

AFTERMATH OF THE SENEGALESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2024 AND THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY

29.10. 2024 Richard Klauber¹

Annotation

On March 24, 2024, elections took place in one of the most stable democracies on the African continent to date. In these elections, the candidate of the hegemonic party was defeated (with 36 % of the vote), ending its dominance since 2012. Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the new president, won in the first round, as is customary in Senegal, with 54 % of the vote. Diomaye Faye is the right-hand man of opposition politician Ousmane Sonko, who was appointed prime minister of the country shortly after his release from prison. This ended the spiral of violence unleashed by the ruling United in Hope (BBY) party, which plunged the country into a socio-economic crisis, inflation, and violent protests.

The main candidate was Amadou Ba, a recently elected prime minister who also served as finance and foreign minister and was supposed to win the elections. But the election was won by Diomaye Faye, of the Patriots of Senegal (PASTEF) party, against which the regime of former President Macky Sall had recently taken repressive measures. Diomaye Faye was released from prison (where he was released after a show trial) just ten days before the election. Nobody knew Faye until he emerged as Sonko's ally, his rapid rise to power came as a shock to everyone.

Introduction – Political Situation and Electoral System of Presidential Elections

Senegal's elections were held under the pressure of the crisis, the instability of the protests, the repression, and the arrest of opposition politicians. The ruling United in Hope (BBY) party, led by President Macky Sall, promised continued stability in the country, which the opposition said they had eroded. As a president with sweeping powers over parliament tried to delay the presidential election to stop the opposition and defuse the unrest. However, the opposite happened, the Constitutional Council overruled the president, and the elections were finally

held in March of this year instead of the planned December.

The ruling party used the armed forces to quell unrest, the authorities eliminated individual candidates from the election, and there was also talk that Macky Sall, violating the constitution, would run for a third term in the presidency. Democracy in one of the most stable countries in Africa was under threat. Under the pressure of the protesters, whom he first tried to resist through the police and the authorities, Macky Sall succumbed and released the opposition Sonko, who was not allowed to participate in the elections. Hundreds of people were arrested during these protests and around 60 died in clashes with the police. Bassirou Diomaye Faye ran for Sonko, he was perceived as a secondary and less dangerous politician, but he defeated the election favorite Amadou Ba.


Presidential elections are conducted by a two-round majority system.ⁱⁱ

Presidential Candidates Who had the Potential to win the Election

The favorite in the presidential election was the candidate for the party of the former president, Macky Sall's BBY, Amadou Ba. Amadou Ba is a 62-year-old former foreign and economy minister who was appointed by President Macky Sall in September 2022 to the post of prime minister he held until recently.

Before his election by the BBY party at the National Assembly, it became clear that the BBY party was internally divided into rival factions. Certainly, Ba did not seek the presidency, unlike his opponents, but he was nevertheless chosen by the current president as his successor, most likely under party pressure.

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Macky Sall, the former president, endorsed Amadou Ba as his successor, and he enjoyed the most support before Diyoume Faye's release from prison. Macky Sall has been president since 2012 (then elected for seven years) and was re-elected in 2019. There has been speculation that he will run again this time, sparked by President Sall's constitutional reform to renew his mandate from 2016 when he could run more than twice. However, Sall decided not to run.ⁱⁱⁱ

While outgoing President Macky Sall and his candidate for the ruling coalition Ba favored liberalization policies, opposition leader Sonko and his chosen candidate Faye plan to introduce a new currency and renegotiate contracts with the country's oil and gas operators. This was also a key choice in the energy sector, as Senegal will start extracting liquefied natural gas (LNG) this year. Most of it will go to Europe, which is trying to phase out Russian gas - and that country will get an unprecedented opportunity.^{iv}

Amadou Bao's biggest rival was supposed to be Idrissa Seck. Idrissa Seck was a 64-year-old veteran politician, probably the most experienced of all presidential candidates. Seck became prime minister from 2002 to 2004 for the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) under former President Abdoulaye Wade.

He was expelled on embezzlement charges and spent several months in prison before his case was dismissed. In 2006, he founded his party called Rewmi. In 2007, he ran for the first time in the presidential election against Wade, finishing second. He ran again in 2012, but this time he did not make it to the second round against Macky Sall.

Seck did not give up his bid for the presidency, so in 2019 he ran again against Macky Sall, this time finishing second with 21 % of the vote. After that, his Rewmi party joined with BBY to form a coalition with them. From November 2020 to April 2023, he served as President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council.

A former prominent ally of Macky Sall was Boun Abdallah Dionne. Dionne is a 64-year-old presidential

candidate who announced his candidacy after Ba. Dionne is his rival within the BBY party. Dionne was also an experienced politician, having supported Macky Sall before he became president. During Sall's reign, he became chief of staff in the president's office, then prime minister from 2014 to 2019.^v

His rivalry with Ba began with a rift with Macky Sall, who abolished the post of prime minister in 2019, thereby depriving Dionne of his mandate. In 2022, Sall restored the position of prime minister and replaced him with Baa. Dionne responded by running for president, however, Dionne died shortly after the election of an unspecified illness.^{vi}

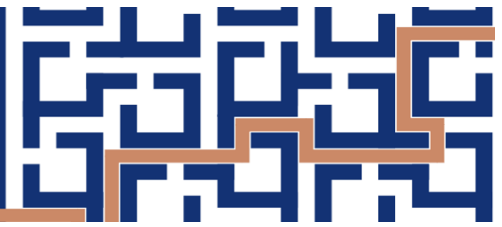
The current position of the relevant parties in parliament and the consequences of the decline of United in Hope (BBY)

Current President Macky Sall's ruling party BBY, suffered a significant setback in the last election in July 2022, winning 43 fewer seats. With 82 members of the 165-member unicameral parliament, BBY had to convince at least one more party.

The opposition parties Liberate the People (Yewwi Askane Wi – YAW) and Wallu Senegal won a combined 80 seats. For the first time in the country's history, cohabitation (the president will be in opposition to the government) was threatened until BBY succeeded in coalition forming with smaller parties.

Lawmaker Pape Diop of the Bokk Gis Gis Liggeey coalition, who won one of the three remaining seats, said he would join forces with the BBY to prevent a legislative crisis. President Macky Sall and his BBY party retained their majority, but the election results showed that his party was rapidly losing popularity.^{vii}

There are a lot of factors that are constantly weakening the BBY side and playing into Sonko's hands. The first important factor that mobilizes young voters is



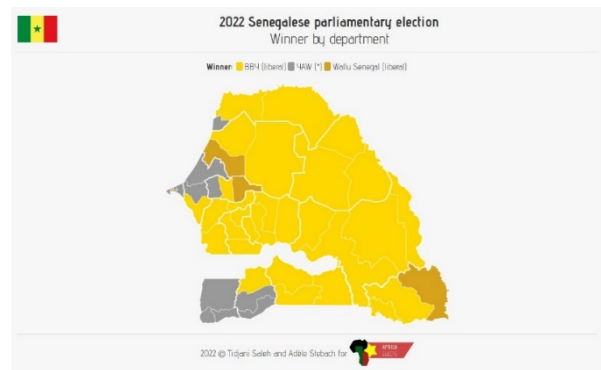
unemployment. In 2019, the share of young Senegalese without employment, education or training was already 35 %, and this crisis has been significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.^{viii}

The second factor is inflation, which in a country where about a third of the population lives in poverty, the risk of radicalization of the population out of necessity, the war in Ukraine, and the appreciation of the US dollar have triggered a second wave of inflation, which has undermined confidence in the current government. Almost three-quarters of Senegalese believe that the government has mishandled the situation, according to a 2022 survey by the Afrobarometer agency, this corresponds to the support of Amadou Ba, who won about a third of the remaining satisfied Senegalese.^{ix}

The third and last important issue is oil and gas, as commodities that should start to be extracted this year. Sonko wants to maximize revenues by negotiating a new energy contract, probably not with France. Whereas Bao's campaign slogan was "Prosperity Shared."^x

There was another party in Parliament that tried to discredit President Macky Sall and his presidency. That party was the PASTEF party, whose leader was the newly appointed Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko. The party was dissolved on July 31, 2023, due to repeated protests against the government and president and criticism of their human rights violations and the Senegalese Constitution.^{xi}

However, PASTEF is still popular among young Senegalese, winning the most votes in the capital Dakar, and in the southern, densely populated region of Casamance. Young Senegalese want change from the ruling party for more than 20 years. They attend Faye and Sonko's campaign events and participate in protests in large numbers.^{xii}



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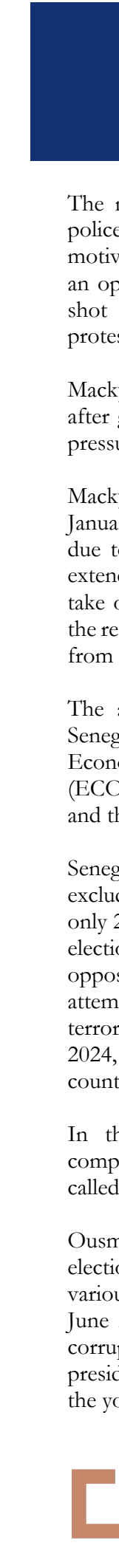
Repression of opposition and dissent

Until recently, Senegal was considered a stable democratic country compared to other Sahel states. That all changed after the mass protests of March 2021 that preceded the parliamentary elections. The authorities decided to suppress the protests by force, using the armed forces, who detained over 1,000 political repeat offenders and dissidents. The police raid took place in mid-2022 just before the elections and was aimed at the media to influence events in favour of the ruling BBY party. However, the party still lost its absolute majority in parliament in the elections.

According to Human Rights Watch, torture of civilians during interrogations by the armed forces, and shootings in crowds have also been recorded, resulting in dozens of deaths since March 2021 before the presidential election.

In addition, lawyers who have defended members of the opposition in trials complained of disrespect for the rights of convicts, interrogations in custody, fabricated charges, and lack of evidence to substantiate the accusations.

Dozens of journalists were arrested without charge, verbally threatened, and physically assaulted. Media outlets have been suspended, and authorities have imposed restrictions on mobile internet and social media.^{xiv}



The murder of popular rapper Baba Khan by the police was also considered by many to be politically motivated. It took place during a 2023 protest when an opponent of Macky Sall, rapper Baba Khan, was shot dead without directly participating in the protest.^{xv}

Macky Sall released around 300 political prisoners after growing protests. He made this decision under pressure from the population.

Macky Sall first moved the presidential election from January to June but was later forced to move it to April due to opposition condemnations as Sall sought to extend his mandate. Sall called in the military police to take out members of parliament who were blocking the resolution. After this move, protests and migration from the country increased.

The actions of the government and president of Senegal were opposed by the US Department of State, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, the African Union, and the UK Department of Foreign Affairs.^{xvi}

Senegal's Constitutional Council has decided to exclude most of the presidential candidates. Of the 79, only 20 were allowed to participate in the presidential election. Among them was Ousmane Sonko, an opposition leader who had been imprisoned for an attempted coup, calls for an uprising, collusion with terrorist groups, and other charges. As of April 4, 2024, the released Ousmane Sonko became the country's prime minister.^{xvii}

In the end, however, Macky Sall relented and complied with the protesters, and under pressure called the elections for March 24.

Ousmane Sonko came third in the 2019 presidential election, did not concede defeat, and began to take various actions, according to the authorities, illegal. In June 2023, he was arrested and convicted of youth corruption and was barred from running in the presidential election. But it has broad support among the young population, which makes up

43 % of the population, and many other allies in the ranks of the opposition.^{xviii}

Ousmane Sonko – revolutionary and dissident fighting against Macky Sall's ruling, hegemonic party

Senegal's new prime minister, Ousmane Sonko, is a predatory politician who mobilized Senegalese's youth to enable the election of his staunchest protégé, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, as president, and who now, as expected, has secured the top job in return.


A fierce opponent of former President Macky Sall, 49-year-old Sonko was barred from running in the March 24 presidential election because of a defamation conviction. He was released from prison just before the presidential election. Shortly after being elected, Sonko formed a government with 25 ministers and 5 junior ministers.^{xix}

Both Faye and Sonko have vowed to abandon the African Financial Community (CFA's) franc, which is pegged to the euro, saying that Senegal will first try to reform the West African monetary union in cooperation with its seven other members.

Ousmane Sonko is seen as a successful revolutionary and dissident against the hegemonic BBY party, which did not shy away from violating the principles of the rule of law by fabricated trials and even shooting into crowds.

As the former mayor of Ziguinchor, the capital of Senegal's troubled southern region of Casamance (where separatist tendencies also reign). Sonko has gained popularity as a politician opposed to a system willing to challenge Sall's relationship with the former colonial power, France, and foreign companies operating in the mining industry.^{xx}

Sonko is a devout Muslim who supports tougher laws against homosexuality in Senegal, where more than 90 % of the population is Muslim. Homosexual acts are already punishable by imprisonment.



In May 2023, he drew criticism from women's groups and dozens of celebrities for making humiliating comments against an alleged victim during his rape trial, which they said showed him unfit for higher office.

A popular but controversial politician who supported Faye in the election, he made a name for himself by criticizing elites and promising to help Senegal's unemployed youth. It has many critics, but many say that it speaks the truth to power.

Sonko rose to fame in 2016 after he was removed from his position as a tax inspector for denouncing the opacity of some public contracts and the privileges of the political class. While running in the 2019 presidential election he finished third, thanks to his advocacy of traditional and religious values.

During the campaign, we saw how the winner of the presidential election, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, really became famous. Their motto, as well as that of the banned political party PASTEF, is "Sonko is Diomaye and Diomaye is Sonko", just to reassure the population that behind this candidate, who is not very well known, is the controversial but popular opposition figure Ousmane Sonko.^{xxi,xxii}

The Influence of External Actors and the Importance of the Presidential Election for the Security of the Country

In recent years, West Africa has seen coups in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Chad (April 2021), Guinea (September 2021) and Burkina Faso (January and September 2022), as well as Niger (July 2023). The security situation in the region is torn by separatist tendencies (e.g. Tuareg), ethnic conflicts (e.g. the conflict between the Bambara and the Fulanis), and civil wars.

The security system in Senegal was a model example of a stable state for West African countries. As early as 2003, before Macky Sall took office, an anti-terrorist cell was established in the Senegalese armed forces. In addition to this active counter-terrorism

component, the government has developed a preventive domestic component where local authorities raise awareness of terrorism in villages. Residents are urged to report "abnormal acts" or the suspicious presence of newly arrived strangers.

Under Macky Salle, the Inter-Ministerial Intervention and Coordination Framework for Counterterrorism Operations was created to supervise terrorist organizations abroad. Senegal has also sent troops to Mali as part of the so-called Peace Conference. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Senegal supported this UN mission, with the highest number of police officers and the third largest number of soldiers and lasted from April 2013 to December 2023.^{xxiii}

In Senegal, most of the population is Muslim and identifies with the four main Sufi brotherhoods: the Quadrya, Tidjanya, Mouridya, and Layeniyya, which preach Islam but express opposition to terrorism because it has no spiritual support. These Muslim brotherhoods follow Sufi Islam, which contradicts Wahhabism and Salafism, which is followed by terrorist organizations in neighboring Mali. The Cadre unitaire de l'Islam au Sénégal (Cudis) brings together the main Muslim brotherhoods and associations in the country.^{xxiv}

The closest threat to Senegal is the terrorist organization Katibat Serma, which operates in western Mali and so far, only smuggles raw materials and livestock across the Senegalese border. Senegal's external security played a key role in the presidential election, as it has always been a strong argument by Macky Sall, who has deterred other terrorist organizations from trying to breach Senegal's borders through the 2016 reforms and the deployment of armed forces to Mali.^{xxv}

The Katibat Serma group is led by Iyad ag Ghaly, a Malian jihadist who was formerly the leader of Ansar Dine (terrorist organization). In 2019, 4.2 million individuals were displaced from their homes in the countries of the Sahel region, 1,000,000 more than before this year.

This was caused by the merger of the extremist group with several al-Qaeda groups, such as the terrorist group Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Murabitoon, and the liberation Macina Front (MIF), also known as Katibat Macina. This merger took place in March 2017.

A year later, the group began to infiltrate Burkina Faso and Niger from Mali. Senegal was also a target of Katib Serma, but the terrorist organization failed to infiltrate the state of Senegal more deeply.^{xxvi}

With the resignation of Macky Sall, there is also a risk that a branch of al-Qaeda called Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, also known as JNIM, may infiltrate the north of the country, without a government, with massive protests and thus busy armed forces and the state of Senegal is likely to be the next victim of terror in the region.^{xxvii}

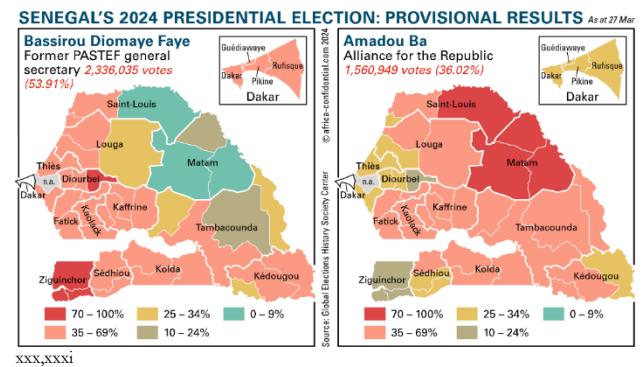
Although Sonko and Fay declared their dissociation from France in their pre-election speeches and appearances, however, when French representatives expressed their willingness to negotiate with the winner of the election, regardless of which party he was from, it seems that Sonko played on the voices of young people who believe in Pan-Africanism.^{xxviii,xxix}

Ethno-religious division of Senegal and its impact on the Presidential Elections

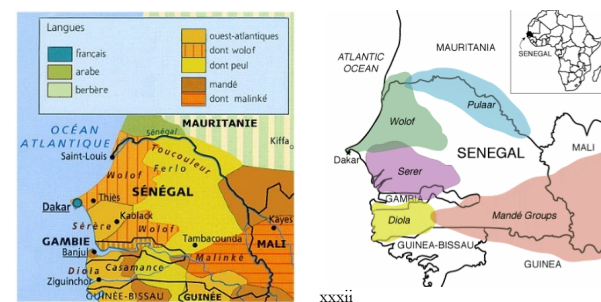
Faye's victory was due to several important factors. Besides the above-mentioned support of Sonko and the economic crisis, other very important factors are demographic and national factors. Ethnic Wolofs, who make up most of the population (almost 40%), voted for Faye, also because the Wolofs are mostly employed in industry, which employs 49% of the population and has been hit hardest by the economic crisis.

The Wolof people live in the west of the country, which is densely populated, along with the third largest ethnic group, the Serera. The Serer make up 16% of the population, more of whom also work in industry, but south of Dakar, where this ethnic group

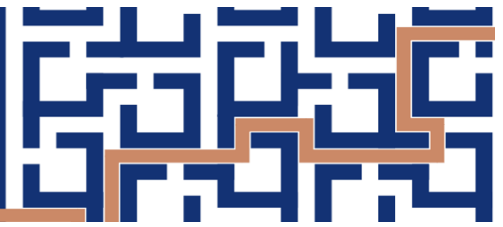
lives, there are also the agricultural areas of Thiés, Fatick, and Diourbel. In the south of Senegal, in the country's second most populous city, Ziguinchor, there is the Diolian ethnic group, which Sonko won during the 2019 presidential election when his anti-system policies won over this ethnic group, which at the time had separatist tendencies to secede the Casamance region from the rest of Senegal.



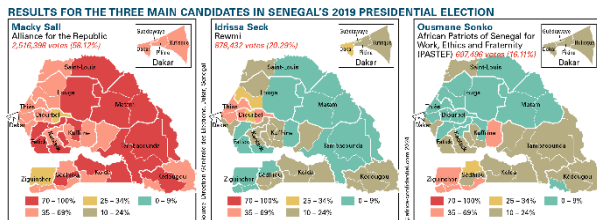
By contrast, the Pulaars, the second-largest minority, comprising approximately 28% of Senegal's population, living in the sparsely populated northeast of the country on the border with Mauritania and Mali, voted overwhelmingly for Amadou Ba. It is important to mention that the Pulaar are not a single ethnicity, but a linguistic and multi-ethnic family. This minority voted for Amadou Ba together with the Malinkeu minority (about 5% of the population) in the east and south-east of the country, because of security



reasons, as Mali is a security threat of extremism and terrorism. The areas of Saint-Louis, Matam, and Tambacounda are Macky Sall's traditional strongholds, which secured him a dominant victory in the last election.



Taking away votes from other competitors played a key role, especially Idrissa Seck, who lost voters because he ran a moderate campaign to avoid being kicked out. This tactic proved to be a fatal mistake for Seck. He won only 0.9 % of the vote in the election, compared to the last election in 2019, when he finished second with 20.29 %. Sonko had already taken over Seck's strongholds before his imprisonment, and in a country where more than 90 % of the population is Muslim, this tactic has paid off, especially in the areas of Thiés and Diourbel, where in the east of this area Faye won the holy city of Touba, where he had over 70 % of the vote.



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Faye's support for former President Abdoulaye Wade, with whom Sall worked before becoming president himself, also helped to draw over some of Macky Sall's die-hard voters. With Macky Sall retiring from politics, Faye and Sonko have a chance to win over some demoralized MPs in parliament to their side and secure a majority.^{xxxiv,xxxv,xxxvi}

Conclusion

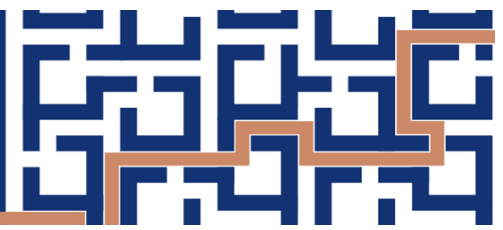
Despite the three-year crisis, Senegal proved to be a strong and stable democracy, with the Constitutional Council playing an important role, which did not side with either Salla or Sonko and was able to enforce democratic principles when the BBY party sought a more authoritative style of governance.

Since taking office, Faye and Sonko's policies have moderated mainly in monetary policy, where the replacement of the CFA franc is not taking place. Sonko clarified his stance already in a pre-election press conference, saying a new currency would be introduced only if CFA franc reforms at the sub-regional level failed.

What will change, however, will be a change from the active diplomatic approach to ECOWAS to a more assertive approach, where the ruling coalition will promote its Pan-Africanism. This will probably manifest itself to have greater influence over neighbouring Guinea and Gambia, which Senegal also influences due to its ethnically similar population. Furthermore, the new government will try to install its people in the leadership of ECOWAS, which is not impossible due to Senegal's advantageous position.

Senegal will probably keep its traditional pragmatic foreign policy when it comes to relations with the European Union and France, however, we can certainly count on the anti-colonialist sentiments of Faye and Sonko.^{xxxvii}

The country's security situation will surely stabilize to its original state after the end of the crisis. The possibility of threats to the country by the terrorist organizations Katibat Serma and Katibat Macina is very small, and with the highest probability, they will not violate the integrity of the state.



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