Oral Defense Announcement
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An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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Ethnicity, Issue Voting, and Regime Change in the Gambia; Why Did Yahya Jammeh Lose the 2016 Presidential Election? The Dawning of a Democracy in the Gambia

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Place: Remote

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 dissertation is going to address. An important fact is that dictator had organized an election which he lost, and this study 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 dissertation 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, even though Gambian voters were split on the question of the economy, their dissatisfaction on Jammeh handling of human rights during the 22 years regime lasted led to his lost to opposition coalition leader Mr. Barrow, in the 2016 presidential election.

Using similar approach to investigating issue voting, this dissertation also examines the local government election of mayors in the Banjul City Council (BCC) and Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC). There is a striking similarity of the 2018 local government election study with the results of the 2016 study of the presidential elections in The Gambia, in which Jammeh lost to the opposition coalition parties. In both sets of elections, Gambian voters have demonstrated that they were more concerned with issues than with the ethnicities of the candidates in elections. Just as concluded that Jammeh lost the election based on issues of human rights, more than ethnocentric voting, the study of local government elections indicates that decisions were primarily based on issues that people care about more so then the ethnic identities of mayoral candidates.

In their determination of the second and third most important issues, differences emerged between the voters in Banjul and those in the KMC. While voters in the KMC have stated that their second and third preferences were waste collection and building road networks within the city, the voters in the mayoral election in Banjul have repeatedly noted the importance they attached on fixing the road infrastructure of the city as their second and third most considered issue when they voted in the local government election. Although, ethnicity was important for some of the voters, but it wasn’t the main factor that influenced the regime change than the concerns Gambian voters have on Jammeh’s handling of human rights in the country.

Keywords— Election, Issue Voting, Ethnicity and Regime Change.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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