

Ethnicity, Issue Voting, and Regime Change in the Gambia: the Reason Yahya Jammeh Lost the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract : In a country where there are minimal economic opportunities, with a declining living condition of the people, do electorates in Africa's newest democracy reevaluate their support for a candidate based on issues or ethnicity. In the 2016 presidential election in The Gambia, the opposition coalition party had successfully managed to overthrow an authoritarian government, which has ruled the country for 22 years. The results of the election are not only surprising but also presented an interesting theoretical puzzle that raises important this paper is going to address. An important fact is that dictator had organized an election which he lost, and this paper will assess the voting decisions of Gambian electorates to determine whether they were more concerned with issues such as status of the economy, human rights abuses by the Jammeh administration or the ethnicities of the contestants who took part in the election. This study uses field survey data, conducted six months after this historic vote, to evaluate the opinion of the electorates. Contrary to the notion of the prevalence of ethnic voting in African elections, an argument made by many scholars, this study concluded that Gambian voters were more concerned with issues such as the economy and human rights under the Jammeh administration than they were for the ethnicities of the candidates. The election was issue-based, and that Jammeh lost the polls due to the concern the electorate had on human rights abuses by his government.

Keywords : election, issue, ethnicity, regime change

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