ECOWAS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE POST-2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL CONFLICT IN GAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of ECOWA in the management of the post-2016 presidential electoral conflict in Gambia. The 2016 election was surprisingly won by the leader of an opposition coalition; Adama Barrow. Barrow defeated Yayha Jammeh, who had already won consecutively four previous presidential elections. This marked the terminal point of Jammeh's 20-years rule of Gambia, marred with human rights abuses. Jammeh initially conceded defeat but later changed his mind after a week, thus triggering a major political conflict. For months, he made incessant desperate attempts to cling to power, before finally leaving the country on 21 January 2017, when it appeared he would be removed by force. Indeed, different stakeholders including the ECOWAS played a vital role for ensuring peace in Gambia. In this connection, this study discusses exclusively the roles of ECOWAS in mitigating the conflict under consideration. With extant literature and oral sources backed with the realist conflict theory, the paper traces the historical foundations of the ECOWAS and electoral conflict in Gambia. It emphasizes the roles the organization has played in mitigating the post-2016 electoral conflict in the Country. The study reveals that ECOWAS was able to restore civil rule and peace in the country by threatening the use of force. ECOWAS enjoyed the support of both African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). The two organizations gave ECOWAS the much needed support. This conflict resolution in the Gambia was termed the African solution to African problems. Hence this study recommends among others that ECOWAS should continue to act as the regional defender because the numerous conflicts in the region are indeed African problems and should therefore be tackled by Africans themselves.

Keywords: Democracy, Election, Post-election crisis, ECOWAS, Gambia

INTRODUCTION

Elections are one of the fundamental principles of democracy. So essential that a society cannot be regarded as a democratic one if it fails to conduct at least periodic elections. In fact, it is periodic election that distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship government. However, elections in the developing countries are usually manipulated for the personal aggrandizement of manipulators, thereby making it difficult to conduct free and fair elections. Indeed, the challenge of conducting free, fair and credible elections is one fundamental problem of developing democracies. The flawed nature of elections in West African countries since independence poses problem of democratic consolidation in the sub-region. Worse still, the competition for political power has assumed violent dimensions as shown in 1993 races in the Republic of Congo which led that nation into civil war and in Cote d'Ivoire between 2010 and mid 2011 which prompted a struggle that resulted in the death of about 3,000 persons and dislocated almost a million (Bekoe, 2012).

Electoral violence affects campaign and even turnout of electorates during elections. The utilization of coercive power to threaten people in elections has likewise been seen to have implications in reducing voter's turnout (Bratton 2008; Burchard, 2015). Elections coming up after significant scenes like civil wars, can likewise reactivate dormant social cleavages with implications for violence (Flores & Nooruddin 2012; 2016). Violence can undermine democratic process as it constitutes a cog in the wheel of democratic sustainability.

It has been argued by numerous researchers that the main causes of conflict in West Africa include corruption, social, politics, religious, economic, climate, and environment issues (Egbo 2002, Cilliers & Schuenemann 2013; Mekonnen Mengistu 2015; Brown & Stewart 2015). Of particularly note are Brown & Stewart (2015), who claimed that the policies made by the international monetary institutions increase the economic inequalities between the developed and the developing countries; thus many people remain poor and poverty has tendency of inducing conflict.

However, this paper asserts that electoral conflict is also one of the most devastating conflicts in West Africa sub-region and this has necessitated the intervention of ECOWAS in different elections in different countries including the the Gambia post-election crisis in 2016. This study explores the roles of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in managing post-electoral crisis in Gambia in 2016. ECOWAS was launched in Lagos on 28 May, 1975, with the aim of economic integration, development and prosperity of West African states. The template for the realization of this aim was captured in the ECOWAS treaty and other relevant protocols. The legal and institutional framework presented a perfect structure which only needed concerted and focused action to realize ECOWAS' lofty goals and objectives (Okom, 2016: 75-76).

The main goal of establishing ECOWAS was the economic integration and development of

the region as reflected in the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty. Thus:

> The aims of the community are to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent (ECOWAS Revised Treaty 1993, Article 3).

Since the formation of ECOWAS, numerous conflicts and crises in the region impeded the realization of the objectives. The West African sub-region has experienced and still experiencing conflict in diverse dimension that have made development and integration impossible. This has incapacitated the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and they have not been able to realize their aims and objectives in the region. As a result of conflicts and crises in the region, ECOWAS was motivated to form a Standing Mediation Committee in 1990 that established the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). This group was formed for the restoration of law and order and to create necessary conditions for free and fair election. It came into limelight during the Liberian conflict.

However, the focus of this research is on the post-election crisis in Gambia during the 2016 presidential election and how ECOWAS was able to manage and restore democracy in that country. While most nations around the globe presently use elections as a method for changing leadership and gaining legitimacy for incumbents to remain in power so as to fore stall violence, the same method (election) seems to have orchestrated violence. Why? This constitutes the problem of this study. Hence the need for this study. This study is significant because there seems to be very few studies on the role of ECOWAS in the management of post-election crisis and particularly the Gambia electoral crisis in 2016 election, thus this study is to fill this gap in the extant literature.

In order to achieve this aim, the study is divided into different segments. Aside the introduction, there is a section on the review of related literature encompassing conceptual clarifications and theoretical framework. The next section traces the background of ECOWAS. This was followed by a chronology of the Gambian electoral conflicts. Also considers is the section that deals with an overview of the post-2016 presidential electoral conflict in Gambia. The succeeding segment hinges on the roles of ECOWAS in mitigating the said conflict. The last two sections are recommendations and conclusion respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electoral Conflict

Nnoli (1998) sees conflict as an integral aspect of social existence and progress. According to him, there cannot be progress without conflict resolution because most societal problems are contradictions and conflicts that impede social progress which when resolved can push society forward towards increased humanity. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that conflict is part and parcel of human existence. As long as man continue to live together there is bound to be conflict. Conflict is synonymous with dispute, quarrel, squabble, disagreement, difference of opinion and many more. It originates from a Latin word "conflictus" which means "struck together", shock, clash, collision (Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict, 2008:391). According to Joshua and Oni (2013), conflict may be brewed when two actors or groups pursue incompatible goals. That is to say two actors strive to achieve goals that are at variance with each other.

Electoral conflict is viewed by different people through different dimensional lens. Electoral violence is a subset of political conflict (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017); it is likewise another type of misrepresentation of elections. At a less concrete level, electoral conflict could be comprehended to be any scene where force is used at the electoral process that affects the outcomes of the elections. The UNDP characterizes electoral conflict to be acts or dangers of terrorization, or bodily mischief done to impact an electoral procedure or that happen as a result of electoral rivalry (Birch &Muchlinski, 2017). To them, electoral conflict could be physical violence or coercive intimidations directly connected to approaching election contests or announcing election results. Fisher (2002) described electoral conflict to be any arbitrary or sorted out act or hazard to threaten, bodily damage, blackmail, or mishandle a political partner in looking to decide, adjourn, or to generally impact on electoral procedures (p.3). Thus, to him, conflict of elections covers a wide range of underlying factors that undermine the electoral processes or results.

Sisk (2008) gives what appears to be one of the most comprehensive definitions of electoral conflict, he sees it as actions or intimidations of power, threatening, or bodily intimidations executed to impact on election methods or that develops with respect to the electoral contention. At the point when executed to influence an election procedure, violence might be utilized to impact the procedure which could lead to delay, confuse, or crash an election with implication on the outcomes. Moreover, electoral conflicts are ordinarily comprehended as violence that happen within the cycle of elections, these could be before elections, during elections and after elections (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017). The causal association, which most of the time irrefutable, limits electoral fierceness to what is some ways could be related to the election technique, rather than brutality that occurs in the

midst of the electoral strategy; which sometimes may not have direct connection on the election. Nevertheless, most total savagery in overall society is likely to be related somehow with the voting strategy, specified the fundamental political, community, and budgetary consequences of the results of election, and it has been stated that most brutality occurs in the midst of race campaigns and on race day has political thought processes (Birch &Muchlinski, 2017).

Post-electoral Conflict

In their argument, Daxecker and Schneider (2014) demonstrate that, global election monitors' exist to monitor and legitimize elections. However, the probability of violence after election is high if electoral contest is fraudulent. They refer to this as false race(s). They argue that false races checked by global bodies will be more vulnerable to consequent brutality in light of the fact that a free outsider can uncover electoral misconduct more dependably than local establishments and uncovering such electoral misconduct(s) can trigger violence.

Similar to Daxecker and Schneider's debate, Borzyskowski (2013) maintains that, the existence of appropriate international voting monitors and their feedback on false races (electoral misconduct) increase the probability of post-election savagery. She utilizes information on constituent viciousness in Africa assembled by Straus and Taylor (2009) to gauge the event and force of post-race viciousness. Fjelde & Höglund (2016) further argue that the inability to observe international measures of electoral integrity is a standout amongst the most essential factors adding to post-election dissents. They likewise argue that, the likelihood that manipulation of the election will trigger post-election challenges is especially high in post-dictator administrations that have little involvement with electoral competition in democracy. Bolaji (2015) states that, EU do send specialists on facts discovery missions and election monitoring to guarantee elections uprightness in nations. This is done through arrangement of tools for eyewitnesses and getting of other required materials for election monitoring mission. The EU is in this light is one of the groups that give supplementary support to ECOWAS through overall undertakings for periodic elections, from which many West African countries have benefited and are still benefiting and the benefits include biometric voter enlistment. The EU has also been collaborating with other reputable organizations on voting assistance (Bolaji, 2015).

Historical Foundations of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS was founded in 1975. The aims and objectives of the regional body are to improve collaboration and integration of West African economies with the specific goal of raising the conditions of lives of its people, to sustain and advance financial dependability, build relations with other member countries while working toward African unity (Okere and Ph,

2015). These authors argue that ECOWAS as an inter-Governmental Organization was economically motivated.

After the formation of ECOWAS, internal issues were effectively contained within those individual nations, be that as it may, in 1989, 1996 and 1998 muddled inner clashes broke out in Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone respectively. Okere and Ph (2015), further claim that the emergencies caused by these internal clashes compounded the problems of insecurity and also led to the displacement of persons. This created an atmosphere of precariousness, supported by arms trafficking and expansion of little arms and perilously traded off economic improvement motivation.

Without reaction from the global bodies to huge infringement of human rights in these nations, ECOWAS subsequently assumed a major part in abolishing civil wars in 1990 to 97 and 2003 to 2007 in Liberia and in 1991 to 2002 in Sierra Leone which later spilled over to Guinea and caused turmoil in the whole West African nations (Okereand Ph, 2015). ECOWAS intercedes on the strategic front through its mediation body including Presidents of the various government of member countries, and militarily by sending a great many soldiers of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group called ECOMOG which is drawn from different West African states (Okereand Ph 2015).

As stated before, the initial idea for the formation of ECOWAS was to advance economic participation and coordination of West Africa. However, frequent crisis that bedeviled some West African states led to a change in its major pursuit in 1993 as the responsibility to protect its people was brought to the center stage (Hartmann, 2017). Notwithstanding, electoral monitoring continues to be part of the ECOWAS roles as agreed among member states since 1993. In 2005, the Commission of ECOWAS formed the Electoral Support Unit, and that was generally the moment when ECOWAS commenced to systematically follow every single election in West African nations (Hartmann 2017).

The convention expressly empowered ECOWAS to make sure that democratic rule system was not unexpectedly stopped by using any means (Art. 45). There were sanctions attached to its violation. These sanctions run from deprivation of basic leadership privileges within member states to some other intervention esteemed suitable by the Negotiation and Security Board and the Authority of Presidents of Governments. The convention of 2001 came into practice in 2008 when it was ratified by 9 of the 15 West African states. It has the ability to utilize its military power to stifle unlawful individual(s) from hijacking the machinery of government by force as it happened as of late in the Gambia (Hartmann 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the realist theory of conflict. Realist theorists see conflict as an inherent nature of man which is precipitated by competition to control scarce resources

(resources in this context includes political power). Man is selfish and pursue his selfish interests without minding whose ox is gored. It is this scenario that leads to conflict. Hans Morgenthau is seen as the father of realist theory as far as international relations is concerned. Other contributors to the theory of political realism include George Kennan (Morgenthau, 1946; 1978; Kennan, 1947). Even though realist theory initially seems to be applicable to international relations, it can as well be applied to domestic politics. In this sense, various political actors struggle to control resources which include political power and at times, the rules of the game are not followed. It is this desperation for control of resources among actors that often lead to conflict. However, Francis and Robert (1996) have pointed out that, political realism did not tell the whole story as important as it is, neither does it possesses explanatory capacity to depict world politics. Thus, Wendt (1999), contends that contrary to realism which emphasizes power and material power structures in relations among nations, it is ideas and cultures that govern relations. Be it as it may, the realist theory of conflict is still appropriate for this study in the sense that, it is the struggle for power via election in which the incumbent power holder lost out in the general election in Gambia, but refused to abdicate power that created the political turmoil.

An Overview of the 2016 Presidential Post Election Crisis in the Gambia

According to Hartmann (2017), when the Gambians went to the polls on 1 December 2016, few of them might have thought that this election was going to mark a watershed in the political history of their country. The regime of Jammeh Yahya and indeed the regimes before him had been strongly authoritarian. And for the present administration there was no sign of crack in the authoritarian way Jammeh is ruling the country because even a slightest hints of opposition political activities were repressed, the press gagged and everything was under tight control of the authoritarian leader Jammeh. The vocal opposition leader Ousainou Darboe had ended up in prison together with 19 other politicians for simply having participated in a demonstration calling for political reforms in April 2016. Dabore was sentenced to a four years imprisonment prior to the election. And according to Amnesty International, there was a high level of systematic human rights violations, torture, disappearance of journalists, activists, and there was a general atmosphere of intimidation in the country (Amnesty International 2016; HRW 2015). The regime refused to register international election observers to monitor the election and internet and text messaging services were short down during the election (Amnesty International 2016; HRW 2015).

Against this background therefore, it seemed very unlikely that an incumbent will be defeated during the presidential election. So it took almost everyone by surprise when on 2nd December 2016, the Electoral Commission of The Gambia declared opposition candidate Adama Barrow to be the winner of the election. Barrow had succeeded Darboe as leader of the opposition, and had managed to secure the support of most of the fragmented

opposition parties.

Another surprise came when Jammeh in a television speech conceded defeat and congratulated Barrow even before the official release of the election results. This initial reaction by the incumbent was a welcome relief to the Gambians who knowing the kind of person Jammeh is never expected easy release of power to the declared winner of the election. He further said on television he would not contest the results, and vowed to return to his farm to eat what he grow and grow what he eat (Hartmann, 2017).

There was celebration at the wake of Barrow victory but this was short-lived as a week after, specifically on the 9th of December 2016, Jammeh declared he no longer accepted the election results as declared by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). He said he no longer had trust on the IEC due to some irregularities observed during the result collation in some regions. He did not only contest the election results but also called for a fresh election under a fresh electoral commission. This was due to some irregularities in aggregating results from one particular region that led to the IEC giving two different results. Commenting on the 2016-post electoral conflict in Gambia an oral informant, Wapmuk (2019) noted that:

> The main issue that led to the political crisis in the Gambia after the 2016 presidential election was reluctance on the part of the incumbent in the person of Jammeh Yahya to relinquish power after an election that was generally considered to be free and fair though with a bit of challenges. Yes there were some challenges that was expected. The Independent Electoral Commission had on 5 December, readjusted the votes counted, reducing the number of votes won by each of the three candidates but ultimately confirming Adama Barrow's victory. This made Yahya to question the credibility of the Independent Electoral Commission.

On 10 December, troops were deployed on the streets of Banjul as a sign that Jammeh was still in control of the security apparatus. The offices of the Electoral Commission were occupied by the army on 13 December, staff were prevented from entering the building. Jammeh no longer appeared committed to handing over power to the elected president by 18 January 2017 as supposed. In a context of rising domestic and international condemnation of Jammeh's refusal to accept the electoral results and hand over power, the outcome of this constitutional crisis was far from certain. Fearing for his life, President-elect Barrow went into hiding and eventually fled to Senegal, and by January 2017, the international community had recognized his government as the only legitimate one. Therefore, it was the case of failure or reluctance to hand over power that led to the political crisis and threat to democracy in the Gambia (Hartmann, 2017). Bandipo (2019) succinctly stated that:

> The impression of the international community that is the UN, AU including the ECOWAS was that the Gambia was under oppression by the then president Jammeh Yahya. The incumbent suppressed every opposition at any level. There was no freedom of expression and violation of human right was the order of the day. Any activities of the opposition political parties are suppressed and people involved imprisoned. For example, the opposition leader Ousainou Dabor was sentenced to four years imprisonment prior to the election.

Democracy cannot flourish where opposition parties are not allowed to exist. So it was not surprising to the ECOWAS member states when the incumbent refused to hand over power to the declared winner of the election in person of Adama Barrow. This was the build up to the political crisis that erupted post 2016 election in the Gambia. The coalition party that eventually won the election was formed with determination to wrestle power from the incumbent and the Gambian citizens in diaspora were instrument to this.

The ECOWAS Commission created the Electoral Assistance Unit in 2005 and began to systematically observe all national elections in member countries. But electoral observation requires an invitation from national authorities. In the case of the Gambia election imbroglio, President Jammeh refused to allow the ECOWAS Observers Team to monitor the December 2016 presidential elections. This was quite unusual and following Jammeh's original concession of defeat, ECOWAS, together with the AU and the UN Official Representative for West Africa, congratulated the Gambian people and its leaders for the smooth and peaceful election and transition. When Jammeh later changed his position, ECOWAS was quick to react, calling on the Gambian government to abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations. An interviewee who is also the Gambian High Commissioner to Nigeria, Momodou (2019) lamented that:

> There were a lot of issues that culminated into the political crisis after the IEC declared the winner of the 2016 presidential election. First of all, the Gambian people were fed up with the Jammeh administration that was known for human right violations and oppression of his own people. We are ready for a change after 22 years of terror in the hand of Jammeh. Gambians both at home and abroad were ready to wrestle power out of this administration, that even if the ECOWAS had not intervened we were ready to face Jammeh and damn the consequences.

Democracy Summarily, the actual cause of the crisis came from the result collation from the Upper River Region. When the election was conducted the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) the body responsible for conducting election made a mistake in counting

the result from that result. At the time of result collation, the number of total votes for each party was inflated to the tune of the total number of registered voters. For example, the total number of registered voters in that region was ten thousand, after the election, in addition to the different number of votes each party got, the total number of registered voters which was ten thousand was also added to each party thereby inflating the number of votes casted for each party, the addition was across board.

When the IEC realized this mistake even though it had declared the winner of the election, went back to correct this mistake, the votes added to the parties were also subtracted and recounted which still gave the same result since the addition was across board. The winner of the election still remained the winner. This was the reason for the two different results declared by the IEC. Jammeh Yahya saw this mistake on the part of the IEC as an opportunity to contest the election. He ceased the opportunity to query the credibility of the IEC and called for a re-run of the election under a new electoral commission. Jammeh came on a national television and declared he will not step down for anybody. He deployed military men to every nook and cranny of the country and started unleashing terror on the people. The people knowing the kind of operation the military can do started fleeing the country to the neighbouring Senegal. Incidentally at that time, there was an international conference going on in Bamako Mali, Barrow was advised to attend the meeting and use the opportunity to meet other African heads of states and discuss with them on the way forward for the Gambia.

The Roles ECOWAS in Managing the Post-2016 Presidential Electoral Conflicts in Gambia

The reversal of position by President Jammeh was not acceptable to ECOWAS member states and according to them, the scenario threatened peace not only that of Gambia but the entire West African sub-region. Thus, ECOWAS leaders decided to send a mediation commission to Banjul. In the mediation committee was acting ECOWAS Chairperson, Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari, President of Ghana John Dramani Mahama and Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma. Also among the delegation was the UN Special Representative for West Africa (also a former ECOWAS Commission President), Ghana's Mohammed Ibn Chambas. These were the persons that formed the delegation team that travelled to Banjul on 13 December 2016 to negotiate with Jammeh to respect the rule of law and step down for the winner of the election. But despite the high-ranking composition of the delegate, they were not able to convince the incumbent to change his position (Farge and McAllister 2016).

Following the failure of this first mediation, ECOWAS heads of state were apparently convinced that they needed to adopt more credible sanctions. When asked whether the UN would consider military action to force Jammeh's departure, Chambas did not rule out this possibility (Farge and McAllister 2016). At their regular summit on 17 December 2016 in

Abuja, they decided upon the following course of action:

a. ECOWAS would continue mediation efforts through President Buhari and President Mahama, and request that the AU and UN endorse their decisions.

b. The Heads of state would attend the inauguration of President-elect Barrow, to be sworn in on 19 January 2017 in conformity with the Gambian Constitution.

c. ECOWAS would be obligated to take all necessary means to strictly enforce the results of the elections (ECOWAS 2016 d). To this end, ECOWAS placed standby forces on alert and formally authorised them to intervene militarily if Jammeh did not step down.

Further negotiations between Buhari and Jammeh in Banjul ended on 13 January without any breakthrough, and as the deadline of 18 January approached, the option of military intervention became more realistic. On 14 January, Barrow travelled together with the ECOWAS mediators to Bamako to meet most of the other ECOWAS Heads of state, who were attending the France–Africa Summit there. UN Special Representative- Chambas declared that ECOWAS would ask the UN Security Council to approve the deployment of troops to Gambia if Jammeh refused to cede power (Vanguard 2017).

ECOWAS chiefs of staff gathered on 14 January in Abuja to discuss the preparations for the establishment of the ECOWAS Military Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG). On 18 January, troops (most from Senegal, with contingents from Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Togo) started to move toward the borders with Gambia (which is surrounded by Senegalese territory), and together with Nigerian forces also implemented a naval blockade. In the afternoon of 19 January, under the sponsorship of ECOWAS and in the presence of many international diplomats, Adama Barrow was sworn in as President in the Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal. The same day, the UN Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2337, expressing its full support for ECOWAS's quest "to ensure, by political means first," that "the will of the people of The Gambia as expressed in the results of 1st December elections" be honoured, though the Security Council did not endorse military action according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter (UN 2017).

On 19 January, some troops nevertheless invaded Gambian territory, but the invasion was quickly halted by a last-minute negotiation by Mauritania's President Abdel Aziz, Guinea's Alpha Condé, and Ibn Chambas. Under the imminent threat of military invasion, with thousands of Gambians fleeing to Senegal, and with Jammeh's own army chief pledging his allegiance to President Barrow, Jammeh eventually agreed to step down and go into exile. The ECOWAS contingents then secured the territory, and it was decided that ECOMIG would stay for a further three months in Gambia as requested by President Barrow (Hartmann, 2017).

According to Wapmuk (2019), the role of ECOWAS in the Gambia crisis was that of a decisive regional defender. In line with the UN policy of non –interference in the affairs of a sovereign nations, ECOWAS and even AU do not intervene directly in the affairs of states because they are sovereign entities. However, in a situations whereby government of a state failed to protect its citizens or failed to adhere to the rule of law, in that case, it becomes a necessity for the international community to protect their own citizens. For example in the case of genocide.

In the Gambia case, it was not a case of genocide, rather a constitutional crisis and violations of human rights. And ECOWAS also acted based on experience to safeguard a situation from degenerating to a violent conflict. This is because if they sit back and wait until the situation becomes critical like we had in Liberia and Sierra Leone, then it will cost them more in terms of money and men (soldiers). In the case of Gambia we might as well give ECOWAS credit for acting promptly to save a situation that would have deteriorated, may be into a civil war.

The actual role ECOWAS played was first of all peace diplomacy. There was a peaceful mediation to persuade the incumbent Jammeh Yahya to hand over power to the winner of the election in person of Adama Barrow. Unfortunately, he refused the peace initiative as he was reluctant to step down. Then ECOWAS had to move to the next level of more or less demonstrating power beyond persuasion. Jammeh was given an ultimatum to hand over power and if he fails to do that, then there would be no option than to intervene with the use of force (Wapmuk, 2019).

There were some demonstrations of show of force in which fighter planes were flying all over this small country- Gambia. This was enough to convince the President that the game is up, and he eventually left the country after another negotiation with the ECOWAS Heads of state. Hence the intervention was not actually a case of marching soldiers with guns into the country. Even the country's head of the military categorically told Jammeh he would not help him should ECOWAS intervene militarily (Wapmuk, 2019).

According to Bandipo (2019) the ECOWAS played the role of a mediator in persuading the incumbent to relinquish power to the winner. It was when mediation did not yield any result that the ECOWAS military intervention in the Gambia (ECOMIG) was established to force Jammeh out of power. But the military force was immediately halted when Jammed finally agreed to leave the country. The ECOWAS military force was then turned into a stabilizing force to stabilize the country after Barrow was restored as the rightful winner of the election and returned from the Mali after being sworn in as the new president. Hence ECOWAS was able to restore peace and democracy in Gambia without actual use of force but threat to use of force.

The Impact of the ECOWAS Intervention in Restoring Democracy in Gambia

In a nutshell, ECOWAS managed to "restore democracy" in Gambia by using the threat of force without using any actual physical violence. On 19 January, there was apparently some sporadic fighting on Gambian territory which involved Senegalese troops and rebel units from Casamance, but the negotiated departure of Jammeh avoided any military confrontation between the Gambian army or affiliated mercenaries and the ECOWAS troops. Ever since Jammeh had reneged on his commitment to respect the electoral results, ECOWAS heads of state and the ECOWAS Commission had been quite clear in their position and remained steadfast. The scenario of military invasion had been openly discussed since the ECOWAS summit in Abuja on 17 December. The organisation had also won legitimacy through being backed by both the African Union and the United Nations Security Council (the latter with some reservations) for what was essentially an ECOWAS strategy and policy. Only when the scenario of military invasion became credible did the Gambian regime accept the defeat. With Senegalese troops stationed on the border and the Nigerian air force patrolling the sky above Banjul, most of the President's remaining allies clearly realised the ship was sinking. It has been pointed out that the negotiated departure of Jammeh might not be considered an entirely successful operation, as he flew to a country (Equatorial Guinea) where he will face no prosecution for past violations of human rights or other criminal offences, and he was allowed to take with him most of his belongings (valued at USD 11.4 million, including a fleet of luxury cars). According to the opposition, the state coffers were practically emptied (Burke 2017). It is, however, clear that Gambians themselves could not hold their leader accountable without the support of the international community, and it is very unlikely that ECOWAS would have been able to achieve a peaceful transition and the restoration of democratic order without having made these compromises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study dwelt on the ECOWAS and the management of the post-2016 Gambian electoral conflict. After a critical study of the phenomenon under review, the paper made some policy recommendations which are the following:

i.   ECOWAS should be more proactive in conflict management of the region by building institutional capacity and muster financial resources within and outside its region without sacrificing and negotiating it security mandate.

ii. Early warning mechanism should be employed: In some cases, before conflict could break-up, some governments in African States do not take pre-cautions in averting issues that could lead to conflict. As such, they neglect issues at the very

beginning during agitations and when such issues are not addressed, it may transform into war. Therefore, all issues that are raised through agitations should be taken into due consideration on how such could be addressed in order to prevent conflicts between the agitators and the government. This is done through the early warning mechanism system. Where early warning is neglected, the people suffer a lot especially when innocent people are being killed and the country turns into a state of political instability. Addressing issues through the early warning mechanism also preserves the country's stability and as such, could promote peace and security sustainability where international business could also strive peacefully. There is need for African leaders to develop a comprehensive early warning mechanism system so as to create consciousness among the people and the governments of African States.

iii. Placing National Interest above Personal Interest: African leaders need to set examples to their followers (the people, citizenries) on how to place national interests above personal interests. There is great need for re-orientation of African people. Some of the reasons why the people fight the government are when they see a government that does not yield to the aspiration of the people. This can also be examined in African countries where the leaders want to remain in power till their death.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has acknowledged that since the 2016-post presidential electoral conflict in Gambian, there has been a proliferation of literature from scholars of different disciplinary orientations with a view to stimulating a lucid understanding of the phenomenon in question. However, not much has been written on the roles of ECOWAS in mitigating the conflict. It is on this note that this study serves as an intervention to close the knowledge gap that exists. The ECOWAS regional community comprised leaders from Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leon who united to resolve the political conflict in Gambia. ECOWAS standby force was also involved in the peace and conflict resolution of the Gambia's political crisis. On the advice of the ECOWAS regional group, President elect, Adama Barrow fled to Senegal where he stayed, and was officially sworn into office as the country's President in Gambia's Embassy, Senegal with the ECOWAS Standby Force comprising the ECOWAS Armed Forces from Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Sierra Leon. President Yahya Jammeh finally agreed and stepped down as President of the Gambia under the mediation of the ECOWAS leaders.

More so, the new President Adama Barrow returned to Gambia from Senegal after the former President, Yahya Jammeh went on exile. Looking at the personal backgrounds of those of Jammeh's West African peers who tried to convince him to step down, it is clear

that few of them felt any solidarity with the Gambian leader. Most of them were elected as opposition candidates against incumbents, and owed their position as heads of state to a functioning electoral process and strong regional democratic norms.

There is certainly a strong variation among African sub-regions when it comes to the number of democratic regimes. This would explain why ECOWAS finds it easier than other regional arrangements in Africa to push for democratisation, and why it is less likely that we will see a repetition of ECOWAS's restoration of democracy policy in other parts of the African continent (Hartmann 2017).

The longest-serving leader within ECOWAS is currently Togo's Faure Gnassingbé, with 12 years in office. While democracy might still face many obstacles in West Africa, alternation in office has indeed become the rule. In the other sub-regions (and regional arrangements) of the continent, with the exception of Southern Africa, we still find a majority of leaders who reached power by means other than the ballot box.   The determined intervention on the part of ECOWAS should thus be praised. A failure to enforce the departure of Jammeh would have delegitimized the whole democratization agenda. For ECOWAS, as for all other regional organisations, actively promoting the strengthening of democratic institutions and the rule of law in member states is a much more difficult task than sanctioning anti democracy behaviour, as it requires much more capacity and a stronger interaction between the ECOWAS Commission and member states' governments. ECOWAS intervention in Gambia sends a powerful message at this time when democracy is under serious attack and had indeed found an African solution to an African problem.

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