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Potential Drivers of Jihadism and Radicalisation in Senegal

Naila Salihu and Devante Duncan

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Introduction

Senegal has been relatively stable despite a latent conflict in the Casamance region. The Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) has since the early 1980s been engaged in a low-intensity armed confrontation with the Senegalese government in a campaign for the independence or autonomy of the region. However, the Casamance crisis has not presented a major national and human security threat to Senegal partly due to its astute security management and local conditions in the country in general such as its relative ethnic homogeneity, and role of local religious and societal leaders. The interconnected issues of political Islam and terrorism are of increasing concern for Africa as these have begun to provide new dimensions to conflicts both within states and across sub-regions.¹ Political Islam now serves as a medium for political mobilization in various forms.² This is often driven by the idea that jihad (religiously-sanctioned warfare) is an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (*fard kifaya*³). Individuals often go through a multi-layered process of radicalization to be able to carry out jihad and acts of terrorism. There have been reports and arrests of Senegalese foreign terrorist fighters in parts of the region.⁴

Islam in Africa has been predominantly Sunni with the Maliki school of thought at the most dominant in the northeastern parts of the continent and *Shafi'i* prevalent in the east.⁵ Sufi forms of Islam have been central in the spread of the religion and central to the religious and social lives of people in the region. The expansion of Islam in the region was possible with a high degree of adaptation of local cultures and societies under Sufism. This has fed into long internal debates and tensions on religious practice and persistent efforts at reforms. In West Africa especially, themes of the reformists' jihads of the eighteenth and nineteenth century are echoed in the critiques of Sufi practices by contemporary reformists from the *Wahhabis*, *Salafis*, or *Sunnites*. The reformist groups have criticized the Sufis for introducing innovations to the practice of Islam and thus consider them as not true Muslims.⁶

Senegal is a dominantly Muslim country with about

90% of its population being Muslims. In countries with Muslim dominance, the debates and tensions on religion and politics have centered on the role of Islam in the political system and secularism. This has been a source of major concern with the rise of violent extremism and political Islam in parts of West Africa. Senegal is a secular state. The state has been able to build a sociopolitical balance to the competing impulses through a system of symbiotic relations built on the strong collaboration of Sufi leaders with an officially secular state – a system that was inherited from the colonial period.⁷ However, there is declining authority of Sufi elites in Senegal due to varied reasons including political liberalization and the rapid proliferation of new religious voices.⁸

This could possibly increase the country's opportunistic use by jihadist and radicalized groups to promote their religious rhetoric. Senegal has been the regional hub for Sufi Islamic sect. Adherents are primarily linked to brotherhoods, especially Tijaniyya, Mouridism, Layenes and Qâdiriyya. This arguably provided a mitigation measure against violent extremism. The Sufi Brotherhood is one of the most influential religious institutions in the country and with the power it wields, can ensure that people are shielded from the radical and jihadist dialogue. At the same time emergence of reformists or Salafist including Wahhabites such as Ibâdu Rahmân (whose ideology is close to that of the Muslim Brothers with sub-groups of students on university campuses in Dakar and Saint-Louis) and Al-Falâh (of Wahhabite-Salafist leanings, of Saudi Arabia) have created fault lines for religious tensions in the country.⁹

The geopolitical paradox of Senegal is that it symbolizes the extent to which some African states belong to Arab and Islamic organizations. For instance, it has twice hosted the Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and is a member of the Islamic Educational, Science and Culture Organization (ISESCO), the Muslim World League (MWL) and the World Islamic Call Society. Yet the country remains a traditional ally of the West, especially France.¹⁰ Senegal is in the Sahel region which has become the arc of instability in West Africa. So the country is at risk. Among the main drivers of instability in the region include the crises of governance, terrorism, violent extremism, external debt, environmental degradation, civil wars, food insecurity, youth bulge massive exoduses, fragile and porous political

¹Aning, K. & Salihi, N. (2013). The African Security Predicament. In: Heinz, J. (Ed) Routledge Handbook on African Security, London: Routledge. pp.9-20.

²Aning, K. (2007, February). Africa: confronting complex threat. Coping with crisis working paper series. New York: International Peace Academy.

³Hamid, S. & Dar, R (2016). Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A primer. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/>

⁴Interviews in Dakar, February 2021

⁵Villalon, L.A (2018). Islam and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. Islam and Politics around the World. Esposito, J.L and Shahin, E.E. New York. Oxford.

⁶Interviews in Dakar, February 2021

⁷Villalón (2018).

⁸Ibid

⁹ECOWAS, (2013), Peace and Security Report, Issue 3 May, Institute for Security Studies.

¹⁰Ibid

borders, and illegal immigration and drug trafficking.¹¹ There are indications that this region will continue to grapple with these challenges for some time to come.¹² Most of these challenges exist in Senegal. Security challenges in the Sahel, especially in neighboring Mali and Mauritania have increased the vulnerability of Senegal to violent extremism. The country shares a lot of socio-cultural and historical features with Mali. Senegal has been a central part of regional and international efforts at dealing with the crises in Mali. All of these elements have contributed to the vulnerability of Senegal to terrorist attacks of which none has been recorded yet. Several clues were pointing to the presence in Senegal of operational units from neighboring countries who are capable of perpetrating violent extremist acts. Current developments arising out of local political developments have given rise to tensions and protests in the country which claimed about 5 lives between February-March 2021. This report shares insights on potential drivers of jihadism and radicalization in Senegal. It is based on an analysis of primary data secured from interviews with relevant stakeholders in Dakar in February 2021. Secondary data is also used to complement the primary data. The report further examines the principal actors and explores the existing response mechanisms and their effectiveness and challenges. It offers some policy recommendations.

Actors of Jihadism and Radicalization

Youth in the West African region have been identified as one of the main actors involved in radicalization and jihadism.¹³ The youth represents over sixty-four percent of the population in the region. Young people present an invaluable resource to the region, especially when their potential is harnessed for productive purposes.¹⁴ Senegal presents a similar situation, with young people constituting over fifty percent of the country’s population. Young people have been identified as one of the main actors contributing to jihadism and radicalization in the state, either as targets or perpetrators. Their vulnerability and the prevailing political climate of the state make them susceptible to joining radicalized groups.¹⁵

Many youth in the country have fled to join the ranks of terrorist groups in other countries such as Boko Haram, ISWAP in Nigeria and Ansar Dine in Mali due for various reasons, however, a clear opposition to the type of Islam practiced in the country has become a running theme in many youth combatants.¹⁶ In 2017, Senegalese authorities arrested three suspected individuals for having ties to ISIS and Boko Haram. Among those detained were Moroccans and Nigerians who were described as purportedly recruiting for the Islamist sects among Senegalese youth.¹⁷ Popular among these combatants, was Makhtane Diokhane, a religious teacher in Senegal linked to the Boko Haram, who had been working to establish the group’s footprint in Senegal. Diokhané had received funding from the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, to recruit 15 Senegalese fighters to join the ranks of Boko Haram.¹⁸

Even as a predominantly Muslim state, Senegal’s religious identity is divided between Sufi Islamic sects and a host of non-sectarian movements.¹⁹ Sufism remains most influential among the religious and political elites. However, the increasing push for recognition by emerging reformist or Salafist groups could translate into violence. According to a respondent, some Islamic organizations, notorious for their radical teaching target the youth due to their vulnerabilities. These organizations seek to manipulate to advance their agendas.²⁰ These organizations offer financial help to these young people, particularly to youth with a narrow understanding of Islam, who are targeted and manipulated into becoming instruments of violence through radicalization and programmed to engage in jihadism.²¹ The youthful population of Senegal is a blessing and a curse, as it presents extremist and terrorist groups and a large pool of potential fighters to choose from.²²

¹¹Hassan, H. (2020). A New Hotbed for Extremism? Jihadism and Collective Insecurity in the Sahel, *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* Vol. 8 No. 2 (2020): 203-222
¹²Ibid
¹³Interview with a senior official at Center of Defense and Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 26th February, 2021.
¹⁴UNFPA (2018). Adolescents and Youth Report: West and Central Africa. Retrieved from wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf [Accessed on 15th March 2021]
¹⁵Interview with a member of CSO Dakar, Senegal. 22nd February, 2021.
¹⁶Interview with a researcher at the Centre d’étude de Religion de Religion de l’Universite Garcon Berge, Saint Louis. Dakar, Senegal. 26th February 2021.
¹⁷Cummings, R. (2017). Senegal, ISIS, and al-Qaeda: A Terrorism Trifecta. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Retrieved from <https://institute.global/policy/senegal-isis-and-al-qaeda-terrorism-trifecta> [Accessed on 22nd March, 2021.]
¹⁸Foreign Military Studies Office (2018). Senegal Stops Terrorist Attacks. February Issue
¹⁹United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2016). Citizenship on the alert. What 800 Sahelians have to say. Senegal National Report. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
²⁰Interview with a researcher from the Centre d’étude de Religion de l’Université Garçon Berge Saint Lois, Dakar, Senegal. 26th February 2021.
²¹Ibid.
²²Interview with a researcher Institute for Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 25th February 2021.

Dual Educational System

A dual educational system exists in Senegal. This includes formal educational institutions and religious or koranic schools. The two main types of koranic schools are the traditional koranic school (also known as Daras or Madrasa) and the mixed (franco-arabe) koranic school, which offer informal religious education. Senegal forms part of the UN's Education for All (EFA) Programme, which aims to achieve universal primary education for all as part of the Millennium Development Goals. Nonetheless, primary education in Senegal is far from being universal, with a 57% net primary school enrolment rate posted in 2002 and 71% in 2007.²³ With Islam being the dominant religion in the state, koranic schools are almost present in every neighbourhood. Koranic schools are a highly patronized form of education for most Muslims as compared to formal education.²⁴ The Senegalese government has experienced difficulty in regulating the koranic educational system in the country. These schools have the propensity to produce radicalized people because they are unregulated. The limited scope of koranic schools as an alternative to formal education, does not effectively offer students a degree, diploma, or employable skills sought after by employers.²⁵ Most students come out of these schools without the requisite competencies for employment in the formal sector of the economy. The products of the Koranic schools are least favored for public sector jobs. This creates frustration as koranic school graduates find themselves unable to secure formal jobs. The inability of the youth in koranic schools to effectively deconstruct the teachings of radical imams who may propagate violence through their preaching makes them susceptible to radicalisation.²⁶ The state has also encountered challenges in effectively regulating the teachings of imams all across the country which poses a big risk to young students. For example, the arrest of a group of young Muslims who had intentions of engaging in violent extremism was expected, as the suspects studied in Mauritania, where they attended koranic schools, financed by Saudi Arabia.²⁷

Radical Islamists and Reformist Organizations

As noted earlier, Senegal is a predominantly Islamic country with ninety-four percent of its people being Muslim.²⁸ In addition, close to ninety percent of Senegalese Muslims, are members of the Sufi brotherhood. Sufi, as a branch of Islam is rooted in the local traditions of African Muslims have been and continues to be a powerful and often contested manifestation of Islam in West Africa.²⁹ On the contrary, Salafists or Sunni advocates for a brand of Islam that is seen to be purist, fundamentalist, and free of cultural references thereby making the Islam traditionally practiced in the region a kind of African or 'black Islam'³⁰. Over the years the brotherhoods have faced stiff opposition from reformist Muslims, also known as Sunni or Salafist Muslims, who seek to promote radical Islam in the country to reform the form of Islam practiced by the brotherhoods.³¹ Some Salafists in Senegal accuse the Sufis of failing to practice the correct form of Islam. The Wahabists propagate violent Islamic doctrine opposing the mainstream Sufi doctrine.³²

The reformist groups have in the past criticized the brotherhoods for promoting the worship of individual imams (marabouts), rather than Allah.³³ Islamist associations such as Senegal's Jamaatou Ibadou Rahman (JIR) and Association des élèves musulmans de Senegal, Dakar (AEMUD), are considered some of the organizations responsible for the active promoters of radicalization and jihadism in Senegal.³⁴ These groups present an image of practicing moderate Islam when on the contrary, they engage in promoting radical teachings and even as far as enforcing violent jihad. They create schools, and mosques, as well as invest in other community projects such as boreholes among others, as their 'social responsibility' to win the hearts and minds of the people. In addition, they provide educational scholarships for many students, funded by Middle Eastern countries including Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, among others, to study in these countries. These students would then return to Senegal with a new conception of Islam.³⁵

These organizations use traditional media such as radio and television to promote their ideologies and

²³Drame, E. R., & Kamphoff, K. (2014). Perceptions of Disability and Access to Inclusive Education in West Africa: A Comparative Case Study in Dakar, Senegal. *International Journal of Special Education*, 29(3), 69-81.

²⁴André, P. & Demonsant, J. L. (2012). Koranic Schools in Senegal: A real barrier to formal education? (No. 2012-34). LISER.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Interviews, Dakar, February 2021

²⁷Interview with a member of CSO, Dakar, Senegal. 24th February, 2021.

²⁸Creevey, L. (1996). Islam, Women and the Role of the State in Senegal. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 26(3), 268-307. doi:10.2307/1581646

²⁹Seesemann, R. (2010). Sufism in West Africa, *Religion Compass*, 4(10) : 606-614,

³⁰Ibid

³¹Interview with an official at Center of Defense and Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 26th February 2021

³²United Kingdom: Home Office. (2014). Senegalese Islam: Old Strengths, New Challenges. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53f35e364.html> [accessed 22 March 2021]

³³Ibid.

³⁴Gomez-Perez, M. (2017). "Political" Islam in Senegal and Burkina Faso: contrasting approaches to mobilization since the 1990s. *Mediterranean Politics*, 22(1), 176-195.

³⁵Ibid.

principles. The majority of reformist actors come from koranic schools in Senegal and even in the Middle East. The lack of recognition from the government and other state actors incites frustration in these young koranic school graduates. These reformist groups instigate youth, especially those who are unemployed and feel betrayed by the political system that cannot provide jobs, as well as the inefficacy of the brotherhoods to provide stop-gap solutions to these problems, to seek a more modern version of Islam abroad where sharia preaching is rife.³⁶

Drivers of Instability

The commonest theme running through the responses from most respondents was frustration. Youth in Senegal who form the majority of the population are believed to join these radical and jihadist groups due to frustration from the lack of employment opportunities and their inability to meet basic needs, especially upon completion of their education. Senegal presents a fertile ground for Islamic radicalism due to the existence of a dual educational system. The difficulty involved in securing jobs, especially for students from koranic schools, makes them easy prey for radicalized actors and jihadist groups.³⁷ The frustration is also rooted in the lack of recognition as some resort to joining these groups as they believe that Muslims are subject to criticism and abuse. The desire to make Senegal an officially Islamic state like Nigeria instigates these young people to attempt to enforce radical Islam in the South of Senegal, one of the poorest regions in the country, providing a fertile environment for radicalization.³⁸

Young people who feel frustrated in Senegal, leave the country to seek greener pastures where they can effectively practice Sunni Islam in countries such as Nigeria, Mauritania, Libya and Middle Eastern countries.³⁹ They emphatically post on social media to prove their happiness and in turn attract other young people to join them in these countries, to practice Sunni Islam and propagate sharia doctrine. They believe there is no need for a religious guide or marabout as Muslims can pray directly to God.⁴⁰

Lack of Social and Economic Development

The lack of development and poverty create inequalities that underpin many of the grievances that incite terrorism. Senegal is one of the least developed countries in the world, ranking 168 out of 189 in the 2019 United Nations Human Development Index, which measures progress in social and economic development.⁴¹ The Senegalese government grapples with the challenge of widespread poverty, with more than half the country living below the global poverty line, despite significant economic growth. The percentage of those who live below one dollar in Senegal is very high. Outside Dakar, there are poor regions with little to no social amenities.⁴² The government's failure to effectively provide for people in remote areas provides jihadist groups the opportunity to step in to act in the state's stead to provide and subsequently expose them to radical teachings. People living in rural areas face challenges making ends meet, as there are little or no opportunities for gainful employment. Many young people in rural areas particularly opt to join radical groups and jihadist groups to ensure their survival. With thousands of young people entering the labour market every year and the limited opportunities in the job market, a lot of young people are rendered unemployed, which is a worrying trend for the country. According to most respondents, the government's failure to tackle the unemployment situation has played into the hands of the radical and jihadist groups, who exploit the unemployment situation to recruit people into their ranks with alluring promises. Reformist Islamic groups have exploited the unemployment situation by enticing recruits via offering financial inducements to desperate Senegalese and their families who live in abject poverty.

Challenges of Governance

Another major driver of radicalization and jihadism in Senegal is the deficit in governance. The challenge of governance has been persistent in the country. However, in recent times, President Macky Sall and his government have come under serious criticism by the populace for

³⁶Interview with a member of civil society organization Dakar, 24th February, 2021.

³⁷Interview with a researcher at Institute for Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 25th February 2021.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Interviews Dakar, February 2021

⁴⁰Interview with the Head of Prospective and Strategy at Environment and Development in Action. (ENDA) Dakar, Senegal. 24th February, 2021.

⁴¹World Bank. (2019). *World development report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene* Briefing note for countries on the 2020 Human Development Report. Senegal.

⁴²Interviews in Dakar, February 2021

⁴³Africa News. (2021). Clashes in Senegal after opposition leader Sonko accused of rape. Retrieved from <https://www.africanews.com/2021/02/08/clashes-in-senegal-after-opposition-leader-sonko-accused-of-rape/> [Accessed on 23rd March, 2021].

failing to deliver on promises since the start of his government in 2012. He has subsequently earned a reputation for muzzling his political opponents in a bid to consolidate power. Recent events in February 2021, where the opposition leader of the PASTEF party (Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity) Ousmane Sonko was arrested on rape allegations were witnessed in some quarters as part of political machination to stifle the political opposition.⁴³ Sonko was subsequently stripped of his parliamentary immunity by an ad hoc commission dominated by pro-government MPs. In addition, Sonko on his way to court was arrested for disturbing public order. These developments triggered nationwide demonstrations in the capital, Dakar.⁴⁴ The Sonko arrest was only the trigger amidst many underlying issues such as youth unemployment, growing inequality, corruption scandals, poor management of public services and compounded by repressive measures amid the COVID-19 pandemic from the incumbent government.⁴⁵ The power of such mass protests in the country's political history cannot be overlooked. Notably, mass protests were witnessed in 2011 following an attempt at a third term by former president Abdoulaye Wade. President Macky Sall's government has not been free of corruption allegations as his brother, Aliou Sall was alleged to have been involved in a corruption scandal. This was revealed in 2019 by BBC, where British Petroleum allegedly agreed to pay \$10bn for a suspicious Senegalese gas deal involving Macky Sall's brother.⁴⁶ The report alleged that Aliou Sall was secretly paid \$250,000 (£196,300) in 2014 by a gas company that sold its shares in Senegalese gas fields to BP, forcing him to resign as head of a state-run savings fund, however, no investigation was carried out by the state regarding this issue.⁴⁷ Bad governance, corruption and mismanagement of the country's resources could instigate the already frustrated Senegalese youth to pick up arms with jihadist groups against the state.

The Casamance Question

A potential threat emanates from the lingering conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal, which has

been described as a 'no peace, no war' situation. Since 1982, the separatist Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) has been fighting for an independent Casamance. This was stated first through popular protest, then since 1990 through a guerrilla war. Despite ceasefires and accords throughout the 1990s and improved security conditions, durable peace remains elusive.⁴⁸ The conflict has killed thousands of people, displaced tens of thousands more, crippled the rural-based economy and turned large tracts of territory into no-go zones due to landmines.⁴⁹

Casamance region is geographically divided from northern Senegal by the Gambia. The region's ethnic, religious, and cultural composition is different from the rest of Senegal. Since independence, the southern population has protested the north's domination of national politics and resources.⁵⁰ Although Senegal exhibits a high degree of cultural homogeneity, Casamance is an exception with a majority Diola population. The Diolas and other related ethnic groups of the Ziguinchor Region are predominantly forest people with a very different set of values, and beliefs than northern Senegalese, who originate from the vast arid zones of the Sahel and the Sahara.⁵¹ There is a discernment among this group that northern Senegalese do not respect their traditions and have monopolised jobs, property and land.⁵² These perceptions coupled with economic and political grievances have been exploited by criminal networks and conflict parties to wage a never-ending conflict.⁵³

Casamance conflict also has regional dimensions due to the landlocked position of The Gambia inside the Senegalese territory and the border with Guinea Bissau.⁵⁴ This has been a source of tension among these countries. Issues of fluid identity also exacerbate tensions among neighbouring countries. Due to the inter-connections between the ethnic Diolas, Balantes and Mandingos of northern Guinea Bissau and the troubled Casamance region of Senegal, Guinea Bissau's role is crucial in the conflict. Some governments in Guinea Bissau in past have been accused of aiding the MFDC campaign efforts in the Casamance.⁵⁵ The same interconnection makes the role of The Gambia very crucial. Former President

⁴⁴Africa News. (2021). Senegal opposition leader charged with rape and released on bail. Retrieved from <https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/08/senegal-more-protests-feared-sonko-released-under-judicial-supervision/> [Accessed on 23rd March 2021].

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶BBC (2019). Aliou Sall, Senegal president's brother, resigns post amid corruption claim. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48753099> [Accessed on 23rd March 2021].

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Evans, M. (2002). The Casamance conflict: out of sight, out of mind?. Humanitarian Exchange, No. 20. 5-6.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Fall A. (2010). Understanding The Casamance Conflict: A Background. KAIPTC Monograph No. 7.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Yahya Jammeh was on numerous occasions alleged to have assisted the MFDC in the Casamance. The MFDC rebels are predominantly former President Jammeh's ethnic kinsmen and his active role in the crisis had been questioned on numerous fronts. There is a new political dispensation in the neighbouring countries, as the current Gambian President Adama Barrow, who came to power in 2017, is considered close to Senegalese President Macky Sall. Similarly, the President of Guinea Bissau Umaro Sissoco Embaló, another ally of President Sall. Arguably, these leaders may not be active parties in the crises, yet their countries provide a haven for the MFDC rebels and splinter groups.

The Casamance conflict remains a latent one after successive peace processes. Efforts so far at resolving the conflicts have been piecemeal, and without a serious attempt to tackle the underlying social and economic factors. For instance, in 2012, President Sall initiated a mediation process. However, the process was truncated in 2013 and recommenced in 2014. Specifically, the April 30, 2014 agreement sought to provide an opening for the Senegalese government to redevelop the Casamance economy and integrate the region into national politics. The outcomes have been mixed as issues such as lack of education and opportunities for younger people have left many in the Casamance region still feeling marginalized.⁵⁷ The MFDC has split into four factions due to internal disagreements, compromising the pursuit of peace efforts. Casamance separatists control the lucrative cashew trade as well as the illegal cannabis and timber trade.⁵⁸ This criminal enterprise has been a major driver of the conflict.

There have been attacks against the Senegalese state and individuals by MFDC. For instance, in 2018, 14 young men were slaughtered in an execution style-killings in the north of Ziguinchor.⁵⁹ Again, in January 2022, an attack by rebels in Western Gambia resulted in the death of two soldiers and 5 hostages Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) forces under the Senegalese Contingent. Subsequently, Senegal, supported by neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, suddenly launched an offensive on January 26, claiming the

capture of several bases and forcing the rebels to fall back.⁶⁰ The Senegalese army launched another round of military operations on March 13, 2022, aimed at dismantling rebel group bases along the Gambian border. This military offensive has caused more than 2,000 people to flee the southern region of Senegal.⁶¹ In hindsight, the Casamance separatist movement may not pose an existential

threat to Senegal, yet a potential threat lies in the possibility of jihadist groups in the region exploiting existing social, economic, religious, and political fault lines and joining forces with actors from the Casamance region.

Response Mechanisms

Educational Reforms

At the state level, there is the desire to pursue educational reforms, notably the modernization of koranic schools. The traditional koranic schools follow different curricula from the formal education system.⁶² As a result, products of this system do not come out with the requisite qualifications for the job market. The Senegalese government has developed the 'Franco-Arabe' schools (école franco-arabe) as an improvement on the existing traditional koranic schools.⁶³ The new Franco-Arabe schools incorporate formal and religious education to provide students with a balance in both areas. In Franco-Arab schools, students take the same exams as in formal state schools, thus there exists little difference between the two. These reforms have helped build up Senegalese youth, equipping them with formal education and employable skills that can be harnessed in the formal sector.⁶⁴ Senegal had made progress in providing equal access to quality education for boys and girls. The government had modernized over a hundred koranic schools that are now Franco-Arabe schools following a state-prescribed curriculum reform.⁶⁵ The formal educational system has been encouraged to open up to the discourse of religious tolerance and in this regard, measures are being put in place to document all Islamic teachings on tolerance and disseminated across all schools in Senegal.⁶⁶ The state has carried out some programmes to sensitize

⁵⁶Seyferth, D. (2014). Senegal: An End to One of Africa's Longest Civil Conflicts?.

⁵⁷Simpson, C & Diallo, M.A. (2015). Between war and peace Forgotten Conflicts – Casamance. New Humanitarian, 3 August. Available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2015/08/03/between-war-and-peace>

⁵⁸Mandic, D.(2022). Wheeling and Dealing in War: Smuggling, Stigma and Separatist Rebellions. PACO, Issue 15(1) 2022: 88-106

⁵⁹France24, (2021). Rebels in Senegal's Casamance under pressure after offensive, February 11

⁶⁰ibid.

⁶¹Hammerschlag, A. (2022). Conflict in Senegal Displaces Thousands. March 17. Available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/conflict-in-senegal-displaces-thousands-/6489729.html>

⁶²Interview with the Head of Prospective and Strategy at Environment and Development in Action. (ENDA) Dakar, Senegal. 24th February, 2021.

⁶³André, P., & Demonsant, J. L. (2012). Koranic Schools in Senegal: A real barrier to formal education? (No. 2012-34). LISER.

⁶⁴Interview with a Researcher, Dakar. 22nd February 2021.

⁶⁵Global Partnership. (2018). Senegal is spearheading reforms in its education sector. Retrieved from <https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/senegal-spearheading-reforms-its-education-sector> [Accessed on 23rd March 2021].

⁶⁶Interview with official of csdc, Dakar, February 2021.

the youth against radicalization and jihadism.⁶⁷ Some of these interventions have come as a result of collaboration with different civil society and international organizations.

Counter-terrorism Measures

The Ministry of Security in Senegal has employed measures to curb radicalization through information sharing and monitoring in the form of telephone monitoring and border patrols.⁶⁸ The state recognized that border security needed improvement, necessitating a more coherent approach developed with the cooperation of border communities, security officials, and regional neighbors. The state has also augmented its security capability through procurement of weapons and training of security forces in counter-terrorism. The national gendarmerie and national police have created specialized counterterrorism units to address the perceived threats. The geographical size of Senegal also helps its cause as the state can exert its authority over every area in the country. Although Senegal has not experienced any major jihadist attacks, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM) has been present close to the Senegal-Mali border, seeking to infiltrate Senegal and perpetrate attacks.⁶⁹

However, Senegalese troops have stepped up efforts in countering the activities of the group, recently, dismantling a cell in Kidira in January 2020 and arresting four men concerning the attempted attack.⁷⁰ These arrests amid other perceived threats compelled the government to establish a military base close to the Malian border. The state, in a preventive approach to the menace, established a mobile unit (Groupes d'Action Rapides de Surveillance et d'Intervention) GARSI funded by the EU, operating in Kidira.⁷¹ GARSI was established to complement state security forces to increase the state's presence in remote and cross-border areas in efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and organized crime, gathering intelligence and providing operational support to neighboring states. It also allows for interoperability with the forces of neighboring countries.⁷² The investment in intelligence has helped douse threats to the security of Senegal, through arrests of unscrupulous persons engaged in suspicious activity.

Although Senegal does not form part of the G5 Sahel, the country benefits from the intergovernmental cooperation's effort to expunge radicalization and jihadism in the region since the state is bordered by Mauritania in the north and Mali in the east. These countries by their proximity find themselves in a regional security complex, where threats in a country have the propensity to transcend borders into neighboring countries. The joint force endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Committee has made strides in fighting terrorism and cross-border organized crimes such as human trafficking, among many other threats in the region.⁷³ The government also created an Inter-Ministerial Framework for Intervention and Coordination of Counterterrorism Operations (CICO) in 2016, to fight radicalization and prevent violent extremism, led by the Ministry of Interior.⁷⁴ This committee contributes to generating intelligence on the security situation in Senegal as well as collaborating with Mali and Mauritania to engage in increased surveillance through border patrols.⁷⁵

The government of Senegal has also developed social and economic programs, notably the creation of jobs for the youth to reduce frustration arising from unemployment, intending to reduce youth propensity to join these groups. The government through the Programme d'Urgence de Modernisation des Axes Frontaliers (PUMA) and Programme d'Urgence de Développement Communautaire (PUDC) programs has made considerable efforts to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of the people, especially people in rural areas.⁷⁶ These programs have contributed to ensuring the needs of the Senegalese people are met while helping them maintain an appreciable standard of life.

Sensitisation Programmes

The Sufi Brotherhood plays an essential role in moderating the activities of its followers. The Brotherhood has a close association with the political leadership. This can contribute to reducing the risk of violent extremism in Senegal. These groups can moderate the activities of Muslims in the country and

⁶⁷Interview with Head of CSDS

⁶⁸Interview with a researcher Centre d'étude de Religion de l'Université Garçon Berge Saint Lois, Dakar, Senegal. 26th February 2021.

⁶⁹Interview with an official of Center of Defense and Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 26th February 2021.

⁷⁰The Defense Post. (2021). Senegal Uncovers Jihadist Cell in East of Country. Retrieved from <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/02/09/senegal-uncovers-jihadist-cell/> [Accessed on 23rd March 2021].

⁷¹Interview with a researcher at Institute for Security Studies, Dakar, Senegal. 25th February 2021.

⁷²Africa Center for Strategic Studies, (2018). The G5 Sahel Joint Force Gains Traction. 09 February. Available at <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/g5-sahel-joint-force-gains-traction>

⁷³Rupesinghe, N. (2018). The joint force of the G5 Sahel: an appropriate response to combat terrorism? Conflict trends, 2018(2), 11-18.

⁷⁴United States Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 - Senegal, 19 September 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcff8413.html> [accessed 23 March 2021]

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Interview with a researcher in Dakar, Senegal. 25th February 2021.

can order expose radical preachers who intend to sow seeds of violence.⁷⁷ At the Community level, the Brotherhood engages in preventive discourse to sensitize youth to promote tolerance and peace among people. Through conferences, durbars and seminars, they expose the dangers of Jihadism and the risk it poses to society. The Brotherhood is one of the most influential religious institutions in the country and with the power it wields, can ensure that people are shielded from the radical and jihadist dialogue. Religious leaders or *Marabouts* have been educated to warn their followers to be vigilant of external influences. Authorities in religious circles have also appealed to imams to desist from picking up even slight traces of Salafist practice.⁷⁸

Social media has also been a major instrument in the fight against jihadism and radicalization. It can be harnessed to equip terrorists with tools to enlist, train, coordinate and communicate with followers and potential recruits remotely. In the same vein, social media can be used positively to promote messages of peace as it is a widely popularized medium used by the youth. The increasing use of social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tik Tok, among others, in Africa has the propensity to increase public awareness of the impact of jihadism and radicalization on the state, thereby changing perceptions both nationally and internationally.

Conclusion

Senegal has been largely stable and has not recorded any case of a terrorist attack. However, there exist conditions in the country which have fermented the rise of violent extremism in other parts of West Africa. The country's dominant Muslim population makes it susceptible to jihadism and radicalization. However, this alone does not provide enough grounds for terrorism to flourish. It is rather, the endemic poverty, lack of development and opportunities for the youthful population amid governance crises that put the country at risk. Geographically, Senegal is in the Sahel region. This region has become a hotbed of instability that traditional security strategies and approaches have been unable to solve. The region is likely to continue to suffer from terrorist attacks as jihadist groups target both security forces and civilians. Senegal is thus vulnerable to the risk of instability in its immediate neighbours, particularly Mali. For example, reports of youth from Senegal who have become foreign terrorist fighters in other places, like Nigeria and Syria, give cause for concern.

Recommendations

- The state has the responsibility to improve governance and offer young people hope with working institutions. This could help reduce frustration among a majority of the populace.
- Comprehensive education reforms are essential to streamline the curricula of the koranic schools and improve the quality of products from this system of education.
- The state has to outline stricter sanctions for religious leaders who propagate violence through hate speech and fake rhetoric. The Islamic Brotherhood in turn has a moral obligation of promoting messages of peace and tolerance across the country.
- Continuous dialogue and implementation of tangible reforms to address the Casamance conflict.

⁷⁷Interview with the member of Islamic coalition, Dakar, Senegal. February, 2021.

⁷⁸Interview with a member of religious group, Dakar, 24th February 2021.

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