. The rising political tension in the country saw the President-elect, Adama Barrow taking up abode

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1 SP Huntington, “The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century” (University of Oklahoma press, 1993), p. 14.

2 R Joseph, “Democratization in Africa after 1989: Comparative and theoretical perspectives”, *Comparative Politics*, 23(3), 1997, p. 375.

3 E Sanyang & S Camara, “The Gambia after elections: Implications for governance and security in West Africa”, (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Peace and Security, 2017), pp. 8; 11; 14.

in Senegal.<sup>4</sup> The international community waded into the political crisis in the country through the regional body, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) detailing security forces from Nigeria and other states in West Africa, which eventually led to the departure of President Jammeh into exile to Equatorial Guinea,<sup>5</sup> ostensibly negotiated to give him a soft-landing in his post-presidency. The ousting of Jammeh from power following his refusal to accept election results in The Gambia speaks to the coercive defence of democracy in the country. Nigeria has committed itself to this task since its return to democracy in 1999.<sup>6</sup> In line with Resolution 2337 of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Nigeria along with other ECOWAS actors embarked on an unprecedented action in West Africa.<sup>7</sup>

This article interrogates the deployment of Nigeria's asymmetric advantage in collusion with other ECOWAS actors towards resolving the Gambian political impasse since the former is still trying to find her feet in democratic practice among other pertinent issues and challenges. Nigeria had before the re-emergence of democracy in 1999 been the leader of the ECOWAS in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the resolution of the crisis in Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone.<sup>8</sup> Nigeria's diplomatic and military forays into the Gambian crisis of 2016 call for critical analysis of the role of asymmetric differentials in state power in West Africa. The article then contends that while Nigeria's efforts at resolving the Gambian crisis is commendable in enforcing the will of its citizens, Nigeria's credentials as an enforcer of democracy remain inconsistent due to local dynamics. In the final analysis, Nigeria lacks the very democratic values it enforced in The Gambia.

## **Asymmetry in international politics: Conceptual and theoretical insights**

The theoretical utility of asymmetry is now growing in international relations. It speaks to the way(s) nations that possess disparity in material capabilities to relate with one another in the international system. It avers that power differential does not necessarily lead to the domination of the weaker by the stronger state. Traditionally, international politics was configured by its founding fathers in terms of the capacity of each state in the international system to pursue its interest within the international system in terms of power. In the realist tradition in international relations, inter-state relations are best captured by the quantum of power they can deploy in the comity of

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4 A Jazzera, Adama barrow sworn in as president in senegal, *News Agencies*, 19 January 2017 (available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/1/19/adama-barrow-sworn-in-as-gambias-president-in-senegal>, as accessed on 2 May 2021).

5 C Hartmann, "ECOWAS and the restoration...", *Africa Spectrum*, 52(1), 2017, p. 87.

6 S Omotola, From importer to exporter: the changing role of Nigeria in promoting democratic values in Africa. *Political Perspectives*, 2(1), 2008, p. 34

7 C Hartmann, "ECOWAS and the restoration...", *Africa Spectrum*, 52(1), 2017, p. 89.

8 O Ogunnubi, "Effective hegemonic influence in Africa: An analysis of Nigeria's 'hegemonic' position", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52(7), 2017, p. 9.

nations. In the seminal work of Hans Morgenthau, international politics is essentially captured as power struggle among nations. Hence, states design their foreign policy and their behaviour in the international system based on their power potential which is measured in terms of material capabilities.<sup>9</sup> It offers a disputation to the position that disparity in the material capability of states does not necessarily lead to the domination of the weaker state, as there are empirical instances of cooperation and tranquillity in its relation with the stronger state.

The theory departs from realists and new-realists who see asymmetry as mere variance in resource or material capabilities. These proponents contend that variance in resource or material capabilities does not necessarily lead to conflict between the stronger and weaker states. Brantly Womack popularized this view of inter-state power relations in his seminal work, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* by offering the contentions of the theory. The theory presupposes that disparity in resource capabilities creates differences in the interests and perception between stronger and weaker states in international relations. This suggests that perceptions and interactions between the two states will be shaped by the opportunity situation and the vulnerabilities faced by both parties. The theory assumes that although asymmetric relations are rarely stable, they tend to be usually robust.<sup>10</sup>

Womack notes that there has always been the tendency to see asymmetry as disequilibrium rather than as a sustained condition in the relationship between two nations with a disparity in capabilities.<sup>11</sup> This entails that the stronger state despite its advantaged material status is not in domineering relations with the weaker state. Examples of asymmetric relations include China-Vietnam relations, United States-Mexico relations, and so on. The central feature of these relations is that there are apparent disparities in the endowment of the two relating nations. However, despite the disparities, these relations have been sustained with the weaker states being able to hold their own in the scheme of things. Asymmetry is seen as an important conception of international relations by elevating the perception and status of small states in relation to the bigger and stronger states. It is a major way by which small states shape the behaviour of powerful states.<sup>12</sup>

Krystof Kozák adds an important dimension to the understanding of how asymmetry works in bilateral relations. In his view, four patterns of behaviours can be observed in states in asymmetric relations. They are as follows:<sup>13</sup>

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9 HJ Morgenthau, *Politics among nations* (New York, Alfred Knoff, 1948), p. 17.

10 B Womack, *China and Vietnam: The politics of asymmetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 18.

11 B Womack, *China and Vietnam: ...*, p. 17.

12 T Long, "It's not the size, it's the relationship: From 'small states' to asymmetry", *International Politics*, 54(2), 2017, pp. 144-160.

13 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations: A case study in asymmetry relations" (NEU, 2018) (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 17-19.

- The stronger state can shut itself from interacting with the weaker state (B1);
- The stronger state can open up and be benevolent towards the weaker state (B2);
- The stronger state may not pay attention to the weaker state, probably be in alliance with another strong state (B3);
- The stronger state can use its asymmetrical advantage to dominate/overrun the weaker state (B4).

Rather than possible outright domination of the weaker state by the stronger state, Kozák shows that there are patterns of inter-state behaviour that show that the weaker state is not always dominated or not in danger of being dominated. This point differentiates asymmetry from the traditional and more established theories of international relations. Having seen that realists and neo-realists, in the final analysis, recognize the disparity in material capabilities as the defining feature of international relations, asymmetry provides further behavioural options for states in international relations. An important feature of the various theories of international relations is that most of them claim to disagree with the realist theoretical position, they agree albeit in varying degrees to the fact of asymmetrical material capabilities and behavioural fallouts that can ensue from it.

For example, integration theorists argue that states must pool sovereignty for interdependence and mutual benevolence of members. Karl Deutch notes this by asserting that integration connotes “a relationship among units in which they are mutually interdependent and jointly produce system properties which they would separately lack”.<sup>14</sup> A weakness of the integration in comparison to asymmetry is that while integration might ensure that the stronger states do not dominate the weaker ones, it does not allay the fear of the stronger state of losing some of its capabilities in its relation to the weaker state. This weakness accounts for the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, as Britons feared that their economic capability can be made weak due to the influx of workers from poor European states. Womack recognises this situation and asserts that asymmetry is a sustained situation rather than a disequilibrium.<sup>15</sup> It also recognises the fears of the stronger state which is mediated by the fact that all the behaviours pointed out Kozak are at the instance of the stronger state.

Asymmetry is relevant in the analysis of the Nigerian-Gambian relations and more crucially in explaining the role of Nigeria in the 2016 political crisis in The Gambia. Since the commencement of diplomatic relations between the two states, two of Kozak's four potential behaviours in asymmetric relations between their relations. First, Nigeria has been benevolent towards The Gambia on various diplomatic fronts ranging from economic assistance to military assistance, among other benefits

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14 SO Akinboye & FO Ottoh, “A systematic approach to international relations” (Lagos, Concept Publications, 2005), p. 71.

15 B Womack, *China and Vietnam:...*, p. 17.

(B2). Second, Nigeria changed from asymmetric benevolence to military threat (domination) to force Jammeh out of power upon his refusal to accept the result of the presidential election of 2016 (B4). The vast disparity in material capabilities between Nigeria and Gambia means that asymmetric relations can be used to aid the democratization process in West Africa, even though that has its limitations. The carrot and stick mechanism demonstrated in the change of Nigeria's behaviour towards The Gambia from B2 to B4 shows that theory of asymmetric relations can be used to explain how stronger states can use their material advantage to instil democratic values in their regions.

### **Nigerian-Gambian relations: A case study in asymmetric relations**

The Nigerian-Gambian relations started in 1965 upon the independence of Gambia. Nigeria which became an independent state five years earlier had already established the guiding principles of its foreign policy, chief of which declared Africa as the 'centrepiece' of its foreign policy. Being of Britain's largest colonies, Nigeria became a natural leader of African nascent African states upon gaining independence. Thus, Nigerian-Gambian relations over history has found expression within the framework of the assertive foreign policy pursued by Nigeria in her early decades of statehood. This portends that Nigeria-Gambian relations are based on asymmetry. This is because there is a vast disparity in material capabilities between the two nations. Based on the understanding of international politics as a game of power, which is the prism through which states pursue their interests, Nigeria ranks higher than most African countries in power metrics such as economy, population, military strength, geographical size and resource endowment, among others.

Kanol, based on Kozak's four asymmetric options, submits that Nigeria-Gambian relations are asymmetric, given the disparity in the material capabilities they can deploy in the international system.<sup>16</sup> Aligning with the foregoing, when compared on three of the national power metrics such as population, economy and military might, Nigeria ranks higher than all the countries in West Africa, including The Gambia.

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16 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), p. 2.

Image 1: Map of West Africa showing the location and geographical sizes of West African states



Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Western Africa (available at <https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa#/media/1/640491/204287>, as accessed 22 July 2021).

In the map (see Image 1) of West Africa above, while Nigeria does not have the largest geographical size in the region, The Gambia's 11,000km<sup>2</sup> size pales into insignificance in comparison with that of Nigeria's 923,000km<sup>2</sup>. This disparity is brought into further clarity in the compilation of the economic strength of West African states in 2015, a year preceding The Gambia's controversial polls of 2016.

Table 1: 2015 GDP and population of West African states (The Gambia and Nigeria asterisked).

Countries	GDP (current US\$)	Population
Benin	11,388,160,958.25	10,575,952
Burkina Faso	11,832,159,275.60	18,110,624
Cabo Verde	1,596,800,287.16	524,743
*Gambia, The	1,378,176,868.32	2,085,860
Ghana	48,564,863,888.44	27,849,205
Guinea-Bissau	1,048,229,629.42	1,737,202
Liberia	3,177,000,000	4,472,230
Mali	13,104,802,016.20	17,438,778
Mauritania	6,166,857,628.62	4,046,301
Niger	9,685,577,941.03	20,001,663
*Nigeria	486,803,295,097.89	181,137,448
Senegal	17,774,766,636.05	14,578,459
Sierra Leone	4,218,723,875.14	7,171,914
Togo	4,180,866,177.04	7,323,158
Cote d'Ivoire	45,814,637,971.47	23,226,143
Guinea	8,794,202,443.67	11,432,088

Source: Green Building Africa, "GDP and population of West African states" (available at [https://www.greenbuildingafrica.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/decoupes\\_OOAS\\_Locations.png](https://www.greenbuildingafrica.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/decoupes_OOAS_Locations.png), as accessed on 13 May 2021).

Table I above shows the vast disparity between the economic powers of Nigeria and The Gambia, among other West African states. The GDP of Nigeria is more than those of other states put together, while The Gambia ranks lowest in the region's economic power table. Furthermore, the disparity between Nigeria and The Gambia can be seen in terms of historical existence and figures. Historically, the Nigerian military has been existing since its colonial days while the Gambian military only emerged in 1981 in the build-up to the formation of the now-defunct Senegambia Confederacy.<sup>17</sup> As of 2016, the Nigerian Armed Forces had 220,000 members while The Gambia had less than 1,000 armed personnel.<sup>18</sup>

The foregoing analysis establishes the superiority of Nigeria's national power to that of The Gambia and sets the context for the former's benevolent relations (B2) towards the latter. The Gambia has benefitted from its relations with Nigeria. Nigeria and The Gambia have related over history on many fronts, including economic, judicial, social, educational and scientific, defence and civil aviation.<sup>19</sup> The bulk of Nigerian-Gambian relations revolves around economic assistance of various forms to The Gambia. To foster economic relations between the two nations, the Nigeria-Gambia Joint Commission was launched in 1983, while the first session of the Commission was held in 1985. The two nations entered the Lagos Treaty focusing on 'Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between them.'<sup>20</sup> The bilateral relations were further strengthened in January 2003 on "the reciprocal promotion and protection and the bilateral trade agreements in the areas of education, law enforcement, health and agriculture".<sup>21</sup> The Gambia has benefitted from Nigeria's diplomatic generosity in terms of concessional crude oil<sup>22</sup> to the country and financial donations which Nigeria has graciously done to ensure that African countries can run effectively in the teething days of independent nationhood.<sup>23</sup>

One of the strongest areas of Nigeria-Gambia relations is the judicial segment between the two nations. Right from the independence of The Gambia, the country has benefitted from Nigeria's magnanimity in seconding top-notch judges to the country. The history of the Gambian judiciary would not be complete without

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17 JA Wiseman, "Military rule in The Gambia: An interim assessment", *Third World Quarterly*, 17(5), 1996, p. 918.

18 Trading Economics, "Nigeria – armed forces personnel, total" (available at <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/armed-forces-personnel-total-wb-data.html>, as accessed on 30 April 2021).

19 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 29-44.

20 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), p. 29.

21 *Peoples Daily Online*, Nigeria, Gambia Sign Cooperation Agreements, 31 January 2003 (available at [http://en.people.cn/200301/31/eng20030131\\_110997.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200301/31/eng20030131_110997.shtml), as accessed on 1 May 2021).

22 S Danso, S Emovwodo, & M Saud, *Ecowas common trade policy: Challenges and opportunities – Gambia and Nigeria*, International conference on research and academic community services (Atlantis Press, 2020), p. 55.

23 VO Ukaogo, UU Okonkwo, FO Orabueze, VO Eze, & S Ugwu-Okoye, "Afro-centrism as the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy: A historical misnomer in the aftermath of xenophobic attacks in South Africa", *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 7(1), 2020, pp. 2; 7.

mentioning the great judicial minds from Nigeria. Many Nigerian lawyers have also practised in The Gambia thereby helping to strengthen its judiciary. Nigerian judges such as Justices Akinola Aguda, EO Ayoola, Emmanuel Akomaye Agim and Emmanuel Fagbenle have all served as Chief Justice of The Gambia.<sup>24</sup> Nigeria and The Gambia have also historically had robust educational and scientific relations. Many Nigerian education professionals have been sent to or employed in Gambian educational institutions over the years. Gambian students have been trained in Nigerian institutions.<sup>25</sup> The University of Gambia has benefitted in exchange programmes with Nigerian universities towards the heightening of the research and development of the capacity of The Gambia.

The Gambian military is a relatively younger institution compared to Nigeria's. Hence, both nations have been engaged in defence and strategic relations with the deployment of members of the Nigerian Armed Forces drafted to train Gambian military personnel. This is as a result of the Nigeria-Gambian Defence Pact which has been very robust and helped in ensuring that The Gambia can maintain a defence force that can ensure the defence of its territorial integrity. Nigeria also helped in the training of the Gambian Police.<sup>26</sup> Other areas covered by the Defence Pact include immigration and sundry security training. In civil aviation, Nigeria has helped in building the aviation sector of The Gambia following the bilateral agreement on the subject in 2004.<sup>27</sup> The agreement covers all aspects of civil aviation aimed at making The Gambia one of Africa's leading safest destinations in air travel.

Arguably, the umbrella policy governing Nigerian-Gambian relations is the Technical Aid Corps (TAC) that was established by the Nigerian government in 1987. The main drive behind the policy is to contribute to the development of African and Caribbean nations as part of its avowed foreign policy thrust that sought to aid them altruistically in a departure from the Western aid that is without strings attached. The Gambia is the biggest beneficiary of this diplomatic magnanimity by Nigeria. The Gambia has benefitted across many sectors such as health, education, legal and skilled workers to develop human capital across these sectors. It was the highest receiver of the TAC volunteers between 1987 and 2004 with 363 corps members. In the health sector, The Gambia received 160 health workers in the first 18 years of the Corps' existence.<sup>28</sup> The importance of the TAC to human capital and the overall development of The Gambia is immense. This is registered by the views

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24 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 37-38.

25 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 38-40.

26 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 40-43.

27 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), pp. 43-44.

28 W Adebawo, *Globally oriented citizenship and international Voluntary service* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2011), p. 31.

of volunteers about the gory situation key sectors of the Gambian economy would have been without the TAC.<sup>29</sup>

The diplomatic benevolence of Nigeria towards The Gambia means that the latter is better for its asymmetric relations with Nigeria. Kanol notes this by averring that The Gambia has gained more than Nigeria in the relations between the two countries.<sup>30</sup> Countries like The Gambia have benefitted from the Afrocentric nature of Nigeria's foreign policy. The Gambia enjoyed the B2 aspect of the asymmetric relations between it and Nigeria up till 2016 when the electoral and possible constitution crisis erupted following the intransigence of President Jammeh to concede defeat and quit power. Hence, Nigeria changed its actions to B4 as a last resort to ensure that the election stands and transition went seamlessly.

### **Historical background of the Gambian 2016 electoral crisis**

The Gambia is one of Africa's smallest nations. Arising from colonial politics, the country became an independent state in February 1965 as a constitutional monarchy. It is a multi-ethnic state; a feature she shares with other countries on the continent. According to the 2019 estimates of the World Population Review (2019), the population of The Gambia stands at 2.23million people. In terms of ethnic distribution of the population, Mandinka forms 42%, while Fula, Wolof and Jola make up 18%, 16% and 10% respectively. Other groups such as Seres, Serahule and the Bianunkas are in the minority.<sup>31</sup> The Gambia became a republic in 1970.<sup>32</sup>

The post-independence political history of The Gambia can be divided into two eras. The presidencies of Dauda Jawara (1965-1994) and Yahya Jammeh (1994-2016). In the first era, Dauda Jawara became the political leader of The Gambia with his emergence as the Prime Minister of The Gambia in 1963. He later became the President of the country when it secured Republican status in 1970. His party, Progressive Peoples Party (PPP) had won the majority of seats in the 1962 elections.<sup>33</sup> Compared to other African countries at early independence, politics in The Gambia was one party-dominant.

In the West African region, for example, there was a very quick emergence of one party or one-party dominant states. In Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire respectively, Presidents Kwame Nkrumah and Felix Houphoët-Boigny turned the political system

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29 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), p. 33.

30 D Kanol, "Nigeria-The Gambia relations..." (available at <http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6686868202.pdf>, as accessed on 25 April 2021), p. 3.

31 World Population Review, "Gambia Population 2019" (available at [www.http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/gambia-population/](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com/countries/gambia-population/), as accessed on 2 May 2021).

32 Country Watch, *Gambia Country Review 2016* (available at [www.countrywatch.com/Content/pdfs/reviews/B394Q688.01c.pdf](http://www.countrywatch.com/Content/pdfs/reviews/B394Q688.01c.pdf), as accessed on 8 June 2019), p. 2.

33 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 428.

of their countries into a one-party affair almost immediately after independence.<sup>34</sup> In Nigeria, even in the face of viable political competition, it was a one-party dominant system at the centre.<sup>35</sup> Jawara's PPP dominated the legislature. Political mobilization was also ethnic-based. Compared The PPP had greater followership in the rural areas and the ethnic card was usually employed to campaign against political opponents, as Jawara was a Mandinka.<sup>36</sup>

Jawara easily won all elections in the first phase of The Gambian political history. Elections were held in The Gambia in 1966, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987 and 1992.<sup>37</sup> In these elections, the ruling party and opposition parties experienced mixed fortunes, however, Jawara won all the elections despite allegations of corruption, weak institutions and inefficiency.<sup>38</sup> There are opinions that Jawara was able to stay for so long in power due to strategies of co-optation and alliance. The President had a policy of inviting opposition elements into his government given the need for qualified Gambians to run the governance of the country. Hence, opposition elements so invited into government eventually joins the PPP, leaving their former parties fragile and disintegrated. This situation did not, however, breed a one-party system in The Gambia as opposition parties had the necessary freedom to organize and be part of the political process of the country.<sup>39</sup>

Observers of the Jawara era of The Gambian politics noted that while the administration of the country under the President was not perfect, the human rights record of his government was relatively good.<sup>40</sup> There was freedom of expression and political association under his government. According to Freedom House, The Gambia was Africa's freest country in 1972 and remained one of the continent's four freest countries up till 1990.<sup>41</sup> A major display of good human rights posture of the Jawara Presidency was in commutation of the death penalty for plotters of the 1981 coup in the country to imprisonment and some even got state pardon.<sup>42</sup> On the economic front, Gambia's economic performance continued to wane after the good performance of the 1970s. By the mid-1980s, the economy of The Gambia had suffered terribly from mounting external debt and high inflation forcing the government to adopt a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) tagged "Economic Recovery Programme"

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34 R Schachter, "Single-party systems in West Africa", *The American Political Science Review*, 55(2), 1961, p. 294.

35 L Diamond, *Class, ethnicity, and democracy in Nigeria: The failure of the first republic* (Syracuse University Press, 1988).

36 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 428.

37 SS Nyang, "Politics in post-independence Gambia", *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, 8(2), 1975, pp. 113-126.

38 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), pp. 426-438.

39 RA Dugbenu, "The role of ECOWAS in managing post-election crises in West Africa: The case of Ivory Coast and The Gambia" (MA, University of Ghana, 2018), p. 67.

40 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 431.

41 A Doss, J Herbst, & G Mills, "Towards a taxonomy of militaries in contemporary Africa", *Prism*, 4(3), 2013, p. 132.

42 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 431.

(ERP) between 1985 and 1989.<sup>43</sup> The economic decline of The Gambia was caused by the wrong economic choice typical of African countries at that period. In the case of The Gambia, the over-bloated civil service and the over-valued nature of its currency, which encouraged the excess importation of luxury goods that the economy could not carry were responsible.<sup>44</sup> Across the African continent, poor economic performance and political instability contributed to the economic crisis in many of the countries. This led to a rise in national debts to Western countries across the continent and brought a new fervour to reliance on foreign aid, a situation that made SAP an allure in Africa in the mid-1980s. The wobbly nature of the Gambian economy exacerbated the legitimacy crisis faced by the Jawara government, a situation in which the military pounced on to seize power with a leader that would make the future of elections in the country tenuous. By the time the military struck in 1994, the country was still battling with the economic crisis.

The second of The Gambia political history is the history of Jammeh's rise to power and his high-handed governance of 22 years. Following the 1981 coup that saw President Jawara out of power for a few days, thereby creating a political crisis, the Gambian National Army was created after the disbanding of the Gambian Field Force, a ragtag pretension to a defence force that held sway between 1965 and 1981. Criticisms and disaffection against Jawara's government got to a head on July 22, 1994, with a military coup by junior military officers.<sup>45</sup> Along with Dudley's postulation of the 'logic' of military intervention in politics, which are rationalisations by the military for the justification of putsches,<sup>46</sup> the Gambian military tried to justify their abortion of democracy in the country along with the disaffection of the citizens in line with the guardian theory of civil-military relations. Furthermore, military interests were a factor in the coup. Members of the Gambian National Army were thought to have deep resentment with the domination of the top position in the Army by Nigerian officers on secondment to the county.<sup>47</sup> However, the coup was deemed to have been popular with the masses. This seems to be the situation with military coups in many African countries as the military was seen as coming to clear the mess caused by the politicians. Onah, notes that Nigerians for example celebrated many of the military coups ousting civilians and "derailed" military governments from power.<sup>48</sup>

The coup of 1994 led The Gambia to the second phase of her post-independence politics. Yahya Jammeh emerged as the military leader of The Gambia following the coup. The newly installed Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) suspended the constitution and with the closing of democratic institutions and

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43 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 430.

44 TM Sallah, "Economics and politics in the Gambia", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28(4), 1990, p. 628.

45 E Sanyang, & S Camara, *The Gambia after Elections...*, p. 7.

46 BJ Dudley, *An introduction to Nigerian government and politics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982).

47 D Perfect, "Politics and society...", *History Compass*, 6(2), 2008, p. 431.

48 EI Onah, "From welcome to hostility: A retrospective analysis of the change in civil attitude to military intervention in Nigerian politics", *Lagos Historical Review*, 17, 2017, p. 1.

full-blown military dictatorship emerged in The Gambia. The AFPRC had planned a four-year transition window but due to criticisms by the Press and citizens, a democratic process commenced that led to the promulgation of a new constitution and finally an election in 1996.<sup>49</sup> The peculiar thing about the Gambian 1996 election was the resignation of Jammeh from the Gambian National Army to contest for the Presidency just before the election. He formed the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), the political party on which platform of which he contested and won the 1996 presidential poll.

Jammeh joined the growing list of soldiers-turned-civilians in Africa. Essentially, these new democratic “converts” see themselves as the stabilisers of their polity, hence, the need to continue to power to prevent their nations from falling into the abyss. To achieve his political ambition, Jammeh did all the things that are characteristic of countries where military leaders turned to civilians to retain power. In Ghana, for example, Rawlings macro-managed his emergence as a civilian leader in 1993 having served as a military ruler since 1981. Both Jammeh and Rawlings, in the final analysis, took advantage of their incumbencies, handpicked the electoral commissions and subverted the electoral laws and processes.<sup>50</sup>

Jammeh’s government failed to address the shortcomings of the former government. Rather than enhancing democratic institutions in the country, instilling accountability, transparency and integrity which are essential for growing the economy to ensure national development, the new government closed the political space against the opposition. Jammeh brought new fervour to the long-debated issue of unlimited terms of office. This pathology of democracy has a recipe for political crisis and instability in Africa. Owing to a history of strongman politics, many leaders have not come to terms with the idea of term limits in democracy. This endemic situation has bred leaders that overstayed power by altering or attempting to alter their countries’ constitutional provisions on term limits. 31 of African leaders altered constitutional provisions on term limits while 16% attempted to do so between 1990 and 2019.<sup>51</sup> To facilitate his aversion to term limits, Jammeh also made political competition untenable with draconian provisions such as having a candidate having to gather up to 5000 signatures to qualify to contest elections. This provision could discourage political participation because appending signatures for opposition politicians could be criminalized and punished with lengthy prison terms for the citizens. This is coupled with the payment of \$1000

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49 Country Watch, *Gambia Country Review 2016* (available at [www.countrywatch.com/Content/pdfs/reviews/B394Q688.01c.pdf](http://www.countrywatch.com/Content/pdfs/reviews/B394Q688.01c.pdf), as accessed on 15 May 2021), p. 11.

50 AS Saine, “The soldier-turned-presidential candidate: A comparison of flawed democratic transitions in Ghana and Gambia”, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 28(2), 2000, p. 204.

51 A Casani, “Third term bids and the risks for democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Italian Institute of International Political Studies: Commentary*, 26 October 2020 (available at <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/third-term-bids-and-risks-democracy-sub-saharan-africa-27901>, as accessed on 3 May 2021).

as enshrined in the constitution.<sup>52</sup> Hence competing against Jammeh and his party became an impossible task because the provisions have removed the competitive feature of the democratic system which is a level playing ground for all contestants.

Yahya Jammeh's rule as the President of The Gambia was marked by a brutal human rights record and gross abuse of the democratic process. Political opposition, journalists, human rights activists and other critics of the Gambian society were visited with repression, highhandedness and brutal execution all bearing the imprint of the executive rascality. The press was gagged with repressive laws "criminalising libel, sedition and false news in the country",<sup>53</sup> and many opposition figures were imprisoned. For example, journalists such as Ebrima Manneh and Abdoulie Ceesay were arrested or abducted and imprisoned varying lengths of jail terms, while Musa Saidykhan was physically abused by members of the security forces in 2006. Elections held in The Gambia in 2001, 2006, 2011 were marked by most state-sponsored violence.<sup>54</sup> Dissent to government and criticism was met with the maximum response from the state. For example, 14 students were shot by police officers in April 2000 while protesting against the killing of students and rape in the country. Perpetrators of the crimes were indemnified by the state.<sup>55</sup>

Abuse of the electoral process under Jammeh was such that electoral laws were followed only at the convenience of the President such as the suppression of the press and arbitrary use of state institutions and resources to gained undue advantage over the opponents. Election observers noted that the 2011 elections were peaceful. They were however deemed to be neither free nor fair. In 2012, National Assembly elections were held with APRC winning the majority through the same tactics of harassing the opposition and journalists and abuse of state resources and institutions. Six out of seven opposition parties boycotted the 2013 local government elections in protest of Jammeh's stifling of the electoral process.<sup>56</sup> His rule from 1996 when he contested and won the presidency as a sitting military leader up to his eventual defeat and going on exile in 2016/2017 were despotic, despite regular elections during the period.

## The 2016 Gambian presidential election

The build-up to Gambia's 2016 Presidential elections was the culmination of the pathologies of Jammeh's rule since 1994 and especially between 1996 when he

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52 SI Odoziobodo & E Nnaji, "ECOWAS and the fight against sit-tightism in West Africa: A case study of The Gambia-2016-2017", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 5, 2017, p. 1499.

53 AR Alfa Shaban, Jammeh-era media laws violated freedom of expression - ECOWAS court, *Africanews*, 15 February 2018 (available at <https://www.africanews.com/2018/02/15/jammeh-era-media-laws-violated-freedom-of-expression-ecowas-court/>), as accessed 30 April 2021).

54 Home Office, *Country policy and information note Gambia: Public opinion*, 2017 (available at <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1409534.html>), as accessed 13 May 2021).

55 E Sanyang & S Camara "The Gambia after elections...", 2017, p. 7.

56 Home Office, *Country policy and information note Gambia: ...*, 2017 (available at <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1409534.html>), as accessed on 13 May 2021).

dropped his military uniform for civilian rule. With a succession of manipulations through legal means and state machinery, Jammeh won all Presidential elections in the country with ease. Given that opposition parties and figures had been crippled to the extent that they could not mount a serious challenge to Jammeh and his APRC, they not only won the Presidency but also dominated the National Assembly and other state institutions. The 2016 elections came at a period when within the West African sub-region, democratic governance had just received a new fervour in which electoral contests yielded defeats of incumbents who based on that relinquished power in deference to the will of the people.

Previous elections in the Jammeh era of the Gambian political history had one theme that runs through them – Jammeh had no strong oppositions to face him.<sup>57</sup> 2001, 2006 and 2011 Presidential elections were a nadir of elections as the incumbent won them with increasing margins. In 2001, Jammeh of the APRC won 61% of the votes, in 2006, 53% while in 2011, the winning percentage was 72%. In the atmosphere of fear that pervaded the elections, opposition parties only existed at the mercy of the incumbent as there were arrests and harassment of opposition leaders and several instances of assassination that were politically motivated.<sup>58</sup>

In the preceding months to the 2016 election, in line with the culture of harassment, assassination and arrest of opposition, the incumbent had predicted the victory by the widest margin ever seen in Gambian electoral history. In April 2016, the whole Executive of the biggest opposition party, the United Democratic Party (UDP) was arrested following a protest over the death of a popular youth leader, Ebrima Solo Sandeng. In July 2016, they were sentenced to three-year imprisonment each.<sup>59</sup> While there were regular presidential and parliamentary elections in The Gambia, Jammeh's tactics of harassment and intimidation of journalists and the opposition, abuse of the electoral system and control of the civil society demeaned the process while keeping the President in power. Given the trend of past elections, Jammeh was expected to realize his threat of the widest margin imaginable in the elections. The international community was not also encouraged to send in observers as ECOWAS did not send any observer contingent while the EU was prevented from coming by the government. However, the AU sent a small contingent to observe the election.<sup>60</sup>

The emergence of presidential candidates for the 2016 elections was quite a departure from the previous elections. The mustering of political will by opposition parties to field a coalition candidate was unprecedented in the Jammeh era of Gambian

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57 N Hultin, B Jallow, BN Lawrance, & A Sarr, "Autocracy, migration, and The Gambia's 'unprecedented' 2016 election", *African Affairs*, 116(463), 2017, p. 324.

58 RA Dugbenu, "The role of ECOWAS in managing post-election crises in West Africa..." (MA, University of Ghana, 2018), pp. 74-75.

59 D Perfect, "The Gambian 2016 presidential election...", *The Round Table*, 106(3), 2017, p. 2.

60 M Helal, "The ECOWAS intervention in The Gambia-2016", T Ruys & O Corten, *International law on the use of force: A case based approach* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 912-932.

politics. Leader of the UDP, Adama Barrow emerged as the Presidential candidate of the opposition in October 2016, code-named “Coalition 2016”. Hence, the 2016 Presidential poll pitched Barrow of “Coalition 2016”, Jammeh of the APRC and little known Mamma Kandeh of the Gambian Democratic Congress (GDC).<sup>61</sup> The opposition in The Gambia must have learnt from around West Africa with the emergence of coalition victories in Senegal and Nigeria in 2015. Thus, Gambian swelled the number of cases attesting to the utility of coalition, alliances and mergers to unseat sit-tight leaders in the continent.

On Election Day, the government of The Gambia ensured an internet blackout in the Gambia. However, the results were rather a surprise as Barrow of the “Coalition 2016” was declared a winner by polling 277,708 votes against 208,487 votes for Jammeh and 89,768 for Kandeh. Jammeh took the whole world by surprise by conceding defeat to Barrow. Efforts have been made to explain how and why the opposition won the election in The Gambia. Among the credible explanations for shocking results was the amendment to the electoral law that adopted on-the-spot counting of votes made the election very difficult to rig by the incumbent APRC.<sup>62</sup> However, a few days after the announcement of the results, there was a minor adjustment to the election results by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) as to the total of votes gained by the candidates. This elicited a rescinding of the earlier decision to accept the result of the election by Jammeh who approached the Supreme Court to annul the election and call for a re-vote.

The rejection of the results of the election by Jammeh immediately turned into a political crisis in The Gambia as his stance created a stalemate in the country. Barrow fled into exile in Senegal while within one week, Gambian citizens were fleeing the country for neighbouring countries for fear of an outbreak of violence. Aljazeera reported that about 46,000 Gambians fled the country due to the ensuing political impasse.<sup>63</sup> Jammeh had deployed security forces in Banjul in a tense situation that spelt doom for the country. However, senior members of Jammeh’s cabinet and Gambia’s diplomatic corps recognized Barrow as the President-elect. Prominent opposition leaders and members of Jammeh’s cabinet that recognized Barrow fled into exile for fear of arrest and prosecution. Head of the Gambian Independent Electoral Commission, Alieu Momar Njie also fled to exile as his Commission had been taken over by security forces.<sup>64</sup> The international community condemned Jammeh’s U-turn on the election result and mounted pressures on him to relinquish

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61 D Perfect, “The Gambian 2016...”, *The Round Table*, 106(3), 2017, p. 1.

62 RA Dugbenu, “The role of ECOWAS in managing post-election crises in West Africa...” (MA, University of Ghana, 2018), p. 76.

63 D Perfect, “The Gambian 2016...”, *The Round Table*, 106(3), 2017, p. 6.

64 AR Alfa Shaban, “Jammeh-era media laws violated freedom...”, *Africanews*, 15 February 2018 (available at <https://www.africanews.com/2018/02/15/jammeh-era-media-laws-violated-freedom-of-expression-ecowas-court/>, as accessed on 30 April 2021).

power for the new government.<sup>65</sup>

## **Gambia's 2016 elections and the change in asymmetric actions in Nigeria-Gambian relations**

The decision of Jammeh to reject the results of the Presidential election which he had earlier accepted to the commendation of the international community was baffling to West African leaders. Nigeria joined the international community to condemn the attempt of the President to subvert the will of the Gambian people. Having just defeated a sitting President in March 2015, the Nigerian government recognized the President-elect, Barrow and joined the international community to impress it upon Jammeh to accept defeat for The Gambia to avoid a political impasse. As West Africa's largest country and a friend of The Gambia, the absence of rebuke from Nigeria would have cast an air of legitimacy on the recalcitrant Gambian leader. Hence, Nigeria's joining the international community to condemn the incumbent and recognizing the result of the election was a sign that she was ready to lead other West African countries to mount pressure on Jammeh to accept defeat and allow for a smooth democratic transition in The Gambia.

Due to Nigeria's condemnation of the President's stance on the results of the elections and the recognition of the President-Elect, Barrow, Jammeh could not approach Nigeria for Judges to hear his case in the Supreme Court. Nigeria has a long history of seconding judges to several African countries including The Gambia to help build their judiciaries.<sup>66</sup> The then Chief Justice of The Gambia was Justice Emmanuel Oluwasegun Fagbenle, who declined to hear the case.<sup>67</sup> The last appointment of judges to the Supreme Court of the country was made in October 2016, of which five out of the six judges are from Nigeria.<sup>68</sup> What was surprising was that Jammeh could not secure the services of any of these Judges as he made a request to President Sirleaf-Johnson as the Chairperson of ECOWAS to allow foreign judges to be released to The Gambia to ensure speedy hearing and determination of the case he brought before the Supreme Court.<sup>69</sup> The five Nigerian Judges may have been recalled by the Nigerian government to avert a situation of using Nigeria judges to

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65 D Ojo, T Shoniyi, & A Enumah, "Condemnation trails Jammeh's rejection of election results", *Thisday*, 11 December 2016 (available at <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/12/11/condemnation-trails-jammehs-rejection-of-election-results/>, as accessed on 3 May 2021).

66 IO Agbede, "Akinola aguda: Nigeria's lord denning", *The News*, 4 June 2017 (available at <https://www.thenewsnigeria.com.ng/2017/06/akinola-aguda-nigerias-lord-denning/>, as accessed on February 2019).

67 L Jabateh, "Gambia supreme court judge declines to rule on president's election challenge", *Reuters* (available at <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKBN1510KZ>, as accessed on 16 March 2020).

68 Sahara Reporters, "How Nigerian serving as Gambia's chief judge is secretly working to keep president Yahya Jammeh in office", *Sahara Reporters*, 22 December 2016 (available at [www.saharareporters.com/2016/12/22/how-nigerian-serving-gambia-s-chief-judge-secretly-working-keep-president-yahya-jammeh](http://www.saharareporters.com/2016/12/22/how-nigerian-serving-gambia-s-chief-judge-secretly-working-keep-president-yahya-jammeh), as accessed on 16 March 2020).

69 Sahara Reporters, "Jammeh begs Sirleaf, ECOWAS to let court determine his fate", *Sahara Reporters*, 16 January 2017 (available at [www.saharareporters.com/2017/01/16/Jammeh-begs-sirleaf-ecowas-let-court-determine-his-fate](http://www.saharareporters.com/2017/01/16/Jammeh-begs-sirleaf-ecowas-let-court-determine-his-fate), as accessed on 16 March 2020).

secure a judgment thereby annulling the election.<sup>70</sup>

The Gambia was fast moving towards a political crisis, the importance of preventive diplomacy was not lost on Nigeria. Nigerian leader, Muhammadu Buhari led other ECOWAS leaders to persuade Yahya Jammeh to step down following his defeat by the opposition.<sup>71</sup> West African leaders such as Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson of Liberia, John Mahama of Ghana and Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone on December 13, 2016, visited Jammeh in Banjul on behalf of ECOWAS to persuade him to accept the result and step down from power to pave the way for a smooth democratic transition in The Gambia. The ECOWAS team was buoyed in terms of legitimacy based on the successful transitions across West Africa. Given the examples of Presidents Buhari of Nigeria and Sall of Senegal defeating incumbent Presidents and President Mahama of Ghana conceding defeat in Ghana, the message of democracy in West Africa to Jammeh was clear.<sup>72</sup> Though the meeting with Jammeh ended in a stalemate, the action registers the maturity of ECOWAS diplomacy as led by Nigeria as pursuing preventive diplomacy to forestall the political impasse in The Gambia.

The United Nations, having monitored the situation in The Gambia, through the Security Council, approved actions taken by the African Union and ECOWAS in recognising President-Elect Barrow and with the encouragement of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with resolution 2337 on January 19, 2017<sup>73</sup>, members of states of ECOWAS formed the ECOWAS Military Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG) with Nigeria contributing 200 soldiers to ECOMIG while also availing the operations of her naval air capabilities to oust Jammeh from power. Nigeria's contingent was the second largest after Senegal which contributed 250 soldiers.<sup>74</sup> Given Gambia's weak military arsenal, Jammeh gave in and left the country for exile in Equatorial Guinea. The deployment of ECOMIG brought a new dimension to peacekeeping and democratic stability discourse in West Africa. ECOMIG was termed coercive diplomacy<sup>75</sup> because it was the first time in West Africa and Africa in general that a President was ousted out of power by other

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70 PD Williams, "A new African model of coercion? Assessing the ECOWAS mission in The Gambia", 2017, *International Institute of Peace Global Observatory* (available at [www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/](http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/), as accessed 17 March 2020).

71 D Pilling & M Fick, "West Africa leaders step up efforts to end Gambian crisis", *Financial Times*, 2017 (available at [www.ft.com/content/508d7332-d735-11e16-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e](http://www.ft.com/content/508d7332-d735-11e16-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e), as accessed on 17 March 2020).

72 PD Williams, "A new African model of coercion...", 2017, *International Institute of Peace Global Observatory* (available at [www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/](http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/), as accessed 17 March 2020).

73 United Nations, "Security endorses recognition by African Union, Regional States, of Adama Barrow as President-Elect of Gambia, Unanimously Adopting 2337", 19 January 2017, *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* (available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12688.doc.htm>, as accessed on 4 May 2021).

74 Africa-EU Partnership, Mission in The Gambia ECOMIG, 2018 (available at <https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/projects/mission-gambia-ecomig>, as accessed on 21 March 2020).

75 PD Williams, "A new African model of coercion...", 2017, *International Institute of Peace Global Observatory* (available at [www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/](http://www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/), as accessed 17 March 2020).

countries to foster democracy in that country.

## **Conclusion**

Following the enforcement of the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in The Gambia, it has become apparent the good asymmetry can serve in bilateral relations. The military threat issued by Nigeria to The Gambia to oust Jammeh from power showed that Nigerian-Gambian relations that have historically been based on B2 moved to B4. Democratic enforcement as an aspect of asymmetric relations is new in Nigeria's engagement with her West African neighbours. Nigeria given its asymmetric advantage over other West African countries has been an enforcer of democracy mainly in preventing and reversing forceful takeover of democratic systems by the military in the region<sup>76</sup> but has never done so with an outright military threat as in the case of The Gambia.

Given the success of the democratic enforcement experiment in Nigerian-Gambina relations and the historical friendly, benevolent relations between the two nations, asymmetric behaviour reverted from B4 to B2.<sup>77</sup> The restoration of the B2 relations between Nigeria and The Gambia brings into focus certain issues about the new-found aspect of Nigeria's asymmetric relations in West Africa and beyond. This revolves around the ability of Nigeria to contribute on a B2 basis to the development of democracy in The Gambia. This is because The Gambia possesses weak democratic structures and institutions. After all, the Jammeh Administration failed to develop such critical requirements for realising a fully developed democratic system.

A critical look at the prospects of a viable B2 contribution to democratic deepening in The Gambia with the help of Nigeria, the B4 action in the Gambian electoral crisis was more or less an end itself. This is because an asymmetric B2 contribution to the development of democratic structures and institutions requires the stronger and probably more democratic country to help in replicating its system in the weaker country. However, both Nigeria and The Gambia fall into the category of electoral authoritarian regimes.<sup>78</sup> This means that apart from the regularity of elections, critical democratic institutions are lacking or weak in these countries. This suggests that while B4 may help in affirming democratic outcomes in contested electoral situations like in The Gambia, the asymmetric wherewithal to help build democracy on B2 terms may be lacking if the stronger country has questionable democratic credentials.

Nigeria's questionable democratic credentials that could hamper its B2 contribution(s) to The Gambia and other countries on democracy stems from its inability to deepen

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76 S Omotola, "From importer to exporter...", *Political Perspectives*, 2(1), 2008, pp. 38-41.

77 D Elumoye, "Osinbajo promises to strengthen Nigeria, Gambia relations", *Thisday*, 19 May 2021 (available at <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/19/osinbajo-promises-to-strengthen-nigeria-gambia-relations/>, as accessed on 20 May 2021).

78 S Omotola, "From importer to exporter...", *Political Perspectives*, 2(1), 2008, p. 46.

its democracy beyond the ritual of elections. This continues to make elections in the country problematic. While Nigeria has never experienced the Gambian debacle before, a critical look at elections since 1999 shows continually worsening electoral scenarios characterised by problems such as violence, rigging, corruption (vote-buying and selling) and institutional weakness, among other issues, all of which are almost defying reforms.<sup>79</sup> These electoral issues are associated with the worsening security situation bordering on terrorism, kidnapping and banditry and the various secessionist pressures that are currently threatening the corporate existence of the state. With these challenges facing Nigeria's democracy, it is unconscionable to expect a B2 contribution to the democratic development of The Gambia.

The foregoing reveals that the B4 action that was taken by Nigeria in concert with other ECOWAS actors, though within the purview of regional instruments aimed at building democracy and governance was a limited action. Such an action should be able to extend to B2 which unfortunately may not materialise. This then means that the realpolitik of the Gambian democratic enforcement effort by Nigeria, among ECOWAS actors, was merely to prevent a political crisis in the West African state with the potential to destabilise the region. It was also not to help build the critical democratic structures and institutions that can prevent the emergence of another Jammeh in the future and ensure that democracy, in the final analysis, lives to its promise of improving the living conditions of Gambians.

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79 M Jega, "A reflection on 20 years of democracy in Nigeria", Centre for Democracy and Development, 2019 (available at [https://media.africaportal.org/documents/a\\_reflection\\_on\\_20\\_years\\_of\\_democracy.pdf](https://media.africaportal.org/documents/a_reflection_on_20_years_of_democracy.pdf), as accessed on 10 May 2021).