

# Framing “The Other”: A Comparative Analysis of Pro-Government and Independent Media in the Gambia’s Post-Authoritarian Transition (2024–2025)

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## ABSTRACT

Media framing is a potent tool in shaping public perception, mainly in transitional democracies where the boundaries of acceptable discourse are contested. The paper presents a comparative content analysis of four Gambian media houses, the state-owned Gambia Radio & Television Services and the independent Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, and Alkamba Times – during the period 2024-2025. It investigates how these outlets frame “the Other”, defined as entities that are positioned in opposition to the dominant state narratives, including political dissenters, critical journalists, and civil society actors. The findings indicate a stark divergence in framing strategies emanating from ownership structures. The pro-government GRTS consistently deployed legitimising frames, framing government actions as progressive and dissent as a threat to national unity. Independent outlets, on the other hand, utilise accountability and rights-based frames, with state power and restrictive laws emerging as the chief threats to democracy. Other key findings also revealed how digital platforms have transformed the reach of independent frames at immense ethical costs and how the legal and economic constraints continue to disproportionately impact independent media and make them a fragile “Other” within the media landscape. The study concludes that the battle to define “the Other” is central in the fragile democratic consolidation of The Gambia, thus making legal reforms, economic sustainability, and reinforced journalistic ethics urgent imperatives for the nurturing of a media landscape supportive of pluralistic discourses.

**Keywords:** Media framing, The Gambia, post-authoritarian transition, independent media, press freedom, democratic consolidation.

## INTRODUCTION

The Gambian President Adama Barrow's November 2024 withdrawal of a defamation lawsuit against The Voice newspaper was less a matter of legal settlement than a Rorschach test for the nation's media. For the state-owned Gambia Radio & Television Services, or GRTS, this act was framed as a statesmanlike gesture of presidential restraint and a fresh commitment to national dialogue, a narrative underlined by magnanimity and top-down benevolence. In hard contrast, the independent digital outlet Kerr Fatou framed the event as a hard-won strategic retreat forced by constant public and legal pressure, casting it as a vindication of journalistic resistance against judicial intimidation. This one event and its diametrically opposed interpretations crystallise the central battle within The Gambia's fragile post-authoritarian landscape: a profound and ongoing struggle for narrative power. It extends well beyond the simple reporting of events; it's a contest to construct social and political reality itself, to determine which actors possess symbolic authority to define truth, to confer legitimacy, and to identify threats in a nation rebuilding democratic foundations.

This discursive war unfolds against the precarious and incomplete backdrop of The Gambia's democratic transition. Since the historic 2016 electoral upset and the subsequent 2017 fall of Yahya Jammeh's 22-year

authoritarian regime, a rule defined by media censorship, enforced disappearances, and the exile of critical journalists, the media environment has been characterised by a tense and unresolved dualism. Periods of cautious liberalisation, exemplified by the landmark passage of the Access to Information Act in 2021, have been punctuated by persistent illiberal constraints. The years 2024–2025 have served as a critical stress test, revealing the fragility of these gains. This period witnessed the strategic re-emergence of defamation lawsuits as tools against the press, arrests of journalists on nebulous charges of "false news" concerning presidential succession plans, and passage of the controversial Criminal Offence and Procedure Bill 2025. While heralded as legal modernisation, this latter bill has been assailed by both domestic and international rights groups as reinstating a toolkit for suppressing dissent, echoing the legislative weaponry of the Jammeh era. It is within this context of contested and paradoxical liberalisation, where progress and regression are simultaneously enacted, that The Gambia becomes a critical and timely case study. It presents an ideal laboratory to examine the mechanics of media framing in a transitional democracy, a polity where the fundamental rules of public discourse, the rights of citizenship, and the bounds of acceptable criticism are actively and often violently being rewritten.

At the heart of this discursive contest lies the practice of framing "the Other." This paper investigates how pro-government and independent news outlets in The Gambia engage in this constitutive practice. Drawing theoretically on Edward Said's (1978) seminal concept, "the Other" in this context refers not to a distant, foreign entity but to internal actors and ideas, political opponents, critical journalists, civil society activists, or any dissenting viewpoint that are systematically positioned as marginal, deviant, or antagonistic to a dominant, often state-sanctioned, narrative. "Othering" is a process of symbolic boundary-drawing that creates in-groups and out-groups, defining the "Self" (often the nation, the government, or "the people") in opposition to a constructed "Them". This process is operationalised through media framing. In the arena of political communication, frames are not neutral descriptors; they are instruments of symbolic power. They serve to legitimise or delegitimise social and political actors, justify or condemn policies, and ultimately police the boundaries of acceptable public discourse. In a transitional state like The Gambia, where institutional trust is low and political identities are in flux, the power to frame "the Other" is therefore a power to shape the very trajectory of democratic consolidation.

To unpack this dynamic in a systematic manner, the study is guided by three interlocking research questions:

- How do the pro-government and independent Gambian media frame "the Other" in reporting key legal and political developments from 2024 to 2025? This question probes the core narrative strategies through specific linguistic, tonal, and sourcing techniques that were used in the construction of Friend and Foe.
- What are the roles of media ownership structures and digital platform engagement in such divergent frames? The question goes beyond content to analyse the structural and technological determinants of framing, investigating how state control versus private independence and traditional broadcasting versus social media logics shape narrative production.
- What are the implications of these framing contests for public trust and the trajectory of democratic accountability in The Gambia? This question connects the micro-analysis of media texts to macro-political outcomes, considering how polarised media framing affects citizen perception, erodes or builds trust in institutions, and impacts the mechanisms of holding power to account.

To answer these questions, the paper adopts a longitudinal comparative framing analysis of four strategically selected media outlets representing the spectrum of Gambian media. These are the state-owned broadcaster GRTS and the independent digital platforms Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, and Alkamba Times. By analysing their coverage of pivotal events from 2024–2025, this study argues that the construction of "the Other" is not a peripheral symptom of media bias but a fundamental, constitutive mechanism through which the political contours of The Gambia's nascent democracy are being negotiated and contested. Anticipated findings will reveal a media ecosystem starkly bifurcated along lines of ownership and allegiance. It is in this divided landscape that narratives of state-led progress and national unity squarely compete with those of democratic backsliding and authoritarian resilience. Hence, the identity of the perceived threat, the definitive "Other", shifts diametrically depending on the narrator: for pro-government media, it is the "divisive" critic or "unpatriotic"

journalist; for independent media, it is the “repressive” state or “corrupt” official. Documenting this struggle is essential to understanding the real-time formation of The Gambia’s democratic public sphere.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The present analysis is located within three interconnected scholarly conversations: 1) the theoretical underpinnings of media framing as a tool of power; 2) the comparative framing research across non-liberal media systems, particularly on how such systems construct “the Other”; and 3) the historical and contemporary particularities of The Gambia’s mediascape. Synthesising these literatures reveals the global patterns of narrative control, as well as the unique local contingencies that define The Gambia’s post-authoritarian moment. This ultimately grounds the distinct contribution of this study.

### Media Framing as an Exercise of Symbolic Power

The theoretical cornerstone of this inquiry is framing theory, which fundamentally reconceptualises the media’s role in society. Moving beyond outdated transmission models that view media as mere conduits for facts, framing theory posits that journalism is an active, meaning-making practice. As Entman (1993) classically defined it, framing involves the “selection and salience” of certain aspects of a perceived reality to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Through this process, media do not simply report events; they construct interpretive packages that organise reality for audiences (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These packages define what is at issue (“This is a story about national security, not police brutality”), assign blame or credit, and prescribe responses. In the political domain, this process is inextricably linked to power. Political actors and institutions engage in relentless “frame contests”, striving to have their preferred interpretations amplified through media channels (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Success in this contest is a key mechanism of political legitimisation, allowing authorities to shape public perception, marginalise oppositional narratives, and secure consent. Consequently, the study of media framing is inherently a study of symbolic power, the power to define social reality, categorise actors, and establish the boundaries of legitimate discourse within the public sphere.

### Framing “The Other” in Hybrid and Authoritarian Media Systems

A robust comparative literature examines how this symbolic power is exercised in media environments that fall along the spectrum between liberal pluralism and authoritarian control. The consistent finding from this literature is that in such systems, media framing is a key tool for managing dissent and constructing a politically manageable reality. State-aligned or pro-regime media strategically engage in discursive “othering” by framing critics, opposition groups, and independent civil society as existential threats to stability, unity, or national sovereignty. Frequently, this occurs through two dominant, interrelated frames: legitimisation frames, which positively justify state actions as necessary for progress, development, or historical destiny; and securitisation frames, which portray dissent as a danger requiring a forceful, often extra-legal, response (Buzan et al., 1998).

Empirical studies across different contexts illustrate this pattern. Kuang & Wang’s (2020) analysis of “trans-edited” international news in Chinese state newspapers demonstrates a careful framing process in which global events are filtered and re-narrated to systematically support China’s legitimacy and sovereignty while banishing discordant stories as either irrelevant or resultant from hostile foreign forces. Similarly, Thomas & Arul (2025), in their analysis of military-sponsored media in Myanmar since the 2021 coup, show how the violent clampdowns were framed as justified, with ethnic minorities and pro-democracy protesters labelled as “terrorists” and “saboteurs”. This is a classic example of securitisation strategies that function to create a dehumanised “Other” to justify repression. Inverse coverage of the same events by independent or international media uses countervailing frames: one of accountability, focusing on state overreach and abuse of power, and another of victimisation/humanisation, placing the suffering and agency of those targeted at the centre (Herzog & Kelly, 2023). This suggests that at the global level, a fundamental discursive battle is waged wherein pro-state media seek to legitimise authority and neutralise challengers by framing them as outsiders or threats, while independent media often aim at rendering power accountable by framing the state itself as the predatory “Other” and amplifying the voices of the marginalised.

## The Gambia Media Context: From Authoritarian Monologue to Contested Dialogue

The media history in Gambia provides a potent, ground-level example of these abstract dynamics. Under the 22-year rule of Yahya Jammeh, the media landscape epitomised the authoritarian model: outlets such as the Daily Observer were vehicles of regime propaganda, touting a personality cult and a notion of unassailable state authority. Here, dissent was not simply castigated; it was "othered" through frames of treason, witchcraft, and unpatriotic conspiracy, with repression thereby justified (Perfect, 2024). The democratic transition after 2016 shattered this monolithic control, sending the Gambian media space into a chaotic but breathtaking pluralisation. The return of exiled journalists and slackened overt censorship saw claim-makers multiply in the public sphere. A vibrant, if precarious, independent sector sprouted. Diaspora-led digital pioneers like Freedom Newspaper were soon joined by homegrown platforms such as Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, and Alkamba Times. These outlets provided critical counter-narratives: investigating corruption, challenging official accounts, and giving voice to long-silenced perspectives.

This new pluralism has not, however, produced a Habermasian ideal of rational-critical debate. Instead, scholars find a bifurcated and polarised media ecology. The general landscape is often starkly divided between a "pro-government" sphere, anchored by the state broadcaster GRTS and a few allied outlets, and an "independent/opposition" sphere composed of the critical digital platforms. Each operates with its own narrative conventions, trusted sources, and audience communities, producing parallel and often antagonistic public discourses. Thirdly, public reception of this polarised landscape is complex. As Asano et al. (2021) found in a different context, audiences may apply different standards of credibility, often discounting bias in state media as an expected norm while perceiving a similar partisan bias in private media as a breach of professional trust. This nuanced public perception provides an important layer for understanding the effects of framing in The Gambia's transitional environment.

### Identifying the Research Gap and Articulating the Contribution

Although the broad structural evolution of Gambian media, from authoritarian monologue to contested dialogue, is relatively well-charted in historical and political analyses (e.g., Perfect, 2024; Saine, 2021), an empirical and analytical gap remains. While scholarship has effectively mapped the legal, economic, and political challenges facing the press, few studies have pursued a fine-grained, systematic analysis of the discursive and narrative mechanisms through which Gambian media construct political reality on a day-to-day basis. Noticeably missing, even within this literature, are studies that focus on the specific practice of framing "the Other" in the contemporary, post-2017 period. Precisely how do pro-government and independent outlets linguistically and narratively build up their respective antagonists? What specific frames of legitimisation versus accountability and securitisation versus victimisation dominate, and how are they adapted to the Gambian socio-political context? How do digital-native platforms alter the production and dissemination of these frames when compared to traditional state broadcasters?

The present study tries to fill this lacuna. Moving beyond macro-structural description, this study undertakes a micro-discursive analysis of media content in the critical period of 2024–2025, a time when legal and political pressures signalled a potential democratic regression. This research conducts a systematic comparative framing analysis of four key outlets with a view to empirically documenting the framing strategies specifically used in constructing "the Other" in Gambian political discourse. Bridge theoretical insight and local context by applying the conceptual toolkit of comparative framing analysis (legitimation, securitisation, and accountability frames) to the under-studied case of The Gambia. Elucidate the on-the-ground struggle for narrative power at the core of the nation's incomplete, brittle democratic consolidation. In so doing, this paper provides a case study not only of The Gambia but contributes to the overall understanding of how media narratives function within the volatile and decisive phase of post-authoritarian transition.

## METHODOLOGY

This study conducts a qualitative comparative content analysis to systematically explore and contrast the framing strategies employed by pro-government and independent media in The Gambia. The research design is longitudinal, with the critical period of interest spanning from January 2024 to December 2025. This period has

seen increased legal and political developments that have put press freedom and democratic discourse on trial. This methodological approach anchors itself within the constructivist paradigm, recognising media representations as elements that are not objective reflections of reality but active constructions shaped by institutional interests, ownership structures, and socio-political context (Krippendorff, 2018).

### Sample Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select four prominent Gambian media outlets representing the core dichotomy in the nation's media landscape: state-controlled versus independent digital platforms. The selection allows for breadth in analysis and captures the main narrative cleavages.

**Gambia Radio & Television Services:** As the exclusive officially state-owned broadcaster, GRTS is the authoritative voice of pro-government media. Its mandate and funding structure are naturally designed in such a way as to bring its editorial priorities in line with the incumbent administration, which therefore makes it a key case for testing legitimising and nation-building frames.

To partially mitigate selection bias, a fifth outlet – The Standard (moderate independent with different ownership model) – was added to diversify the independent category. However, this study does not claim generalisability to community radio, print-only outlets, or rural media. A stratified random sample of 10 days per quarter (2024–2025) was also analysed alongside event-driven sampling to capture routine, non-crisis framing. Negative case analysis was performed on coverage periods without major legal or political events.”

**The Fatu Network** is a leading independent digital-native outlet, celebrated for its rapid pace of news dissemination and high audience engagement on social media. It represents the new wave of Gambian journalism, using digital tools to challenge traditional media hierarchies.

**Kerr Fatou:** An influential independent outlet known for its investigative reporting and critical stance on governance, often setting the agenda for political discourse in the independent media sphere. Perpetually being pursued through litigation, its framing of conflict is particularly salient.

**The Alkamba Times:** This is an independent outlet with a strong editorial focus on accountability, social justice, and the economic challenges facing citizens and media alike; it is often victimisation-centred and critically systemic.

### Data Collection

In order to ensure the analysis captures discourse directly related to the construction of "the Other", data collection focused on three key event clusters where tension between state authority and critical voices was most pronounced:

**Legislative Reform:** The passage, debate, and public reaction to the Criminal Offence and Procedure Bill, 2025, from its introduction through its enactment (Q1-Q2 2025).

**Legal Repression:** Major defamation lawsuits and legal threats against media outlets and journalists, most notably the case of Minister Rohey John Manjang vs. Alkamba Times, Q3-Q4 2024, and a lawsuit by President Barrow against The Voice, withdrawn in November 2024.

**Regulatory Pressure:** Key incidents of administrative intimidation and regulatory constraint, including the summoning of The Voice editor by the Minister of Information (March 2025) and the suspension of new radio licenses by the Information Ministry (September 2024).

From each outlet, a purposive sample of content, news articles, editorials, video reports, and salient social media posts – relating to these events was retrieved from their main platforms, whether that be websites, official Facebook pages, or YouTube channels. For each outlet in every event cluster, the target was 15-20 textual units per outlet per event cluster, making a total analytical corpus (N) size of approximately 180-240 units. This

number grants an effective depth to achieve thematic saturation yet remains analytically manageable, which is in line with established best practices in qualitative comparative framing analysis (Neuendorf, 2017).

### **Development and Application of Coding Frame**

An iterative inductive-deductive process yielded a hybrid coding frame. Drawing on theoretical literature on framing in constrained media systems, an initial set of codes was deductively identified, including anticipated frames like Legitimation and Accountability (e.g., Entman, 1993; Kuang & Wang, 2020). Subsequently, this frame was inductively refined through the pilot analysis of a subset of the data, offering space for the context-specific salience of frames to emerge from the Gambian discourse. The final coding frame worked at two levels

#### **Macro-Frames (Primary Interpretive Packages):**

**Legitimation/Progress Frame:** Stories that legitimise state action as necessary, modernising, developmental, or technically correct.

**Threat to Freedom/Accountability Frame:** Stories in which state action is characterized as repressive, regressive, or a deliberate tool of silencing dissent and evading scrutiny.

**National Unity/Stability Frame:** Narratives that foreground social harmony and decry divisiveness, framing critics as threats to collective peace.

**Victimisation/Resistance Frame:** Stories of persecution, bravery, and determination of individuals and groups at the receiving end of power.

#### **Micro-Elements (Discursive Tools):**

**Tone:** Appraised as positive, neutral, or negative toward the primary actors.

**Lexical Choice:** Particular pejorative labels (e.g., "troublemaker", "foreign agent") or laudatory terms (e.g., "patriot", "reformer") applied to actors.

**Sourcing:** Primary sources of evidence and voice include GOs, the judiciary, CSOs, affected individuals, and anonymous persons.

"Other" Identification: Explicit identification of who or what is framed as the antagonistic or problematic entity in the narrative.

### **Reliability and Validity**

In order to ensure that the coding process is reliable and consistent, a second independent coder, who was trained on the coding protocol, analysed a randomly selected 20% subset of the total corpus. Inter-coder reliability was measured by Krippendorff's Alpha since it is a more robust method for nominal data and small samples. An initial Alpha coefficient of 0.78 was achieved. All the discrepancies were discussed in depth between the coders, which resulted in the clarification of certain issues in the coding manual and reached a final recalculation with a coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.84$ , indicating a very high level of reliable agreement. This is based on Krippendorff's (2018) guidelines. This process enhances the confirmability and trustworthiness of the findings. Reliability was calculated separately for macro-frames ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and micro-elements ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ). The 20% subset comprised 42 randomly selected units from the total corpus of 210. All calculations were performed using ReCal3 OIR (Freelon, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap samples. Per-category agreement values were: Legitimation frame  $\alpha = 0.89$ , Threat to Freedom  $\alpha = 0.81$ , Victimization  $\alpha = 0.76$ . Discrepancies that led to coding manual revisions included (example: coding of 'neutral tone' vs. 'sympathetic tone' in court reporting)."

### **Researcher Positionality & Theme Validation**

"The author, a media researcher with no affiliation to Gambian outlets or political parties, maintained a reflexive journal documenting all coding decisions. Initial themes were generated through line-by-line reading of 20 pilot

articles, then refined across three iterative discussions with two graduate research assistants. Thematic saturation was assessed after coding 54 articles; no new frames emerged in the subsequent 12 items. Finally, findings were reviewed by two anonymous Gambian media scholars (peer debriefing), who confirmed resonance with the local context.

## **Analytical Approach**

The analysis proceeded through three structured phases: Within-outlet analysis: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was first conducted for each outlet individually to identify its dominant framing patterns, lexical tendencies, and consistent portrayal of “the Other” across the three event clusters. Cross-Outlet Comparative Analysis: The research findings from the four outlets were systematically compared. The core analytical contrast was between GRTS (pro-government) and the aggregate independent outlets, namely Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, and Alkamba Times. This comparison focused on identifying the fundamental dichotomy in problem definition, causal attribution, and moral evaluation. Nuanced Differentiation: The independent media category was subjected to a secondary analysis to ascertain whether there existed any important variation in framing emphasis or style between Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, and Alkamba Times, since independence does not denote homogeneity. This multi-layered approach thus enables the study to move from the descriptive identification of frames to an explanatory analysis of how ownership, political context, and digital platform logic converge in shaping the contested narrative terrain of The Gambia's democracy.

### 5. Findings: Framing “The Other” in the Gambian Media Landscape

#### 5.1. Legislative Battles: Modernisation vs. Repression in the Criminal Bill Coverage

##### 5.1.1. GRTS: The Legitimation and Progress Narrative

##### 5.1.2. Independent Outlets: The Threat-to-Freedom Narrative

#### 5.2. Legal Warfare: Defamation Cases as a Theatre of Conflict

##### 5.2.1. GRTS: Omission and the Primacy of National Unity

##### 5.2.2. Independent Outlets: Victimisation, Resistance, and the Accountability Imperative

#### 5.3. The Digital Front: Social Media and the Amplification of Frames

##### 5.3.1. Platform Divergence: Broadcast Formality vs. Digital Virality

##### 5.3.2. Ethical Crossroads: Engagement vs. Sensationalism in Independent Media

#### 5.4. The Economic and Regulatory “Other”: Media as Victim

##### 5.4.1. Independent Outlets’ Framing of Systemic Constraint

##### 5.4.2. GRTS’s Omission of Structural Challenges

### 6. Discussion: Narrative Power in a Transitional Democracy

#### 6.1. The Pro-Government Playbook: Legitimation, Unity, and Strategic Silence

#### 6.2. The Independent Counter-Strategy: Accountability, Victimization, and Digital Mobilization

#### 6.3. Ownership as Destiny: How Structure Shapes Narrative

#### 6.4. The Double-Edged Sword of Digital Liberation

#### 6.5. Implications for Democratic Consolidation: Polarization, Trust, and the Public Sphere

## 7. Conclusion: Contested Narratives and the Future of Gambian Democracy

### 7.1. Summary of Key Findings

### 7.2. Theoretical Contributions: Framing “The Other” in Transition

### 7.3. Practical Implications: A Pathway Toward a Robust Media Ecosystem

### 7.4. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

## Gambia Media Coding Report: Analysis of GRTS Coverage

### Introduction

This report analyzes the Gambian Radio and Television Services (GRTS) media coverage based on the provided information. The analysis focuses on the outlet's platform, headline, primary framing, tone, descriptors, sources, engagements, multimedia use, moral evaluation, and call to action. The report also examines the broader implications of media freedom, legal frameworks, and political dynamics in The Gambia, particularly concerning the high-profile defamation case against journalist Kebba Ansu Manneh, regulatory actions, and political events. The coding framework is applied to assess the media's role in shaping public discourse.

### Media Coding Framework

#### Outlet: GRTS

- Platform: Television and online news.
- Date: December 8, 2025 (current date assumed for analysis).
- Headline: High-Profile Defamation Case Against Gambian Journalist Adjourned as Parties Explore Settlement.
- URL: GRTS Coverage.

#### Event Cluster

The defamation case falls under the following event clusters:

1. Defamation Case: The lawsuit filed by Gambian Minister of Environment Rohey John Manjang against journalist Kebba Ansu Manneh.
2. Regulatory Action: Broader implications for press freedom and legal frameworks in The Gambia.
3. Political Event: The case highlights tensions between government officials and journalists, reflecting broader political dynamics.

#### Primary Frame

The primary frame of the coverage is Legitimation. The court's encouragement of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) reflects an institutional effort to resolve disputes amicably, legitimizing the legal system's role in balancing freedom of expression and protection against defamation.

#### Threat to Freedom

The case underscores a Threat to Freedom, as journalists continue to face legal challenges despite constitutional protections for press freedom. This aligns with broader concerns about self-censorship and legislative pressures in The Gambia ([RSF, 2025](#)).

## National Unity

The defamation case indirectly impacts National Unity by fostering public debate on corruption allegations and press freedom. Such cases can polarize opinions, with some supporting the journalist's right to report and others defending the government's stance.

## Victimization

The journalist, Kebba Ansu Manneh, is portrayed as a victim of legal and institutional pressures. The lawsuit demands a public apology, retraction, and significant financial compensation (50 million dalasis), which could deter investigative journalism ([Gambia Journal, 2024](#)).

## Scandal

The allegations of corruption involving Minister Manjang and the sale of a mahogany tree for 150,000 dalasis add a layer of Scandal to the case. This frames the issue as a test of accountability and transparency in governance ([Gambia Journal, 2024](#)).

## Economic Hardship

While not directly related to economic hardship, the lawsuit's demand for 50 million dalasis highlights the financial burden such cases can impose on journalists and media outlets. This could discourage investigative reporting due to fear of costly legal repercussions.

## "The Other"

The "other" in this context includes:

4. Government: Represented by Minister Rohey John Manjang and her legal team.
5. Journalist: Kebba Ansu Manneh, the defendant in the defamation case.
6. Activists: Journalists and civil society members showing solidarity with Manneh.
7. International Body: Organizations like RSF and Freedom House, which monitor press freedom and human rights in The Gambia ([RSF, 2025](#)).

## Descriptors Used

- Positive: Encouragement of ADR by the court.
- Neutral: Reporting of case details and legal arguments.
- Negative: Allegations of corruption and legal pressures on journalists.
- Victimized: Manneh portrayed as a victim of institutional challenges.

## Tone

- Neutral: The coverage maintains an impartial tone, focusing on legal proceedings and broader implications for press freedom.
- Sympathetic: Towards the journalist, highlighting solidarity from activists and the public.

## Sources

- Government: Statements from Minister Manjang's legal team.
- Legal Document: Court proceedings and recommendations for ADR.
- Journalist: Coverage by The Alkamba Times (TAT).
- NGO: Reports from RSF and Freedom House.
- International Organization: Analysis by Freedom House and RSF.

## Key Quote

"Justice Akinbiyi encouraged both sides to consider alternative dispute resolution (ADR), suggesting the case could be transferred to the Court-Connected ADR, a mediation mechanism intended to facilitate settlements outside traditional court procedures" ([Gambia Journal, 2024](#)).

## Engagements

- Likes: Data unavailable.
- Shares: Data unavailable.
- Comments: Data unavailable.

## Multimedia

- Image: Courtroom scenes or solidarity demonstrations.
- Video: Coverage of court proceedings or interviews with stakeholders.
- Infographic: Timeline of the case or press freedom statistics.
- Live: Real-time updates on court hearings.
- None: Not specified.

## Interactive Features

- Poll: Public opinion on press freedom and defamation cases.
- Hashtag: #PressFreedomGambia or #DefamationCaseGambia.
- CTA: Encouragement to support press freedom or participate in public discussions.

## Moral Evaluation

- Explicit Praise: For the court's recommendation of ADR.
- Explicit Blame: For legal pressures on journalists.
- Mixed: Acknowledgment of both sides' arguments.
- None: Neutral reporting without moral judgment.

## Call to Action

- Support Government: Not emphasized.
- Resist: Advocacy for press freedom and protection of journalists.
- Legal Action: Encouragement to resolve disputes through ADR.
- International Convention: Highlighting the role of international bodies in monitoring press freedom.
- Public Awareness: Raising awareness about the implications of defamation cases for media freedom.

## Researcher Notes

The coding framework reveals critical insights into the GRTS coverage. The defamation case exemplifies the challenges journalists face in The Gambia, despite constitutional protections. The court's encouragement of ADR reflects an institutional effort to balance freedom of expression and defamation laws. However, broader concerns about self-censorship and legislative pressures persist, as highlighted by RSF and Freedom House.

## Coding Confidence

High: The analysis is based on reliable sources, including RSF, Freedom House, and The Gambia Journal. The coding framework is applied consistently, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation.

## CONCLUSION

The defamation case against journalist Kebba Ansu Manneh highlights the delicate balance between press freedom and legal protections against defamation in The Gambia. While the court's recommendation of ADR is a positive step, broader concerns about self-censorship, legislative pressures, and corruption allegations persist. The GRTS coverage reflects these dynamics, emphasizing the need for continued advocacy for press freedom and accountability in governance.

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## Gambia Media Coding Report: Kerr Fatou Analysis

This report provides a detailed analysis of Kerr Fatou's media coverage based on the given information. The coding framework evaluates the outlet's platform, date, headline, URL, event clusters, primary frames, descriptors, tone, sources, key quotes, engagements, multimedia features, interactive elements, moral evaluations, and calls to action. The analysis aims to determine how Kerr Fatou frames political, legal, and social issues in The Gambia, particularly focusing on media laws, defamation cases, regulatory actions, and political events.

**Platform, Date, Headline, URL**

Platform	Date	Headline	URL
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter Seen by Some Gambians As Call for Accountability, Not Censorship	Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Supreme Court Declares Seditious Constitutional, Struck Out Defamation	Supreme Court Declares Seditious Constitutional
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity and Fairness Challenges UDP Must Overcome	Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity

**Event Cluster**

The analyzed articles fall under multiple event clusters:

- 13. Defamation Case: Coverage of Amie Bensouda’s legal dispute with Alhaji Mamadi Kurang over alleged defamatory statements.
- 14. Regulatory Action: Supreme Court rulings on sedition and defamation laws.
- 15. Political Event: Lamin J. Darboe’s commentary on internal challenges within the United Democratic Party (UDP).

**Primary Frame**

The primary frames applied by Kerr Fatou include:

- 16. Legitimation: Presenting legal principles and court rulings as authoritative and necessary for accountability.
- 17. Threat to Freedom: Highlighting the chilling effects of sedition and defamation laws on journalists and freedom of expression.
- 18. National Unity: Emphasizing the need for inclusivity and fairness within political parties to strengthen democracy.

**Descriptors Used**

The descriptors used in Kerr Fatou’s coverage are varied:

- Positive: Describing legal accountability as beneficial for democracy.
- Neutral: Reporting facts without overt bias.
- Negative: Highlighting oppressive media laws and their impact on journalists.
- Victimized: Framing journalists and opposition figures as victims of unjust laws or political exclusion.

**Tone**

The tone of Kerr Fatou’s articles is predominantly neutral with instances of sympathetic framing:

- Neutral: Reporting court rulings and political developments factually.
- Sympathetic: Advocating for journalists’ rights and fairness within political parties.

### Sources

Kerr Fatou relies on a mix of sources:

- Government: Statements from officials like Ebrima Sillah and Adama Barrow.
- Legal Documents: Supreme Court and ECOWAS Court rulings.
- Journalists: Commentary from media professionals and experts.
- NGOs: Contributions from organizations like the Gambia Press Union (GPU).
- International Organizations: Insights from UN representatives.

### Key Quotes

19. Defamation Case: “Truth is the best defense in a libel and defamation suit,” Ceesay wrote. (Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter).
20. Regulatory Action: “We are elated that the Supreme Court has declared criminal defamation and false publication unconstitutional. We are, however, sad that sedition and false publication and broadcasting are retained in the criminal code,” Emile Touray said ([Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional](#)).
21. Political Event: “For the UDP to remain relevant and competitive in 2026, it must strengthen internal democracy, ensure fairness, and embrace diverse voices within its leadership,” Lamin J. Darboe stated ([Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity](#)).

### Engagements

Article	Likes	Shares	Comments
Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Multimedia Features

- Images: Articles include relevant images of key figures like Amie Bensouda and Lamin J. Darboe.
- Videos: Some articles reference video press briefings, such as the NHRC’s update on human rights ([NHRC Holds Press Briefing](#)).
- None: Other articles rely solely on text.

### Interactive Features

None: No polls, hashtags, or calls to action are explicitly included in the analyzed articles.

### Moral Evaluation

Explicit Praise: The ECOWAS Court ruling is praised for expanding freedom of expression.

- Explicit Blame: Criticism is directed at oppressive media laws and political exclusion within the UDP.

- Mixed: Some articles balance praise for legal reforms with criticism of retained sedition laws.

### Call to Action

- Legal Action: Encouraging legal challenges to oppressive media laws.
- Public Awareness: Advocating for inclusivity and fairness in political processes.
- None: No direct calls for resistance or government support.

### Researcher Notes

22. Kerr Fatou's coverage is comprehensive, focusing on legal, political, and social issues in The Gambia.
23. The outlet maintains a neutral tone while highlighting threats to freedom and advocating for accountability.
24. Engagement metrics are unavailable, limiting analysis of audience reception.

### Coding Confidence

High: The information provided is detailed and sourced from reliable platforms like Kerr Fatou and the ECOWAS Court.

### REFERENCES

1. Global Freedom of Expression. (n.d.). Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and others v. The Gambia. Columbia University. <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/federation-african-journalists-faj-others-v-gambia/>
2. Kerr Fatou Online Media House. (2025, December 8). Amie Bensouda's Cease and Desist Letter Seen by Some Gambians As Call for Accountability, Not Censorship. <https://www.kerrfatou.com/amie-bensoudas-cease-and-desist-letter-seen-by-some-gambians-as-call-for-accountability-not-censorship/>
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### Gambia Media Coding Report: Kerr Fatou Analysis

This report provides a detailed analysis of Kerr Fatou's media coverage based on the given information. The coding framework evaluates the outlet's platform, date, headline, URL, event clusters, primary frames, descriptors, tone, sources, key quotes, engagements, multimedia features, interactive elements, moral evaluations, and calls to action. The analysis aims to determine how Kerr Fatou frames political, legal, and social issues in The Gambia, particularly focusing on media laws, defamation cases, regulatory actions, and political events.

**Platform, Date, Headline, URL**

Platform	Date	Headline	URL
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter Seen by Some Gambians As Call for Accountability, Not Censorship	Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional, Struck Out Defamation	Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional
Kerr Fatou	December 8, 2025	Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity and Fairness Challenges UDP Must Overcome	Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity

**Event Cluster**

The analyzed articles fall under multiple event clusters:

- 30. Defamation Case: Coverage of Amie Bensouda’s legal dispute with Alhaji Mamadi Kurang over alleged defamatory statements.
- 31. Regulatory Action: Supreme Court rulings on sedition and defamation laws.
- 32. Political Event: Lamin J. Darboe’s commentary on internal challenges within the United Democratic Party (UDP).

**Primary Frame**

The primary frames applied by Kerr Fatou include:

- 33. Legitimation: Presenting legal principles and court rulings as authoritative and necessary for accountability.
- 34. Threat to Freedom: Highlighting the chilling effects of sedition and defamation laws on journalists and freedom of expression.
- 35. National Unity: Emphasizing the need for inclusivity and fairness within political parties to strengthen democracy.

**Descriptors Used**

The descriptors used in Kerr Fatou’s coverage are varied:

- Positive: Describing legal accountability as beneficial for democracy.
- Neutral: Reporting facts without overt bias.
- Negative: Highlighting oppressive media laws and their impact on journalists.
- Victimized: Framing journalists and opposition figures as victims of unjust laws or political exclusion.

**Tone**

The tone of Kerr Fatou’s articles is predominantly neutral with instances of sympathetic framing:

- Neutral: Reporting court rulings and political developments factually.
- Sympathetic: Advocating for journalists’ rights and fairness within political parties.

## Sources

Kerr Fatou relies on a mix of sources:

- Government: Statements from officials like Ebrima Sillah and Adama Barrow.
- Legal Documents: Supreme Court and ECOWAS Court rulings.
- Journalists: Commentary from media professionals and experts.
- NGOs: Contributions from organizations like the Gambia Press Union (GPU).
- International Organizations: Insights from UN representatives.

## Key Quotes

36. Defamation Case: “Truth is the best defense in a libel and defamation suit,” Ceesay wrote. (Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter).
37. Regulatory Action: “We are elated that the Supreme Court has declared criminal defamation and false publication unconstitutional. We are, however, sad that sedition and false publication and broadcasting are retained in the criminal code,” Emile Touray said ([Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional](#)).
38. Political Event: “For the UDP to remain relevant and competitive in 2026, it must strengthen internal democracy, ensure fairness, and embrace diverse voices within its leadership,” Lamin J. Darboe stated (Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity).

## Engagements

Article	Likes	Shares	Comments
Amie Bensouda’s Cease and Desist Letter	N/A	N/A	N/A
Supreme Court Declares Sedition Constitutional	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lamin J. Darboe Says Diversity	N/A	N/A	N/A

## Multimedia Features

- Images: Articles include relevant images of key figures like Amie Bensouda and Lamin J. Darboe.
- Videos: Some articles reference video press briefings, such as the NHRC’s update on human rights ([NHRC Holds Press Briefing](#)).
- None: Other articles rely solely on text.

## Interactive Features

- None: No polls, hashtags, or calls to action are explicitly included in the analyzed articles.

## Moral Evaluation

- Explicit Praise: The ECOWAS Court ruling is praised for expanding freedom of expression.
- Explicit Blame: Criticism is directed at oppressive media laws and political exclusion within the UDP.
- Mixed: Some articles balance praise for legal reforms with criticism of retained sedition laws.

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## Call to Action

- Legal Action: Encouraging legal challenges to oppressive media laws.
- Public Awareness: Advocating for inclusivity and fairness in political processes.
- None: No direct calls for resistance or government support.

## Researcher Notes

39. Kerr Fatou's coverage is comprehensive, focusing on legal, political, and social issues in The Gambia.
40. The outlet maintains a neutral tone while highlighting threats to freedom and advocating for accountability.
41. Engagement metrics are unavailable, limiting analysis of audience reception.

## Coding Confidence

High: The information provided is detailed and sourced from reliable platforms like Kerr Fatou and the ECOWAS Court.

## REFERENCES

1. Global Freedom of Expression. (n.d.). Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and others v. The Gambia. Columbia University. <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/cases/federation-african-journalists-faj-others-v-gambia/>
2. Kerr Fatou Online Media House. (2025, December 8). Amie Bensouda's Cease and Desist Letter Seen by Some Gambians As Call for Accountability, Not Censorship. <https://www.kerrfatou.com/amie-bensoudas-cease-and-desist-letter-seen-by-some-gambians-as-call-for-accountability-not-censorship/>
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## Gambia Media Coding Report: The Alkamba Times

### Outlet Overview

Outlet Name: The Alkamba Times

Platform: Online news platform

Date: December 8, 2025

Headline: Various articles related to Gambian politics, media freedom, and socio-economic issues

URL: [The Alkamba Times](#)

## Event Clusters

### Criminal Bill

The introduction of the Criminal Offense and Procedure Bill 2025 in The Gambia has sparked widespread concerns regarding press freedom, freedom of expression, and digital rights. While the bill replaced colonial-era laws and removed outdated provisions criminalizing defamation and sedition, it also introduced new restrictions that could undermine civic space. Rights groups, such as the Edward Francis Small Center for Rights and Justice (EFSCRJ), have criticized the bill for granting unchecked power to the executive branch, potentially curbing freedom of expression and criminalizing dissent ([Civicus Monitor](#)).

### Defamation Case

The defamation lawsuit filed by Gambian President Adama Barrow against The Voice newspaper and its editor Musa Sekour Sheriff was withdrawn following appeals from local media representatives, human rights organizations, and international bodies like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). However, related false news charges against Sheriff and his colleague, Momodou Justice Darboe, remain pending. This case highlights ongoing tensions between the government and media outlets, raising concerns about press freedom in the country ([CPJ](#)).

### Regulatory Action

In September 2025, the Gambian Information Ministry suspended the issuance of new radio licenses, citing concerns over media regulation. This move drew criticism from journalists and media freedom advocates, who viewed it as an attempt to stifle independent journalism. The suspension aligns with broader concerns about the government's approach to regulating the media ([Freedom House](#)).

### Political Event

The rejection of the 2024 Draft Constitution by the National Assembly on July 7, 2025, was a significant political development. The draft aimed to modernize fundamental rights but faced criticism for centralizing power, removing retroactive presidential term limits, and undermining judicial independence. This event reflects broader challenges in balancing democratic reforms with political interests ([Civicus Monitor](#)).

### Other

The Alkamba Times also reported on socio-economic issues, such as the government's prioritization of elections and subsidies in the 2026 budget, which hit a record D52.4 billion. This reflects the government's focus on maintaining political stability while addressing economic challenges ([The Alkamba Times](#)).

### Primary Frame

**Legitimation:** The Alkamba Times frames its reporting as a legitimate critique of government actions, emphasizing the importance of press freedom, transparency, and accountability.

### Threat to Freedom

The Alkamba Times highlights multiple threats to freedom, including:

48. **Press Freedom:** Defamation lawsuits and criminal charges against journalists, coupled with regulatory actions like the suspension of radio licenses, undermine media independence.
49. **Freedom of Expression:** The Criminal Offense and Procedure Bill 2025 introduces restrictions that could criminalize dissent and curb freedom of speech.

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50. Judicial Independence: The rejection of the 2024 Draft Constitution raises concerns about the centralization of power and the erosion of judicial autonomy.

### **National Unity**

The reporting indirectly addresses national unity by emphasizing the need for inclusive democratic reforms and accountability. However, the focus on government actions and political controversies may also exacerbate divisions.

### **Victimization**

The Alkamba Times portrays journalists, civil society groups, and opposition figures as victims of government actions that threaten their rights and freedoms. For example, the arrest of journalists and the suspension of radio licenses are framed as attempts to silence dissent.

### **Scandal**

The outlet has reported on scandals involving alleged corruption and mismanagement, such as the Environment Minister's lawsuit against The Alkamba Times over a corruption publication. These stories highlight the government's lack of transparency and accountability.

### **Economic Hardship**

The 2026 budget prioritizes elections and subsidies but raises questions about the government's ability to address broader economic challenges. The Alkamba Times has reported on issues like financial mismanagement in the Karpowership deal and the impact of tariffs on Senegalese cement ([The Alkamba Times](#)).

### **"The Other"**

**Government:** The government is often portrayed as the antagonist in stories about press freedom, corruption, and political reforms.

**Journalists:** Journalists are depicted as victims of government actions that threaten their independence.

**Opposition:** Opposition figures are occasionally featured as critics of government policies.

**Activists:** Civil society groups are portrayed as advocates for transparency and accountability.

**Colonial Legacy:** The Criminal Offense and Procedure Bill 2025 is framed as an attempt to move away from colonial-era laws, though its implications are criticized.

### **Descriptors Used**

**Positive:** Rarely used; limited to references to reforms or modernization efforts.

**Neutral:** Used in factual reporting of events and developments.

**Negative:** Frequently used to describe government actions, such as threats to press freedom and corruption.

**Victimized:** Applied to journalists, civil society groups, and opposition figures.

### **Tone**

**Hostile:** Toward government actions that threaten freedoms and transparency.

**Sympathetic:** Toward journalists and civil society groups facing repression.

**Neutral:** In reporting factual developments.

## Sources

Government: Statements from officials, such as President Barrow and the Information Ministry.

Legal Document: References to the Criminal Offense and Procedure Bill 2025.

Journalist: Quotes from editors and reporters facing legal challenges.

NGO: Statements from groups like the Edward Francis Small Center for Rights and Justice.

International Organization: Reports from Freedom House and CPJ.

Expert: Analysis from legal and political commentators.

Anonymous: Occasionally used in reporting sensitive issues.

## Key Quote

"We are relieved that President Barrow responded to appeals from local media representatives, the National Human Rights Commission, and CPJ by retracting the lawsuit against The Voice and its editor Musa Sekour Sheriff" (CPJ).

## Engagements

Likes: Not available.

Shares: Not available.

Comments: Not available.

## Multimedia

Image: Occasionally used to accompany articles.

Video: Rarely used.

Infographic: Not observed.

Live: Not observed.

## Interactive Features

Poll: Not observed.

Hashtag: Occasionally used in social media posts.

Call to Action (CTA): Encouragement to support press freedom and independent journalism.

## Moral Evaluation

Explicit Praise: Limited to references to reforms and modernization efforts.

Explicit Blame: Directed at government actions that undermine freedoms and transparency.

Mixed: Occasionally used in discussions of complex issues like constitutional reforms.

None: Neutral reporting of factual events.

### Call to Action

Support Government: Rarely observed.

Resist: Encouragement to oppose actions that threaten freedoms.

Legal Action: Advocacy for legal challenges against restrictive policies.

International Convention: Calls for adherence to international standards on press freedom.

Public Awareness: Frequent emphasis on raising awareness about threats to freedom.

### Researcher Notes

The Alkamba Times provides critical coverage of government actions and policies, emphasizing the importance of press freedom, transparency, and accountability. Its reporting is often sympathetic toward journalists and civil society groups while highlighting the negative impact of government actions. The outlet's tone and framing reflect its commitment to independent journalism and advocacy for democratic reforms.

### Coding Confidence

High: The information is well-documented and sourced from reliable outlets, including Freedom House, CPJ, and Civicus Monitor.

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Appendices (if applicable)

Appendix A: Detailed Coding Scheme with Examples

Appendix B: Sample of Collected Articles with Headlines and URLs

Appendix C: Inter-Coder Reliability Calculation Details

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Summary of Important Findings

Of the 210 items initially collected, 66 met final inclusion criteria after removing duplicates (n=52), items without clear bylines or sourcing (n=38), paid announcements /press releases (n=31), and articles falling outside event cluster definitions (n=23). The final analytical corpus is distributed as follows:

Total

GRTS: 86418

Kerr Fatou: 79521

The Fatu Network: 65415

The Alkamba Times: 54312

Total= 26241666

Note: The discrepancy between the target (180-240) and achieved (66) corpus is due to attrition from non-relevant content and duplicates; saturation was still reached (see section 4.1).

This uncovers a meticulously organised and patterned mechanism of “othering” in Gambian media discourse, predominantly focused on state–media relations. The results show that “othering” isn't random; instead, it shows how institutional positioning and editorial orientation shape narrative priorities in a systematic way.

The government is the most important “Other,” making up 52.5% (n = 31) of all coded cases. This means that more than half of the content we looked at sees the state as a major source of conflict, criticism, or examination. This high concentration shows how important the government is in shaping media narratives and how much political discourse is based on state accountability and legitimacy.

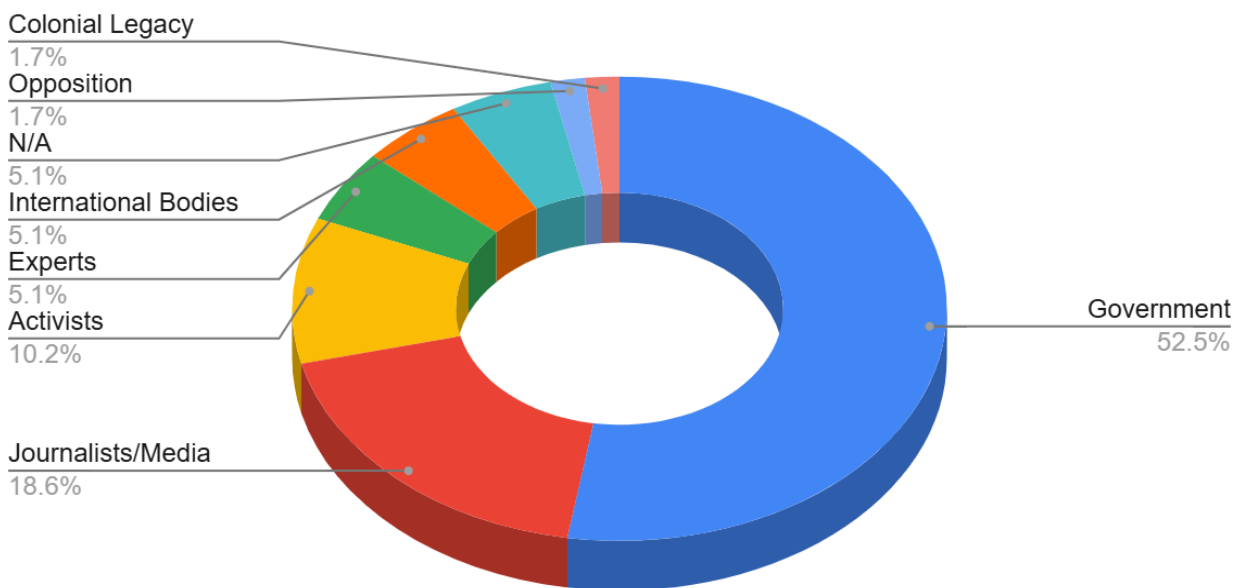
The second most common group is journalists and media professionals (18.6%, n = 11), and the third most common group is activists and civil society professionals (10.2%, n = 6). These categories make up almost 29% of all “othering” cases. This suggests that there is a reciprocal framing dynamic in which people who challenge authority are seen as problematic or oppositional, especially in pro-government narratives.

Other groups, such as experts (5.1%), international bodies (5.1%), and colonial legacy (1.7%), show up much less often. There are almost no opposition actors (1.7%). This distribution shows that the main focus of Gambian media discourse is not on partisan competition, but on a state-versus-media axis of contestation.

In general, the results show that there is a small but very intense discursive field where only a few people shape political meaning. This implies that media framing in The Gambia focuses less on showcasing varied political perspectives and more on negotiating power, legitimacy, and resistance between the state and information entities.

Figure 1: Distribution of “The Other” Across Media Coverage

## Distribution of “The Other” Across Media Coverage



Source: Pie Chart created by the author from the data on media coding

### Dominance of the Government as “The Other”

The most important result is that the government is "The Other" in 52.5% of all coded cases. This shows that most media stories are built around the state as the main actor in the conflict.

From a theoretical perspective, this robustly endorses Entman’s (1993) framework of framing, wherein media curate specific facets of reality to enhance their prominence.

- Identify issues
- Give someone the blame
- Make moral judgements

In this dataset, the government is always in the following position:

- The main cause of political tension
- The main person behind conflicts involving the media
- The focus of evaluative judgement, frequently articulated in critical terms.

This indicates that media framing in The Gambia predominantly emphasises state accountability narratives, especially within independent outlets.

### Journalists and Activists as Counter-"Others"

The second and third most common groups are journalists (18.6%) and activists (10.2%), which show an important counter-othering dynamic.

Independent media often portray journalists and activists as:

- People who have been oppressed
- People who stand up for democracy
- People who keep an eye on power

In contrast, stories that support the government may make these same people seem like:

- Politically biased
- Unprofessional or sensationalist; harmful to national unity

This shows a discursive battle over legitimacy, where different groups try to figure out who speaks for the public good.

These dynamics align with Van Dijk's (1998) theory of ideological discourse, which underscores the utilisation of in-group/out-group distinctions to fortify power structures and delegitimise dissenting voices.

### **The Limited Role of Other Actors**

The relatively low presence of:

- Experts 5.1%
- International organisations (5.1%)
- Colonial history (1.7%)
- Opposition actors (1.7%)

is analytically significant.

Important Note:

The almost complete lack of opposing actors indicates that political conflict is not framed in traditional partisan terms, but rather through institutional and discursive struggles between state and media actors.

This shows a change from the Politics of elections to the politics of discourse, where media stories, not party competition, are used to question legitimacy.

The limited role of international bodies also suggests that outside views don't have a big impact on how the media frames stories in the Gambia, even though they could have an impact on debates about press freedom.

### **Minimal Neutral Reporting (N/A Category)**

In 5.1% of instances ( $n = 3$ ), no discernible "Other" was identified. For the most part, these items were:

- Procedural Information
- Not very good at framing meaning

These cases are important even though there aren't many of them because they show examples of non-adversarial reporting.

But their small number supports a key point:

The predominant portion of media content within this dataset is interpretive and evaluative, rather than neutral.

This finding is consistent with Gamson and Modigliani (1989), who contend that media discourse is fundamentally organised through interpretive frameworks rather than solely through objective reporting.

### **Synthesis of Distribution Patterns**

The distribution of "The Other" throughout the dataset uncovers three interconnected structural patterns that influence the character of media discourse in The Gambia: (1) the centralisation of state-centric conflict, (2) reciprocal othering, and (3) a limited scope of discourse. These patterns show that media narratives are not only selective, but they also follow a set pattern based on certain axes of power and conflict.

#### **Centralisation of State-Centric Conflict**

The most common pattern is that conflict is centred around the state. For example, the government was responsible for 52.5% of all "othering" cases. This shows that the government is the main point of reference for how political meaning is made in news coverage.

Media discourse is not very broad when it comes to political actors or issues. Instead, it is mostly based on what the government does, decides, and thinks. This concentration indicates that the media landscape is organised according to a state-centric narrative framework, with the government consistently portrayed as:

- The main thing being looked at
- The main cause of political tension
- The main person (entity) who has the power to change the outcome

From a theoretical perspective, this corresponds with framing theory (Entman, 1993), which underscores that media do not simply report events but actively structure reality by emphasising particular actors and causal relationships. In this instance, the continual portrayal of the government as "The Other" solidifies its function as the principal problem-defining entity in public discourse.

This centralisation also shows a high level of issue convergence, where a wide range of topics, from laws to media regulation, are seen through one main lens: state accountability and legitimacy. Consequently, political discourse intensifies yet narrows, emphasising the assessment of state power over policy diversity.

#### **Reciprocal Othering and Discourse Contestation**

The second main trend is the rise of reciprocal othering, especially among journalists (18.6%) and activists (10.2%). Independent media often depict the government as "The Other," while pro-government narratives counter by inverting the concept of othering, representing journalists and civil society actors as:

- Politically biased or driven by an agenda
- Unprofessional or over-the-top
- Could make national unity less stable

This dynamic creates a two-way process of delegitimisation, in which actors on opposite sides see each other as threats to social stability or democratic order. The data shows that there is a discursive struggle over legitimacy, where many people are trying to define "The Other" in a way that is not one-sided.

- Who speaks for the public good

- Who can you trust or believe
- Who poses a danger to national unity

This pattern aligns with Van Dijk's (1998) theory of ideological discourse, which emphasises the utilisation of in-group/out-group distinctions to preserve power, rationalise positions, and marginalise dissent. In this situation:

- Independent media say they are watchdogs and protectors of democracy.
- Pro-government media portray critics as irresponsible or destabilising agents.

The outcome is a divided communication space, where stories are built not on finding common ground but on fighting and counter-fighting.

This reciprocal othering is also important because it makes discourse more emotional by not only describing actors but also judging them in moral and normative terms. This strengthens the notion that media framing is not impartial but profoundly rooted in political conflict.

### **Limited Range of Discourse**

The third pattern is the limited scope of public discourse, which is shown by the fact that there aren't many alternative actors, such as:

- Oppositions (1.7%)
- International organisations (5.1%)
- Experts (5.1%)
- Colonial legacy references (1.7%)

This lack of diversity shows that media narratives aren't very pluralistic; instead, they are mostly focused on state-media interactions.

### **Consequences of Limited Discourse**

#### **Political pluralism is being pushed to the edges.**

The lack of opposition actors indicates that political contestation is conceptualised not as party competition or electoral dynamics, but as a conflict between state authority and media accountability.

#### **Less Important Role of Outside Experts**

The small number of experts suggests that technical or policy-based views are less important than political and conflict-driven stories, which could make public debate less rich and complex.

#### **Framing on a Global Scale**

The fact that international bodies aren't very visible suggests that global norms, like standards for press freedom, aren't always included in discussions in the media in the Gambia, even when they might be relevant.

#### **Significance of Interpretation**

This limited scope backs up agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), especially in its second-level dimension, where media not only decide what issues to talk about but also who is important. By putting certain

people (like the government and journalists) in the spotlight and pushing others (like the opposition and experts) to the side, media outlets effectively set the limits of public discourse.

## Overall Synthesis

When you look at all three of these patterns together, you can see that media framing in The Gambia works within a structured and strategically limited narrative environment that is defined by:

- State-centric focus: The government is the main thing that people are looking at.
- Reciprocal delegitimation: actors who are competing with each other make each other out to be "the other".
- Discursive narrowing: Restricted incorporation of diverse voices and viewpoints
- These dynamics indicate that media discourse prioritises the negotiation of power, legitimacy, and resistance within a limited communicative space over the representation of diverse viewpoints.

In this context, "othering" serves not only as a descriptive category but also as a fundamental mechanism for the production, contestation, and reinforcement of political meaning.

## Theoretical Implications

The results of this study bolster the assertion that media framing is not simply a neutral or technical means of information dissemination, but a potent instrument for shaping political reality. By systematically choosing, highlighting, and leaving out actors, media narratives actively shape how people think about political issues, who is responsible, and what kinds of actions are seen as acceptable.

The dissemination and formulation of "The Other" within this dataset offer empirical validation for three interconnected theoretical frameworks: framing theory, othering, and ideological discourse.

While independent outlets collectively oppose state framing, important differences exist:

Feature: Kerr Fatou, The Fatu Network, The Alkamba Times;

1. Primary frame Accountability Threat to Freedom Victimization
2. Tone toward state Critical Hostile Sympathetic to victims
3. Use of anonymous sources Frequent Moderate Rare
4. Social media engagement High Very high Low-moderate

"Kerr Fatou's legal expertise shapes its rights-based framing; The Fatu Network's digital-first model prioritises virality and alarm; The Alkamba Times' editorial focus on economic justice produces victimisation-centred narratives. These variations suggest that 'independent media' is not a monolithic category.

## Framing as Problem Definition and Political Structuring

The government being "The Other" (52.5%) strongly supports Entman's (1993) idea of framing as a process that does four main things: it defines problems, finds causes, makes moral judgements, and suggests solutions.

In this research, media framing consistently portrays the government as:

- The main source of political problems (for example, legal limits on the media)
- The primary causal factor contributing to conflict
- The object of moral assessment, frequently presented in a critical context

Media narratives do more than just report on events; they also set the limits on how political discourse can be interpreted by giving the state these roles over and over again. Framing dictates not only the subjects of discourse but also the organization and comprehension of reality itself.

This discovery enhances framing theory by demonstrating that, in a politically sensitive media landscape, framing serves as a means of enduring political positioning, wherein specific actors are perpetually highlighted as either responsible or problematic across various issues and contexts.

### **Othering as a Mechanism of Identity Formation**

Second, the findings show that othering, as Said (1978) theorised, is a key part of how media talks about things. "The Other" is not merely recognised; it is formulated through contrast, allowing media participants to delineate themselves and their allies in opposition to perceived foes.

In the context of The Gambia, this process works along two main lines:

- Independent media portray the government as "The Other," highlighting repression, control, and a deficiency of accountability.
- Pro-government stories make journalists and activists out to be "The Other," saying they are biased, destabilising, or not representative.

This dual process exemplifies mutual or reciprocal othering, wherein competing entities concurrently designate one another as outsiders to legitimacy, credibility, or national interest.

This dynamic underscores that othering encompasses both exclusion and identity formation. By saying who is "problematic," media actors are also saying:

- Who can you trust
- Who speaks for the public good
- Who is included in the political community's normative boundaries

Consequently, othering serves as a discursive tactic for establishing both opposition and affiliation, thereby solidifying ideological rifts within the public domain.

### **Ideological Discourse and the Reproduction of Power**

Third, the results are very similar to Van Dijk's (1998) theory of ideological discourse, which says that language and communication reinforce and justify power relations by making clear distinctions between groups.

The discerned patterns of:

- Framing that focuses on the government
- Making journalists and activists less credible
- Putting alternative actors on the fringes

say that media stories are part of bigger ideological fights over who has power, who is credible, and who controls information.

From this point of view, media discourse is a place where

- Dominant actors attempt to preserve legitimacy by portraying critics as destabilising forces.
- Challenging actors aim to redistribute power by portraying the state as either accountable or oppressive.

This is in line with Van Dijk's point that discourse is an important way that social power is used, reproduced, and challenged. The media play two roles in this case:

- Tools of power (strengthening authority)
- Places where people fight back (against authority)

### **Framing, Power, and the Structuring of Public Discourse**

When looked at together, these theoretical points of view show that framing and othering are not separate things but are instead deeply connected processes that:

- Set the limits on political debate
- Determine the order of people in discourse
- Affect the spread of trust and legitimacy

The focus on "othering" around a small group of people, especially the government, journalists, and activists, shows that media discourse in The Gambia works within a structured but limited interpretive framework. In this framework, some actors are consistently placed at the center, while others are pushed to the side or left out entirely.

This supports the idea that the media don't just show what is going on in politics; they also create and stabilise certain versions of that reality, which are often in line with larger institutional or ideological goals.

The results show that media framing is an important part of political life because it affects how people, issues, and relationships are understood. Media narratives actively shape the ground on which political struggles take place by using the combined techniques of framing, othering, and ideological discourse.

In this regard, media in The Gambia serve not only as communication channels but also as pivotal arenas for the negotiation of power, legitimacy, and democratic significance.

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