

Power-Preservation Corruption: A Threat to Internal Security of the Gambia

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ABSTRACT : The Gambia, for more than five decades after independence, produced but two presidents – Jawara and Jammeh. The presidential election which was won by Barrow to succeed Jammeh was fraught with crisis that took international intervention to resolve. Political analysts have sweepingly and worryingly concluded that the threat to internal security of The Gambia is power-preservation corruption. This research focuses on two-pronged objectives: the broad objective is to examine historical dynamics of power-preservation corruption by presidents of The Gambia; and the specific objective is to underscore an analysis-based solution to power-preservation as a challenge to internal security of The Gambia. We adopted the ex post facto (quasi-experimental) design and analysed qualitatively, data assembled from secondary sources of vast array of literature. Relying on power preservation explanation of power theory, we concluded that power-preservation corruption constitute the major internal insecurity of The Gambia.

Keywords : power, power-preservation, corruption, threat, security

1. INTRODUCTION

Since independence of The Gambia in 1965, into republic in 1970, only two presidents – Dawda Jawara and Yahya Jammeh - had superintended the affairs of the country, howbeit on popular democratic legitimacy up until 2017. The presidential election which was won by Barrow to succeed Jammeh as the 3rd elected president was fraught with crisis that took international intervention to resolve. Dawda was toppled by Yahya Jammeh who ruled the country for 22 years, manipulated elections and played on ethno-religious cleavages to preserve his hold on political power. On 2 December 2016, Jammeh lost power through a “shock election” won by Adama Barrow.

This research focuses on two-pronged objectives: the broad objective is to examine historical dynamics of power-preservation corruption by presidents of The Gambia; and the specific objective is to provide an analysis-based solution to power-preservation as a challenge to internal security of The Gambia. We adopted the ex post facto (quasi-experimental) design and analysed qualitatively, data assembled from secondary sources of vast array of literature. To carefully and systematically navigate the problematique, the research is divided into 7 mutually interlocking sections: 1) Introduction; 2) History and Political Structure of The Gambia; 3) Political Power-Preservation Corruption in The Gambia; 4) Regimes’ Power-Preservation Corruption in The Gambia; 5) Power-Preservation Corruption vis-à-vis Democratic Consolidation in The Gambia; and 6) Concluding Remarks.

2. History and Political Structure of the Gambia

A lot of historical events took place before The Gambia fell under British colony during the scramble for Africa in 1455. These events started with the construction of stone circles and first southeast migrations of significant numbers of Fula people between 7th and 9th centuries; large-scale Muslim conversion in the Senegambia between 13th and 15th centuries; state-building among the Wolof in Senegal, development of Jolof, Walo, Baol, and Cayor, Serere (Serer) kingdoms of Sine and Saloum between 18th and 17th centuries; and creation of Islamic theocracy in the Futa Toro as well as continued conversion of large numbers of Gambians, particularly Fula, to Islam (Hughes and Perfect, 2008, . xix).

European visitors were first attracted by the navigability of the Gambia River in 1455, when Portuguese Alvise da Cadamosto and Antoniotto Usidimare on behalf of Prince Henry of Portugal entered the river and was repulsed by poison arrows from the soldiers of the kingdom of Niumi (Gailley, 1965, p. 18). Nonetheless, Alvise da Cadamosto and Antoniotto Usidimare sailed into “a complex ethnic and political reality” (Park, 2016, p. 1) to meet Niumi mansa (or Niumi king), which yielded to slave trade. Slave trade made the kings wealthy and resulted to assassinations of kings by political rivals who jostled to take over the seat of wealth and power from the ruling kings.

Although, driven more by economic than civilianising-political incentive, the British established formal government, province of Senegambia and control in The Gambia in 1765. In 1783, the Province of Senegambia reverted to French control leaving Gambia River and James Island under the control of the British. In the nineteenth century, the British raised local levies to sustain its African militia force which protected its trade in the colony. The Gambia became one of the branches of the National Congress of British West Africa, formed by commercial and professional elite in 1920 (Reid, 2012, p. 323).

Towards independence in 14 February 1959, Protectorate People’s Party was formed and on 23 September 1959, Governor Edward Windley drew up Constitution, establishing new House of Representatives, which came into force in 1960, replaced the Legislative Council and renamed Protectorate People’s Party, “People’s Progressive Party (PPP).

The Gambia is an ethnic-based country with the history of each ruling president elevating his ethnic group to political dominance. Though the Mandinka, Wolof and Fula (originally Fuladu) are the most numerous groups in the Gambia River kingdoms, the Jolla people in the southern Kombo who have connections to the Cassamance region of Senegal are dominant group with yet substantial numbers of Serer peoples on the north bank near the mouth of the river.

It is instructive to note that ethnic cleavages produce ethnic politics which dovetail into authoritarian politics and manifests into identity-based conflict. There is high potential for a community or ethnic violence that is poorly managed to escalate into conflict of national character. The potential of ethnic or State conflict in The Gambia in the sub-Saharan Africa (Tomchat, 2017), as argued by Gleditsch et al (2008), Lacina (2006) and Fjelde and Nilsson (2012), is that it could be supported by external forces, thereby escalating the conflict into international conflict and dispute of deadly proportion. According to the GDEL Project Data 2012, although among the lowest, The Gambia no doubt experience ethnic saliency like all other African countries.

The State of The Gambia typifies African-type conflicts. There are broadly two types of internal conflicts in Africa: (i) politically-driven or instigated conflicts in which the state is a party; and (ii) conflict between groups within the state in which the State may be an interested onlooker. However, these categories of internal conflicts are further divided into: (i) rebellion to overthrow a government; (ii) secessionist rebellion; (iii) rural conflicts over resources), etc.

Since its independence, the Gambia never had a successful transfer of political leadership in its political transition. The Gambia is not immune to internal conflict experiences and, in fact, serves an illustrative case study of power-preservation political corruption as a threat to national security.

3. Political Power-Preservation Corruption in the Gambia

Political corruption refers to the act of use of powers by government officials or their network contacts for illegitimate private gain. Put differently, political corruption is the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain such as bribery (in vote-buying, secret loans affairs or some other extra-legislative appropriations to electoral bodies (EB) and other supportive agencies in the electoral process), extortion (e.g., forceful snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes with illegitimate votes), cronyism (e.g., illegal contract awards to special friends and relations to influence the electoral process. Other forms of political corruption are nepotism, parochialism, patronage, influence peddling, graft and embezzlement.

Political corruption is two-horned: extractive and distributive. On one hand, extractive political corruption represents possible benefits to be extracted from politics such as “distributive patronage by the political entrepreneurs” or even cause of lack of basic infrastructure and amenities, growing poverty and high-level of poverty in society (Human Rights Watch, 1997; 2002; 2005; Oluwanni, 2010). Extractive corruption is driven by greed. On the other hand, redistributive political corruption deals with power.

For worse, political corruption, quite different and much more than bureaucratic or administrative corruption, “beyond greed and personal enrichment”, may keep the regime together and afloat as well as give the incentives for controlling the state and capturing, using and maintaining the means to control the State’s power and wealth. Political corruption is concerned with “getting the money in and it is about reinvesting in safeguarding the hold on power” to serve the interest of the ruling class (Amundsen, 2019).

4. Regimes’ Power-Preservation Corruption in The Gambia

Jawara’s Referendum for Democratic Election

Dawda Kairaba Jawara, regarded as the founding father of The Gambia, rose from position of prime minister while Queen Elizabeth II was the head of government during the British colonial rule, the period of independence constitution up until independence on 18 February 1965.

Under the Independence constitution, Sir Dawda Jawara became the first president of The Gambia. Although Jawara built the ladder with which he ascended into the presidency by uniting the Democratic and Congress parties and the support of the largest labour unions under the canopy of People’s Progressive Party (PPP), without adherence to due process or constitutional process, he abandoned them, sacked seven chiefs appointed by the colonial regime after he had won the election, in the guise to clean the house thus committing acts that were akin to the unilateral and undemocratic power wielded by the British (Park, 2016, p. 20). It was clear that Jawara before becoming president made extravagant political promises he was not ready to keep.

In the years after becoming the first president of The Gambia and steadily treading the path of power-preservation, president Jawara sidestepped democratic process toward the end of his term by proposing a referendum for a Republican Constitution instead of facing democratic election. Opponents of Jawara situate the president's tactics as “the home-team, the referee, and the football Association and naturally cannot be expected to lose the match” (NRO, 1967, p. 1).

On 29 July 1981, a disgruntled ex-politician Kukoi Samba Sanyang lead a coup d’état by the leftist National Revolutionary Council (NRC) which was foiled by the intervention of Senegalese army. Part of the reason for the attempted coup was allegation of weak economy and unbridled corruption by The Gambian political leaders. Part of the increased anxiety was that in his 1981 New Year message, rather than address the two related allegation of corruption and weak economy, he preferred to generalise weak “economic problems” and stated:

We live in a world saddled with massive economic problems. The economic situation has generally been characterised by rampant inflation, periods of excessive monetary instability and credit squeeze...soaring oil prices and commodity speculation. These worldwide problems have imposed extreme limitations on the economies like Gambia (Sallah, 1990).

Turning to the issue of corruption, on 31 December 2009, he responded:

I believe in the rule of law and democracy. We are a poor country where petty jealousies exist. One buys a car or builds a house, so he must be corrupt, and Jawara did not do anything. I am expected to serve as a judge and policeman at the same time...We must let the law take its course. We were serious to run a government according to the rule of law and for this we were highly rated and respected.

It was obvious, therefore, that the attempted coup reflected desire for change of leadership baton, instead the aftermath was the creation, on “political expediency”, of Senegambia Confederation, three weeks after the failed coup, by President Jawara of Gambia and President Abdou Diouf of Senegal. The creation of Senegambia Confederation served as ploy Jawara and Diouf to hang on to power. The Confederation collapsed in 1989 because it lacked popular support and legitimacy by the citizens. However, Jawara continued to rule The Gambia until 1994, when he was ousted in a bloodless coup and exiled by Yahya Jammeh.

Jammeh’s Electoral Reversed-Victory

Yahya Jammeh came to the pinnacle of political power as president of The Gambia having, through a small group of soldiers in a bloodless coup, unseated the first president, Dawda on public outcry of Dawda’s political clientelism (Global Investment Centre, 2012), through military coup on 22 July 1994. Having achieved his aim and became the head of state of The Gambia, Jammeh was reported to fear the “barracks more than the ballot” and adopted James Quinlivan “coup proofing” strategic measures, bravado and erraticism to protect himself in office, after several coup attempts in 1994, 1995, 2000 and 2006 (Reid, 2016). After the coup, Jammeh installed himself president of The Gambia and through a very high military-based rule, he scored poorly on human rights record using the notorious national Intelligence Agency (NIA) which was formed in 1995 to monitor threats from within The Gambia army, but instead engaged in “trials and tribulations of opponents who have suffered as his ministrations, executed, inter alia” (Perfect et al, 2016, p. 234).

Jammeh also used illiberal and spurious elections in 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011 to sustain and legitimise his hold on presidential power. To perpetuate himself in power, he developed unwavering knack of suppression of dissidents, restriction of press freedom, freedom of assembly, intimidation and threat by thugs on voters as well as placing ban on international election monitors, for instance, the European Union monitors, to stop monitoring of presidential elections in The Gambia, as was the case in December 2016.

Among cases of Jammeh’s poor human rights record in the 2015 Presidential Election process was the imprisonment of 30 opposition political parties’ supporters, including Ousainou Darboe, leader of the country’s largest opposition party – United Democratic Party (UDP). Jammeh elevated his Moslem-majority ethnic-minority group, the Jola, as the political majority and declared The Gambia Islamic State, thus, instigating religious war as a fear-reaction, securitising tool and political cover to eliminate or displace the demographic-majority Mandinka ethnic rivals in resource distribution politics.

Part of the fear factor tactics Jammeh adopted during the 2016 presidential election was threatening Barrow’s ethnic group, the Mandinka, that “if they think that they can take over the country, I will wipe you out and nothing will come out of it”; “it is you people, you want to bring violence” (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Jammeh’s threat to cleanse the Mandinka people approximates Tomchat’s thesis that ethnicity is an identity that is stronger than forms of identities; “it is visible and provides a very clear demographic base” and ruling elites “always emphasise ethnicity in a manner that makes it a prevalent factor in the politics and operation of that country, by making claims to danger and logically instigating fear-reaction and escalation in tension” (Tomchak, 2017, pp. 11, 13 and 17), in some cases, from communal violence into conflict of national character.

The Gambia's ethnic saliency, Tomchat (2017, p. 67) argues, "demonstrates a very clear effect of the election with the spike fitting the expected timeline exactly", and ending the ethnic saliency in the year doubling into extreme high.

Jammeh's tactics of intimidation, threats, ban of electorates and monitors, assassination of independent journalists, forced arrests, disappearances, and torture were used to garner easy and cheap electoral victory in presidential polls, including the April 2017 53-member one-chamber parliament of The Gambia (Akpuru-Aja and Eke, 2017, pp. 57-58). Through these political malfeasances including altering the constitution on term of office for the president, Jammeh hung on to presidential power of The Gambia for 22 years before he was stopped through 'ballot decision' on 2 December 2016. Jammeh's tactics of intimidation and threat of voters though resulted to voter apathy and low turnout, this time, galvanised the voters into resistance to make sure their votes counted.

On 2 December 2016, Jammeh in a presidential election called under his watch lost and conceded defeat to Adama Barrow even before the official declaration of the 'shock election' results. Jammeh's concession was laced with the purified statement: "you are elected president of The Gambia, and I wish you all the best...I have no ill will" (Corey-Boulet and Abdoulie, 3 December 2016). From the result later released by the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of The Gambia, Alieu Momar Njie, it showed that Adama Barrow scored 45.5 per cent vote, Yahya Jammeh scored 36.7 per cent vote, and Mama Kandeh scored 17.1 per cent vote. Barrow scored highest of the votes and was declared elected.

Surprisingly, on 9 December 2016, Jammeh turned full circle: rejected the election results, reneged on his concession of defeat, reversed the victory, called for a new election, and petitioned the Supreme Court of The Gambia to uphold the cancellation of the presidential election to his favour. The outcome of Jammeh's actions sparked off political and constitutional crisis that engineered post-election violence in the country.

Jammeh's actions, the crisis and violence they generated, caused a sting in the tail of the masses and helped to mobilise both internal and international support from The Gambia bar Association, Press union, university, medical association –civil society organisations – and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU). The United Nations security Council (UNSC) authorised and delegated a high-level group of ECOWAS leaders, on 1 January 2017 to explore diplomatic solution to the political and constitutional impasse. In spite of the ongoing diplomatic approach, Jammeh declared a state of emergency in The Gambia, calling the international pressure on him to cede power "an unprecedented level of foreign interference in our election and internal affairs and also a sustained smear campaign, propaganda and misinformation (Aljazeera, 11 January 2017).

Nonetheless, the international coalition forces pressured Jammeh to climb down and subsequently provided soft-landing for him to leave the country on exile thus ending his regime of power-preservation political corruption in The Gambia.

Barrow's Reversed-Pledge

The regime of President Adama Barrow, curiously is facing a repeat of history of constitutional turmoil as The Gambians took to the streets of Banjul on 16 December 2019, three days less of three years, when Barrow was jubilantly sworn in temporarily as president in Senegal on 19 January 2017 and a month later, sworn in formerly on The Gambian soil. The recent "Barrow-must-go" demonstrations typify the citizens' preparedness to assert their right to hold Barrow accountable to his pledge that:

- (i) he will serve three years as a transitional president to raise the people's living standards; he will usher in democratic reform;
- (ii) he will set up a truth and reconciliation commission to heal a divided country – the Gambia; and
- (iii) he will organise elections and step down after three years, to give others chance.

Barrow's pledge was vide a memorandum signed between him and the coalition of political parties and civil society groups that afforded him the opportunity to stand the presidential election as an independent candidate.

Although Barrow emphasised and leaned on a fairly firm ground of constitutional provision which allows duly elected presidents of The Gambia to serve out their full term of five years, truth of the legality-morality debate in which he is accused of lack of morality is sustained by immoral and self-serving power-preservation that puts a dent on his trustworthiness, transparency, character and people's confidence on him as a leader. Thus, critics of President Barrow contend that although he can legally remain president for five years, the moral argument is that he signed the agreement with party leaders which made it morally binding and to that extent, if he reneged on the promise, it will be difficult for anyone to take him seriously in 2021, when the five year-term elapses (Thomas-Johnson, 16 December 2019).

Sustaining the criticism on Barrow, for instance, Director of the Leaders of Africa Institute and Visiting Assistant Professor at Davidson College in North Carolina, Peter Penar, accused him [Barrow] of using the 'the deal' he made as a candidate with coalition of political parties and civil society organisations to climb to presidential power but spurned and twisted the rules within his coalition for his power-preservation. Protesters described Barrow as a disappointment of the high expectations reposed on him when he emerged into office in The Gambian post-dictatorship era and referred to him as a good president gone bad.

The personalised, illegitimate and immoral style for political power-preservation in The Gambia unravels the underlying dynamics of ethnic incompatibilities exemplified under dictator-president Jammeh's ethnic cleansing and electoral reversed-victory and President Barrow's reversed-pledge from a three-year transitional government in which he was to conduct election and hand over political power before a full-term of five years in the first instance and perhaps a second. These political developments have wrought peculiar form of internal threat to national security in The Gambia.

Power-Preservation Corruption as Threat to the Gambian Internal Security

The Gambia, like most African countries, is multi-ethnic in character. The presence of multi-ethnic, religious, regional, sectarian and language groups conduce to heterogeneous working class (Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich, 2003) and lead to lack of wide support base and appeal by political parties but to social group cleavages. Fabbrini (2001) defines political cleavage as "the partisan expression of an underlying division among the members of a given society" (whether national, sub-national, or supranational) that wears permanent character.

Cleavages divide political parties into voting blocs of advocates and adversaries, or supporters and opponents. They constitute essential building-blocks for factionalisation within political parties or opposition between parties. As a result, cleavages are a central force in party systems and voter alignments in the struggle for power capture, use or preservation. The negative implication of cleavages on struggle for power capture, use and preservation is the entrenchment of political corruption. Inge Amundsen posits that corruption is generally referred to as "the misuse of public authority" (Amundsen, 1999, p. 32).

The Gambia represents a classical case of African country where political corruption:

has not only grown in leaps and bounds but has become systemic, diversified and variegated, and its power-preservation methods rank among the crudest and cruelest. The occupiers of political power deploy all available weapons in their political armoury – fair, foul, constitutional, extra-constitutional, judicial or extra-judicial – to perpetuate themselves and their political parties in power and thus continue to preside over the system of rents and rewards (Ojo et al, 2019).

The struggle for capture, use and preservation of political power in The Gambia is attended by worst of personalisation and sectionalisation of politics as well as bestiality and mundane practices of human rituals and charms as was the case under President Jammeh.

Amundsen reasoned that illegitimate and immoral tools employed for power-preservation is not far-fetched from allure of either or both of the two-horned corruption he identified as 'extractive' and 'redistributive'.

5. Power-Preservation Corruption vis-à-vis Democratic Consolidation in The Gambia

Political corruption refers to the act of use of powers by government officials or their network contacts for illegitimate private gain. Put differently, political corruption is the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain such as bribery (in vote-buying, secret loans affairs or some other extra-legislative appropriations to electoral bodies (EB) and other supportive agencies in the electoral process), extortion (e.g., forceful snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes with illegitimate votes), cronyism (e.g., illegal contract awards to special friends and relations to influence the electoral process. Other forms of political corruption are nepotism, parochialism, patronage, influence peddling, graft and embezzlement.

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The Gambia, power-preservation corruption takes the form of personalised politics rather than democracy. The eras of Yahya Jammeh and his successor Adama Barrow are illuminating examples. Barrow is seen to have invested very little in building a stable political party or in making the process of party-building in The Gambia easy because of political cleavages to tribal affinity, social orientation or financial inducement upon which votes are cast in The Gambian polls. According to Nyima Camara, a political science lecturer at the University of The Gambia, the issue of power-preservation by Barrow left him "compelled to engage in politics, rhetoric and divisive activities (Oti and Wally,)."

A prominent Gambian human rights activist, Mahdi Jobarteh described Barrow's presidency as a "missed opportunity" and adds:

What we have come to see is Barrow going against his own promises and adopting some practices of the former regime, not in terms of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, but with the disfigurement of rule of law, lack of transparency and misuse of public resources.

President Barrow ascended the power position greeted with hope to sustain the coalition across party, religious and ethnic lines, to create jobs for the 45% unemployed Gambian youth, improve fiscal transparency, repeal obnoxious laws and improve human rights record of the post-Jammeh government, create enabling inclusive political climate to enhance participation and fulfill his avowed promise to handover after three years reign as a transitional president.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of power-preservation corruption has revealed a correlation with democracy; a correlation that robs off democratic freedoms of the citizens for political security of their lead; one that creates conflict and human insecurity as well as provides the window for humanitarian intervention by external powers against the internal security of The Gambia. The Gambian leaders, like most African leaders, demonstrated that they were enmeshed in political corruption for power-preservation in which they did not allow democratic practice of

free and equal political self-determination. The logical outcome has always been a fractured State of heterogeneous Gambian societies and a nation of complex political crises.

Contrary to the hopes and promises on President Barrow's assumption of office, there are Siamese-twin corruption of power-preservation and extractive types as well as the relegation of key social sectors – education and health – for high military spending, with the failure to impact positively on the socio-economic lives of the citizens who now live with frustration and near-depression. All the political promises and hopes that came with President Adama Barrow have begun to disappear like the candle lit in the wind. These dynamic factors are recreating the sense of frustration-aggression that ousted President Dawda Kairaba Dawda and his successor Yahya Jammeh and constituted continuing historic challenges against the internal security of the The Gambia.

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