

# Senegal: 1974 - present

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**Written April 2010**

**Updated September 2010**

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**Summary of events related to the use or impact of civil resistance**

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**Conflict Summary:**

For forty years before March 2000, Senegal was ruled by the Socialist Party (PS) of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Senegal's first president since independence on April 4, 1960, and his hand-picked successor Abdou Diouf who became president in 1981. People had been united behind this party due to the anti-colonial fervor that continued to exist a few years after independence and because Senegal was a de facto one-party democratic state. As the former seat of the French colonial administration in West Africa, Senegal had huge potential for success as an independent country. There existed both the educational and political infrastructure for a successful democracy.

However, the Socialist Party (PS) continued to rule the country on the colonial model with broad presidential powers. That, coupled with the emergence of a post-colonial elite class, growing economic inequalities—especially among and between Senegal's numerous regions—bred gradual opposition to the Socialist Party administration of President L.S. Senghor and later President Abdou Diouf. In addition, like most African countries at the time, Senegal's fortunes were not helped by the damages caused by unpopular structural adjustment programs of the 1980s<sup>1</sup> implemented at the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

This growing disaffection for the policies of the Socialist Party ignited the formation of opposition political movements, including very robust student and labor movements. The late 1980s and the 1990s marked a huge resurgence of civic organizations that had been pacified, co-opted or repressed in previous decades during the Senghor presidency. During this resurgence, autonomous business and labor groups were formed that did not hesitate to challenge and/or lobby the government in favor of their members. Examples include trade unions such as the Union Nationales des Syndicats Autonomes de Senegal (UNASAS), which vehemently protested the privatization and other economic policies of the government; teachers unions like SUDES (Syndicats Unique at Democratic des Enseignants du Senegal); and Human Rights groups such as RADHO (Organization National des Droits de l'Homme), as well as other groups that increased protests against the shrinking political space for citizens and the harassment of political opponents. These protests were intensified anytime Abdoulaye Wade, then opposition leader, was arrested or sent to jail—especially by the people from the agriculture-rich province of Casamance, who perceived Wade to be sympathetic to their cause. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the Socialist government came when prominent citizens from Casamance launched a guerilla struggle led by the Mouvement des Forces de Casamance (MFDC) seeking independence from greater Senegal in the early 1980s. MFDC's activities became especially violent in the 1990s after they said the Senegalese government had reneged on the promise greater autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

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As a result of growing dissatisfaction and civic mobilization to change the status quo, a coalition of Senegalese opposition parties, headed by Abdoulaye Wade and his Senegalese Socialist Party (PDS), defeated the ruling Socialist Party in the second round of polls in 2000. But thereafter it took only a few months for this coalition to break apart, with the smaller opposition parties accusing Abdoulaye Wade and his PDS of abandoning key goals of the coalition.

### **Political History:**

Senegal is Africa's longest serving democracy. Albeit the civil war that marred development in its Southern Province of Casamance, Senegal has remained a constitutional democracy since independence. There has never been a coup d'état in Senegal, which is exceptional considering that coups and or civil wars have affected almost all other countries in the West African region, including Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry and recently The Gambia and Ivory Coast. Hence, Senegal has often been touted as one of Africa's shining democracies – in the league of Ghana, Botswana, and South Africa, among others. Like many African countries, Senegal's quest for independence intensified after Ghana achieved independence in 1957, and Guinea Conakry defied the famous *loi Cadre*<sup>3</sup>. Senegal attained independence on April 4, 1960 under the leadership of L.S. Senghor who ruled until January 1, 1981.

Leopold Sedar Senghor, an avid Africanist in the negritude tradition, founded the Senegalese Democratic Bloc in 1948. Ten years later in 1958, as demands for independence intensified, Senghor's Democratic Bloc merged with another political party to become the Senegalese Progressive Union (known as the Socialist Party since 1976). When Senegal gained independence in 1960, Senghor was unanimously elected president. He advocated a moderate "African socialism," free of atheism and excessive materialism. But as hinted earlier, Senghor's one-party democracy was soon challenged by students and their trade union partners. It began when Senghor outlawed the most radical parties in Senegal, such as the African Regroupment Party (PRA) whose leaders were arrested, although these opposition leaders were later courted and accommodated into the ruling party. Senghor also outlawed the Party of African Independence (PAI). This party was a 'Marxist-Leninist', pan-Africanist party that emphasized nationalism. Although PAI was dissolved, some of its leaders who were students in the 1960s remain in today's political opposition.

On May 27, 1968, the Association of Senegalese Students and the Dakar Association of Students called an indefinite strike and boycotted examinations. The students were protesting the Progressive Union's (which became the Socialist Party in 1976) stranglehold of political power—there was no political pluralism and this was a concern to the students who had been politically active since the pre-independence era. The students also saw the regime's subservience to France as a mockery of Senegal's independence. A riot ensued when the police

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entered the university campus to quash the protests; one student was reportedly killed, and over 900 people were arrested, including at least 800 workers and foreign students who were expelled from the country. Senghor temporarily closed Senegal's only, and at that time Francophone West Africa's biggest and most famous university, The University of Dakar (now named for famed Nationalist and Egyptologist, Cheikh Anta Diop), and declared a state of emergency.

The government and some political commentators labeled the 1968 strikes as foreign-induced, and parallels were drawn with strikes in France at the same time. But when the student strikes resumed in June and July of 1969, without similar strikes in France, the domestic nature of the tumultuous political movement led by students was recognized. Not ready to abandon de facto one-party rule, and failing to subdue student unions by invoking anti-sedition laws, Senghor launched his *New Society* initiative to lure young intellectuals into the one-party democratic system by establishing youth branches of his party in the main university and some Polytechniques. Senghor even contemplated establishing his own labor unions to counteract the growing influence of organized labor in view of its close affinity with Wade's PDS. Due to these maneuvers, there was a slump in student political activism and labor protests, which gave Senghor and his party a renewal and a new sense of control.

Senghor voluntarily retired and handed over power to his protégé, Abdou Diouf, on January 1, 1981. He had positioned Abdou Diouf to succeed him through rapid promotions and special appointments. Abdou Diouf continued with Senghor's policies, but he allowed 14 opposition political parties to contest the 1983 elections, instead of the four Senghor had allowed. According to political observers, this decision was not merely made on the basis of recognition of the rights of opposition groups to compete for political office, but was also a conscious attempt to divide the opposition. President Abdou Diouf won the 1983 election by a landslide, amassing 83.5 percent of the votes. Although the mere fact that this election was held was an improvement on Senghor's de facto one-party state, it was not considered free, fair and transparent. The election officials were civil servants directly responsible to the Interior Minister; and multi-party democracy was only beginning to take shape in Senegal.

In preparation for elections to be held in 1988, the opposition parties attempted to form a coalition to challenge President Diouf and his Socialist Party. The coalition, formed in 1985, was dissolved by the government on the grounds that it was impermissible under the Constitution. As a result, in the same year (1985), the opposition parties staged a protest and Abdoulaye Wade was temporarily arrested for organizing an unlawful demonstration. In February 1988, without an opposition coalition, Diouf handily won the elections, however with a 10 percent-reduced majority from his 1983 victory. He garnered 72.3 percent to Wade's 25.8 percent amidst opposition qualms of electoral fraud. Protests and political disturbances ensued, and like his predecessor did during the 1968 student protests, Diouf responded by declaring a state of emergency, and he further detained Abdoulaye Wade until May of that year.

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After 1988, hopes that Abdou Diouf would bring radical political changes were dashed. He entrenched broad presidential powers, continued official maligning of the opposition and continued to suppress dissent. Very little rural and community development took place, which aggravated social and regional inequalities. Simultaneously, Abdou Diouf lost the friendship of Mauritania and The Gambia, two of Senegal's closest geographic and cultural neighbors. In April 1989, the Mauritania-Senegal Border dispute intensified, leading to inter-ethnic violence on both sides of the border. Tensions with Gambia then rose when the area known as 'the Greater Senegambia' was destabilized due to the sporadic violence between Senegalese and Mauritians. The Gambia, which has ethnic and socio-cultural ties with both countries, would not side militarily with Senegal against Mauritania. This, coupled with the disapproval that most Gambians felt about their junior partnership status in the Senegambia confederation<sup>4</sup>, led to the confederation's dissolution.

These sub-regional challenges, in addition to inflation and skyrocketing prices of basic commodities, increased the widespread disaffection with the Diouf presidency, leading him to a 58 percent electoral victory in February 1993. Diouf had earlier in 1991 extended the presidential term by two years, so his 1993 victory left him in office for seven years.

During this time, student activism became resurgent in Senegal. As with student activism in several other African countries, the resurgence in Senegal can be understood in the context of the state's withdrawal from its "welfare responsibilities". Senegal had been a welfare state from independence, but by the 1980s and early 1990s, IMF and World Bank recommendations led to drastic social sector spending cuts and numerous layoffs. In response, university students galvanized and rallied with organized labor to fight for the restoration of social services, including free university tuition and board. Furthermore, by the late 1980s, some of the people who had served as student leaders in the 1960s and led protests against Senghor's government (such as Djibo Ka, Mustapha Niasse<sup>5</sup>, etc.), themselves became politicians with great appeal to the youth. Likewise some university professors, such as Iba Der Thiam of the Patriotic Democratic Convention (CDP), had become influential politicians and inspired students to challenge the government. This array of opposition politicians, led by Abdoulaye Wade, sensing that disaffection for the Diouf government was simmering in Dakar's main university campus, inspired students to support the big "*Sopi*"<sup>6</sup> or "*Alternance*" coalition that ran against Diouf in the 2000 elections.

In the first round of voting, Abdou Diouf failed to win an outright majority with his 41.3 percent against Abdoulaye Wade's 30.1 percent. In the runoff election the coalition of opposition parties led by Wade, and supported by grassroots organizing by students and others, defeated President Diouf. Diouf conceded defeat and peacefully handed power over to Wade. That was an achievement for Senegalese democracy; in a region where incumbents are known to annul elections that they feel they may lose.

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Wade's longstanding opposition to the overreaches of the Senegalese government, and the numerous times in which he was arrested and imprisoned, suggested that he would institute sweeping democratic changes once he became president. Instead, to the dismay of many, Wade's proposed constitution, which was approved in 2001, curtailed the people's rights to hold protests. Article 25 prohibits any protests that may halt economic activities, thereby attempting to limit the potency of protests as a nonviolent political tool. He expanded presidential powers and negated the conditions of the coalition agreement that bought him into office. However, Wade increased Senegal's international pedigree and advanced sweeping economic development in hitherto abandoned rural communities and peripheral regions of Senegal. He was able to secure peace in the longstanding Casamance conflict. He also reverted the presidential term from seven to five years. However, these actions were not enough to soothe opposition to Wade's administration, and his former coalition partners became his biggest opponents, but nonetheless Wade won his second term in February 2007, with over 55 percent of the vote.

### **Strategic Actions:**

Senegal is not new to nonviolent political activism. In fact, many political scholars argue that Senegal has one of Francophone Africa's oldest cultures of political activism. This was largely due to Senegal's existence as the seat of colonial administration of French West African colonies; and many Senegalese are quick to recall with pride their role in anti-colonialism. Senegalese resisted through writings, marches and other forms of protest and the legacies of the heroes of the labor and anti-colonial movements still ride high in Senegalese Society.

Senegalese nonviolent activists also draw inspiration from the mid-20th century strikes by railroad workers, which were a watershed event in the development and nurturing of nonviolent resistance in the entire West African sub-continent. From 1947-1948, West African railroad workers based mainly in Senegal struck against poor wages and unsavory working conditions. Memories of these events ignite a kind of fervor about how hard the past generations have fought for the freedoms modern Senegalese enjoy. These valiant stories had and continue to inspire several publications, including the popular novel *God's Bits of Wood* by Ousmane Sembene and some works by Frederick Cooper. So as their Senegalese politicians began steering the affairs of state after independence, the same activist fervor is often invoked to defend people's cherished freedoms.

The earliest nonviolent movements in Senegal were spearheaded by Muslim religious scholars and saints. Their resistance was targeted at colonialist influence on their religion and culture. This was intensified by the role of the Church in supporting colonialism. Under the leadership of local Islamic leaders such as Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba, El Hadj Malick Sy and Seydina Limamu Laye, Senegalese Muslims saw Islam as a way of uniting against colonialism. Some famous incidents involved Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba, the founder and head of Mouridiyya—the most

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powerful Islamic brotherhood in Senegal. He led a pacifist resistance to colonial rule and was subsequently arrested and sentenced to exile in Gabon for seven years from 1895 to 1902, and in Mauritania from 1903 to 1907. Bamba waged what he called *Jihad al-Akbar* or the *greater struggle* for spiritual purity and material independence. His influence grew due to his claimed mystic and saintly powers. Ahmad Bamba was suspicious of French influence on Islam, but it was the French suspicion about his growing influence that eventually drew Bamba into nonviolent resistance of colonialism. French suspicion was fuelled by the fact that previous Muslim clerics, such as Sheikh Umar Tall and Samory Toure of the *Tijaniyya* order, both waged war against the French in the past. In his two exiles, Bamba resorted to meditation and writing to convey Islam and also his challenges to the French administration. His political principles are conveyed in lyrical poems that his past and present-day disciples memorize. After assurances that Bamba would not wage a military campaign against the French, he was later recognized and honored by the same French colonial administration he vehemently opposed. Contemporary scholars and commentators indicated that was a French public relations stunt, and it worked for some time to placate Bamba's disciples from following the examples of earlier clerics who led wars against the French. The religious brotherhood Bamba started in Senegal is the largest in West Africa and its influence stretches to Western Europe and North America. Much like Vatican city, the city that Bamba founded, *Touba*, exists as a semi-autonomous entity ruled by his progeny and disciples.

Currently in Senegal, numerous civil society campaigns exist, including some sufi religious sects, nongovernmental organizations such as RADHO (Organization National des Droits de l'Homme), teacher unions (which have been on a semi-permanent strike that started soon after the commencement of Wade's second term in 2007), student unions as well as some Catholic priests, to challenge Abdoulaye Wade and his policies. While the concept of civil resistance has not radically changed from Senegal's past, the context in which Senegalese wage civil resistance has. Some contemporary activists wage internet-based campaigns, using music and broadcast media and other forms of protest such as graffiti. Senegalese also conduct peaceful marches and demonstrations, but on a restricted basis. There are now a myriad of media institutions that are privately owned and increasingly the workings of the government and public officials are laid bare in the public domain. For example, the prominent journalist Latif Coulibaly was arrested and jailed for publishing a damning book about President Wade shortly after he became president. Other journalists and members of the opposition used this and Wade's failure to relinquish power after one term, to which he had allegedly agreed, to launch sharp editorials about him. Wade has responded many times by arresting journalists and forcibly dispersing protests. His ruling party supporters are also sometimes accused of attacking members of the opposition and physically assaulting them. With a highly oral tradition, opposition groups also publish their messages in the form of music tapes to deride the policies of President Wade.

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There is an increasing discussion that another coalition will be formed to challenge Wade and PDS in 2012, after opposition parties boycotted the elections in June 2007, especially after Wade re-amended the constitution to extend the presidential term limit back to seven years, which is scheduled to take effect in 2012. The June 2007 boycott was called because Wade and his party-controlled National Assembly had postponed the elections three times, and the opposition stated that Wade had ensured undue control of the electoral commission. According to activists and political observers, the historical struggle to build and strengthen democracy in Senegal is in its third and most consequential phase. The first phase was when workers, students and religious leaders challenged colonial administration; the second was the struggle against Senghor and Diouf's pseudo multi-partyism; and now the fight is to roll back Wade's arrogation of power<sup>7</sup> and expand democratic space for non-state and subaltern actors.

### **Ensuing Events:**

The fate of Senegal under President Wade is largely a mixed blessing. For example, the Senegalese people have seen a surge, not only in their international profile, but by the volume of trade and tourism that Wade's liberalization has brought the country. Roads have been constructed and the electricity supply, hitherto mainly available in urban and other growth centers, has now reached several remote villages through the efficacious use of solar technology. For some time after Wade assumed the Presidency, Senegal was touted as a beacon of democracy in a continent where coups, civil wars and grandiose dictators exist, with slightly increased per capita incomes and relative peace after a longstanding civil war in Senegal's Southern province of Casamance, but increasing evidence of corruption, nepotism and violations of individual and collective rights to protest and free expression by Wade's government are eroding the country's credentials as a modern democratic state.

In fact, opponents of the regime insist that the costs of Wade's liberal policies, coupled with his inclination toward authoritarianism, are greater than any semblance of economic development. Many argue that the political and business classes constitute a new oligarchy amassing untold wealth at the expense of ordinary citizens. Farmer cooperatives have been privatized, destroying the longstanding guarantee for market access and judicious returns on their produce. The Senegalese legislature is weak and the independence of the Autonomous National Electoral Commission faces scathing challenges from the President. With a supermajority in the National Assembly, Wade changed the electoral timetable many times. The National Assembly voted in December 2005 to postpone legislative elections originally scheduled for 2006; these elections, initially scheduled to coincide with the 25 February 2007 presidential elections, were later again rescheduled for 3 June 2007. The June election was boycotted by twelve opposition parties, including the former ruling Socialist Party, which resulted in a record-low, 35 percent voter turnout. All of Wade's actions related to the election were carried out with the vehement disapproval of the opposition, and many began to doubt Wade's commitment to the Senegalese

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constitution and its nascent democratic traditions. Some even allege that Wade has re-introduced personality cult into Senegal's body politic. He is accused of using his office in a paternalistic way as if he knows and embodies all of the hopes and desires of the people of Senegal. He is also accused of sometimes being more involved at regional and international levels at the expense of national programs.

In addition, Wade's government is lately accused of gruesome human rights abuses, especially of the rights of political and other prisoners. Women's rights violations and abuse of Islamic students by their Quranic teachers are on the increase. Political and governance deterioration, and accompanying corruption, has become an increasing trend, while the prosecution and detention of journalists has markedly increased as well. One example of corruption is that in early 2010, officials of Wade's administration allegedly tried to extort \$200 million from a Luxembourg-based telecommunications company, Millicom. Wade also gave a \$200,000 cash "gift" to Senegal's outgoing IMF official, for what many allege is an attempt to influence reports on his government's handling of IMF and donor finances.

These facts are not lost on the civil society and opposition groups who organized in July 2010 to protest, in addition to the political problems, the increasingly frequent power outages that had made it impossible for farmers and businesses to store their produce. However, the government banned the protest, and as noted by the head of RADDHO, Alioune Tine, the government's decision "is not just, ... it is a violation of the Senegalese constitution and an abuse of power." The protest which was earlier called for by the coalition group "Bennoo Siggil Senegal" (United to Boost Senegal) and banned by the government, was finally held on August 14, 2010 in defiance of the government order. The influential mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Ababacar Sall, joined the protest "in solidarity with the people of his city." Opposition Leader and former Wade Prime Minister, Moustafa Niassé, also took part in the protests, as did long-term opposition leader Abdoulaye Bachilly. This time, the government responded with a press conference branding the opposition as "detractors and cowards"

Amidst these criticisms, the opposition and civil society in Senegal are calling to supplant Wade's government with a new government formed by a new coalition of opposition parties. The "*Alternance Coalition*" that elected Wade is now calling for an alternative to his rule. Despite the gulf that exists between and among opposition parties, and Wade's propensity for secrecy and intolerance, a larger political and social movement appears to be slowly galvanizing against his regime.

**Endnotes:**

1. Read "Structural Adjustment Programs and Peanut Market Performance in Senegal" (1998) by R.A. Lopez & I. Hathie of the University of Connecticut as one example of the extent of the effects of structural adjustment programs:  
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/20841/1/splope01.pdf> . Also read from the Robinson Rojas Archives to understand the time periods of the SAP programs in Senegal at: <http://www.rrojasdatabank.info/stradj1.htm>
2. See Wikipedia for some more historical context at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casamance\\_Conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casamance_Conflict) ; or check Martin Evans article on Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (March, 2002), to understand the longevity of this particular conflict at: <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2408>
3. The *Loi cadre* was a law passed on June 23, 1956 by the French National Assembly which provided for universal adult suffrage for all African subjects in French colonies. The law unabashedly gave control over economic development, internal and international defense, and foreign policy to the French government, but allowed self-autonomy over other matters. It was, however, opposed by prominent African leaders, including Léopold Senghor (Senegal) and Sékou Touré (Guinea). However, unlike Sekou Toure, L.S. Senghor did not insist on immediate independence for Senegal.
4. The Gambia and Senegal reached a merger agreement in November 1981, and the Senegambia confederation came into being three months later. The terms of the agreement required Senegal and The Gambia to take the following steps toward union: integrate their military and security forces; form an economic and monetary union; coordinate their foreign policies and communications; and establish confederal institutions. The larger Senegal would dominate these institutions, controlling the confederal presidency and two-thirds of the seats in a confederal parliament. Despite the merger, each country would maintain its sovereign national institutions.
5. Djibo Ka and Mustapha Niasse and some of their colleagues were previously coopted by the ruling Socialist Party but later broke off and formed their respective parties to challenge President Diouf. They still lead their parties as opposition to President Wade after the popular coalition disintegrated. However, Djibo Ka did not join the Sopi Coalition; his URD party sided with Abdou Diouf in the run off which ended the Diouf presidency.
6. *Sopi* is a Wolof word for change. *Wolof* is the largest ethnic group in Senegal and is the lingua franca in Senegal, besides French.
7. Although there is a two term constitutional provision that bars Wade from seeking a third term in office, he has nonetheless hinted that he will contest the 2012 elections. With his party's overwhelming majorities in the legislature, many concede that he can easily amend the constitution to pave way for his candidacy when he will be 86 years old.

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