



Building Resilience and Supporting National Infrastructures for Peace: The Case of Senegal

Lydia Amedzrator



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**MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Elections, Presidential Term Limits, and Political Protests	1
<i>Political Protests</i>	2
Resilient Factors and Institutional Mechanisms for Conflict Resolution	4
<i>Citizens of moral authority</i>	4
<i>No division along ethnic lines</i>	4
<i>Interfaith peace and dialogue / Religious Coexistence</i>	5
<i>Political Committee for National Dialogue</i>	6
<i>Le médiateur de la République (Mediator of the Republic)</i>	6
Conclusion	7

Abstract

Senegal's security situation is largely characterised by political tension as well as the Casamance conflict. This paper however focuses on the political situation in the country. Specifically, the paper provides an analysis of: (a) the constant political maneuverings by ruling parties to strengthen their hold on power beyond the constitutionally mandated term limits and (b) the contestations and protests by opposition parties with the support from the streets. In discussing these issues, the paper makes particular reference to two of the country's most popular and violent protests, the 23 June 2011 and the March 2021 protests, and how they have culminated into violent clashes. To address these different sources of insecurity, various formal and informal peace infrastructures and resilience mechanisms have been employed with varying levels of impact.

Introduction

West Africa's general security situation has been characterized by myriad challenges. The region's security challenges are largely attributable to decades of disturbing political developments, low-intensity conflicts, the ambitions of violent extremist groups to spread to new territories, and the audacious attacks by pirates operating in the Gulf of Guinea. To respond to these challenges, ECOWAS continues to make some attempts through its regional peace and security architecture. At the national level, member states have developed structures that have contributed to building resilience, conflict prevention, and management.

Unlike Sierra Leone and Ghana which have established nationally owned Infrastructure for Peace (I4P), Senegal is one of the West African countries that are yet to take definitive steps towards the development of a national I4P. Nonetheless, the country has put in place some resilient structures and peace mechanisms that have facilitated the effective resolution of conflict situations. This explains why even though political tensions recur and the northern part experience the Casamance conflict, these sources of conflict have not thrown the country into a major crisis as we have seen in Mali. This paper focuses on the sources of political tension in the country and the different forms of interdependent structures, mechanisms, and resources that contribute to conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. To do this, the paper is organized into three main sections. The first section provides a background on the political situation in the country. The idea in this first section is to present an overview of the sources of political tension in the country and its tendency to degenerate into a political crisis if these tensions are allowed to linger. The remaining sections will examine: (a) the resilient factors that explain why, unlike other African countries, Senegal has not yet experienced a coup d'état or a major political crisis; and (b) the formal and informal infrastructures for peace that exist in the country.

Elections, Presidential Term Limits, and Political Protests

Senegal remains a country that has never experienced a violent turnover of executive power. The country, however, 'has an ambivalent democratic legacy and has in recent decades oscillated between rather authoritarian periods that were not fully dictatorial

and rather democratic periods that were not fully democratic'¹. For forty years (1960 to 2000), Parti Socialiste du Senegal (PS) ruled Senegal. By 1974, Senghor introduced limited multiparty competition and Abdoulaye Wade's Parti Democratique Senegalais (PDS) was authorized by the Ministry of Interior². In 1980, former president Leopold Sedar Senghor voluntarily resigned from office and handed over power to his Prime Minister, Abdou Diouf who was inaugurated as President in January 1981. Continuing with PS's grip on power, Abdou Diouf won elections in 1983, 1988, and 1993. The PS remained the only ruling party until after the 2000 elections when Abdoulaye Wade, the perennial opposition candidate defeated Abdou Diouf and formed a coalition government led by the PDS³.

Although the PDS's 2000 election victory over the PS was widely viewed as marking a transition to democracy, many of the authoritarian practices that characterized the PS rule persisted under Wade's administration⁴. For instance, key state institutions such as the Constitutional Court and the Autonomous National Elections Commission (CENA) remained politicized. In the case of the CENA, for example, the Ministry of Interior remained in charge of organizing elections⁵. Wade also engaged in the electoral manipulation of the 2007 legislative elections and the proposals to change election rules to tilt the results of the elections in his favor⁶. The opposition and civil society however protested against these manipulations by the Wade administration leading to his defeat in the 2012 presidential elections. These contestations and protests have however remained under the administration of the current President, Mr. Macky Sall, as he is also perceived to be maneuvering to extend his stay beyond the constitutionally mandated two-term limit.

Presently, the country has a multitude of political parties and organizes regular presidential and legislative elections. Since 1963, the country has conducted eleven (11) presidential elections and has democratically elected four presidents (Senghor, Diouf, Wade, Sall). These are reflected in Table A.

¹Heyl, C. (2019, August). Senegal (1970 - 2016): *Presidential Term Limit Reforms Never Come Alone*. Retrieved from Oxford Scholarship Online: <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198837404.001.0001/oso-9780198837404-chapter-17>, 339.

²Ibid.

³Whitfield, L., & Mustapha, A. R. (2009). Conclusion: The Politics of African States in the Era of Democratisation. In *Turning Points in African Democracy* (p. 203). Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd.

⁴Kelly, C. L. (2012). Senegal: What Will Turnover Bring? *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 121-131.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Table A. presidential elections since 1960

Year	President	Political Party
1963	Leopold Sedar Senghor	Union Progressiste Senegalaise (UPS)
1968	Leopold Sedar Senghor	UPS
1973	Leopold Sedar Senghor	UPS
1978	Leopold Sedar Senghor	Parti Socialiste du Senegal (formerly UPS)
1983	Abdou Diouf	Parti Socialiste du Senegal (PS)
1988	Abdou Diouf	PS
1993	Abdou Diouf	PS
2000	Abdoulaye Wade	Parti Democratique Senegalais (PDS)
2007	Abdoulaye Wade	PDS
2012	Macky Sall	Alliance des Forces du Progres (AFP)
2019	Macky Sall	AFP

Source: Author's Construct⁷

Senegal's apparent democratic culture has however been characterized by the 'leadership trap' which has been manifest in the long overstay of power holders or the maneuvering of power holders to extend their stay beyond their term limits⁸. A typical example is the different 'regime's constant maneuvering aimed at disadvantaging opponents'⁹. Under the Wade administration, for instance, Iddrissa Seck (Wade's former Prime Minister) was sacked in 2004 and expelled from the PDS because Wade was concerned that Seck's newly formed party, Rewmi, would reduce the votes of the PDS in the legislative elections¹⁰. Wade postponed these elections (originally slated for 2006) twice, and local elections (originally scheduled for 2008, but ultimately rescheduled for 2009) once¹¹. The Wade administration also employed different tactics to intimidate strong opponents and weaken the opposition. Some examples include the PDS-linked brutal assault of opposition leader Talla Sylla of the Jël Jël Alliance; interrogation of opposition leaders such as Amath Dansokho of the Independence and

Labor Party and Jean-Paul Dias of the Gainde Centrist Bloc by the Division of Criminal Investigation; arrest of Yankhoba Diattara, Idrissa Seck's political assistant in 2015; and the imprisonment of Idrissa Seck on charges of subversion and embezzlement¹².

President Sall also employs similar tactics to strengthen his hold on power. For instance, in November 2020, he appointed the Rewmi party leader, Iddrissa Seck (who came second in the 2019 presidential elections) as the head of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council - a position that makes him one of the most important figures in power thereby weakening the opposition¹³. Moreso, President Sall appointed Abdoul Mbaye as prime minister on April 5, 2012. Then, on 17 April 2013, Karim Wade, son of former president Abdoulaye Wade, was arrested and charged with corruption. Consequently, both Karim Wade and former Dakar Mayor Khalifa Sall were disqualified from contesting in the Presidential Elections because they were convicted of illicit enrichment and embezzlement of public funds¹⁴. In 2021, one of the strongest opposition leaders, Ousmane Sonko, was arrested and detained on charges of rape. Even though he has been released, the charges against him could land him in prison for 20 years thereby nipping his political ambitions in the bud.

Political Protests

The contestations and protests over presidential term limits and term lengths have been a major source of political tension in the country. Opposition parties have reacted to these extra-constitutional maneuverings by ruling parties to extend their stay in government by mobilizing support from the streets where there is widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling government. This section looks into what is considered to be Senegal's most popular and violent protests in the country's history: the 23 June 2011 protests and the March 2021 protests.

In the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, widespread protests took place in different parts of the country against Abdoulaye Wade's bid to run for a third term. Wade's attempts to extend his stay in power beyond the constitutionally mandated term limit included: (a) proposed changes in the electoral

⁷with information from Galvan, D. (2001, July). Francophone Africa in Flux: Political Turnover and Social Change in Senegal. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 51-62; Kelly, C. L. (2012). Senegal: What Will Turnover Bring? *Journal of Democracy*, 23(3), 121-131; Kamba, E. (2013). *Building Democracy in Africa: Did Senegal Pass the Test for Democracy?* Xlibris Corporation.

⁸Kamba, E. (2013). *Building Democracy in Africa: Did Senegal Pass the Test for Democracy?* Xlibris Corporation.

⁹Kelly 2012, op cit p. 121.

¹⁰Kelly 2012, op cit.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Kelly (2012), op cit.

¹³Kanté, A. (2021). Senegal's political turbulence reveals a justice system in crisis. *ISS Today*, , March 19. Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/senegals-political-turbulence-reveals-a-justice-system-in-crisis>.

¹⁴Ibid

rules, including a proposal to lower the threshold from 50 to 25 percent of votes for a presidential candidate to win the election in the first round; (b) proposal to create the position of Vice President which were deemed to attempt to line up his son, Karim Wade as his successor; (c) interpretation of the constitution which allowed him to run for a third term¹⁵. These political maneuverings by former President Wade to secure re-election coupled with growing frustrations over worsening public services, frequent power cuts, floods, corruption, high cost of living, and higher prices for staples sparked violent clashes between riot police and protesters¹⁶.

Alioune Tine, President of the African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights (RADDHO), organized opposing parties, movements, and unions into a group called Touché Pas à Ma Constitution! (Don't Touch My Constitution!) while citizens' movements like Y'en a marre (Fed Up With It) also protested independently¹⁷. Other protesters broke off from the main group and fought supporters of the ruling party between Dakar's main Sandaga market and the National Cathedral¹⁸. These groups of protesters became known as the June 23 Movement (M23). Following the violent protests, the ruling government withdrew the bill on the percentage clause regarding the minimum threshold of 25%, allowing a presidential candidate to win in the first round, from the National Assembly. The protests however continued in areas around the presidency and National Assembly over the remaining clauses – the establishment of the position of vice president¹⁹. On July 23, 2011 (the first anniversary of the M23), a coalition of several opposition political parties and civil society groups opposed to President Wade's plans to run for a third term, organized anti-government demonstrations in Dakar despite the government's ban on protests announced on July 21, 2011²⁰. Contrary to the two-term presidential term limit rule, President Wade maneuvered and got another opportunity to run for a third term. He however lost the 2012 presidential elections because he faced strong opposition from the streets.

The contestation of the tenure rule continued during

Macky Sall's presidency²¹. Moreover, the invalidation of the candidacies of three Presidential candidates and the arrest and detention of a member of the National Assembly and leader of Patriotes du Sénégal pour le Travail, l'Éthique et la Fraternité (Pastef) party, Ousmane Sonko have been perceived as attempts by Sall to extend his term in office. Mr. Sonko was arrested on charges of rape, disturbing public order, and participating in an illegal demonstration. The legal proceedings against Sonko are widely regarded as the government's attempt to prevent an opponent from running for president in 2024²². In response to the speculations that President Macky Sall will run for a third term with the help of the Constitutional Court, Senegal experienced what is reported to be the worst riot in the country's history in March 2021. The Mouvement de défense de la démocratie (M2D) (Movement to Defend Democracy) was formed in March 2021, a group of opposition parties, including PASTEF-Les Patriotes party, and civil society activists and various organisations opposed to President Sall such as Y'en Marre civil society movement and other civilians clashed with law enforcement officers leading to the 'death of at least 11 people and the injury of nearly 590 while scores of protesters were arrested, and the looting and destruction of property, including public buildings, caused significant damage'²³. The protests began on March 3 as Sonko headed to court in Dakar for a hearing to respond to the rape allegation against him²⁴. Even though Sonko was released on March 8 under judicial supervision, demonstrations continued in Dakar and other cities such as Bignona, Thies, and Zinghinchor²⁵. Similar to the cause of the 2011 demonstrations, the March 2021 protests were also sparked by grievances over unemployment, corruption, and economic hardships due to the Covid-19-related restrictions. There were reports of nationwide internet disruptions, suspension of two television channels Sen TV and Walf TV for 72 hours for broadcasting images of the protests, and violent attacks by protesters on two media outlets, the newspaper Le Soleil and the RFM radio station in

¹⁵Villalon, L. A. (2011). *Senegal: Assessing Risks to Instability*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies. Retrieved from https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110623_Villalon_Senegal_Web.pdf.

¹⁶Ba, D., & O'Reilly, F. (2011). *Senegal's Wade withdraws poll bill as protests rage*. June 23. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-senegal-protests-idUSTRE75M6G020110623>.

¹⁷Kelly (2012), op cit.

¹⁸VOA. (2011). *Senegal's Ruling Party Drops Constitutional Changes After Dakar Riots*. June 22. Retrieved from VOAnews.com: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/senegals-ruling-party-drops-constitutional-changes-after-dakar-riots>.

¹⁹Ba, D., & O'Reilly, F. 2011, op cit.

²⁰Heyl, C. (2019). *Senegal (1970 - 2016): Presidential Term Limit Reforms Never Come Alone.*, August. Retrieved from Oxford Scholarship Online: <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198837404.001.0001/oso-9780198837404-chapter-17>.

²¹Ibid.

²²Kante (2021), op cit.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Human Right Watch. (2021, March 12). *Senegal: Respect Free Expression, Assembly*. Retrieved from HRW: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/12/senegal-respect-free-expression-assembly>

²⁵Ibid.

Dakar, which were deemed to be pro-government²⁶.

Resilient Factors and Institutional Mechanisms for Conflict Resolution

Citizens of moral authority

Religious communities, some institutions, and individuals have a wide influence on politics in Senegal. These groups and individuals referred to as citizens of moral authority comprise religious leaders, retired ambassadors, retired professors, retired high court judges, and strong civil society actors, who over the years, have played dynamic roles that have impacted the turn of political events. Widely perceived to be neutral and credible, these citizens of moral authority such as some leaders of civil society organisations such as the Executive Director of the Goree Institute, Mr. Doudou Dia, and Clerics, whether Muslim or Catholic, are accorded high moral authority because they tend to speak up against poor democratic practices in the country. During the March 2021 protests, for instance, both the President and the Opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko reached out to religious leaders to intervene. In response, statements were issued by bishops of the Episcopal Conference of the Ecclesiastical province of Dakar which contributed to the restoration of order. It was widely reported that if these leaders had spoken up earlier, the damages to lives and property would have been prevented.

Since the time of Abdou Diouf as President, ruling governments and opposition parties have had symbiotic relationships with some religious leaders. Due to their personal charisma, political alliances, lineages and genealogies, and increasingly global economic networks; the Sufi orders, and the major marabouts (spiritual guides), have become actors with extraordinary weight in Senegalese social, political, and economic life²⁷. Politicians have cultivated good relations with these spiritual guides because of the 'symbolic legitimacy of the authority of the marabout in the eyes of both disciples and the state', their large following, and their capacity to determine electoral outcomes in the country²⁸. In 2012, for instance, Abdoulaye Wade pressured Marabouts to issue

holy orders (Ndiguels) to their disciples to vote for him²⁹. Despite the involvement of some marabouts in politics, they continue to play significant roles as voices for limiting the arbitrary exercise of power and as forces for social and political stability³⁰. In the run-up to the 2012 elections, for example, it is reported that Justice Minister Cheikh Tidiane Sy told the National Assembly that the reason he withdrew the election law regarding the reduction in the threshold (25%, instead of the previous 50%+) that allows a presidential candidate to win a first-round victory was that 'the President received messages from far afield, especially our religious leaders, and, as a result, he called on me to withdraw the law'³¹.

No Division Along Ethnic Lines

More than 20 ethnic groups are represented in Senegal, with diverse languages and cultural traditions³². The predominant ethnic groups include Wolof (43.3%), Halpulaar (23.8%), Serer (14.7%), Diola (3.7%), and a few others which are spread across the country³³. Wolofs and Pulaars tend to be Muslims, and Christians tend to be found more among the Serer and Diola ethnic groups, however, interethnic relations among them are strong³⁴. Another important factor is the practice of good neighborliness in the different communities where families have the practice of sharing food with other families or eating together with people from other families. And while they eat together, they use the opportunity to tell stories. Because of the bonds that have been built through communal living, people do not want to do anything to hurt their neighbors. Moreover, kinship ties extend across regions and interethnic marriages are common. At these ceremonies, cultural symbols – different shades of kola nuts, ginger, and doughnuts - are used to drive home certain cultural values. In a nutshell, there appears to be a strong sense of civic consciousness or nationalism among citizens who identify themselves first as Senegalese rather than by their ethnicity.³⁵

Unlike in other countries in the region where ethnicity plays a crucial role in politics, in Senegal, ethnic boundaries are blur and play a lesser role in politics³⁶. This is primarily because political parties are ethnically

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Laughlin, F. M., & Mboup, B. (2010). Mediation and the performance of religious authority in Senegal. *Islamic Africa*, 1(1), 39-61. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42656315>

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Kelly 2012, op cit.

³⁰Villalon, L. A. (2011). Senegal: *Assessing Risks to Instability*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies. Retrieved from https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110623_Villalon_Senegal_Web.pdf.

³¹Ba, D., & O'Reilly, F. 2011, op cit.

³²Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. (2016). The Religious Landscape in Senegal: An Overview. *Policy Brief*. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/berkley-center/160520BCWFDDReligiousLandscapeSenegalOverviewPolicyBrief.pdf>.

³³WANEP Senegal. (2021). *Suivi de la situation sécuritaire lors des dernières manifestations au Sénégal*. Dakar.

³⁴Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs 2016, op cit.

³⁵Galvan, D. (2001). Francophone Africa in Flux: Political Turnover and Social Change in Senegal. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 51-62.

diverse, and ethnicity does not have much relevance for individuals' party affiliation³⁷. Even though parties do not compete along ethnic lines, what is evident is the mobilization of voters based on their ethnic origin.

Table B. Ethnic composition of Ruling governments (1960 to 2021)

Year	President	Ethnic Group	Power relations of ethnic groups in government
1960	Leopold Senghor	Serer	The government included representatives from all regions, and ethnic and religious groups ³⁸ . Even though a Serer, Wolof elites, for example, were repeatedly named prime ministers and army chiefs. Diola and other leaders from the Casamance, who were organizing themselves politically before and after independence were absorbed by Senghor's national party and included in the structures of the central state ³⁹
1981 – 2002	Abdou Diouf	Wolof	Wolof, the dominant ethnic group in the country, was already dominant in the civil service ⁴⁰ . Just as in the case of Senghor's regime, Diouf maintained regional and ethnic balance including the Diola, and Mandingue in his appointments.
2002 – 2012	Abdoulaye Wade		A good number of cabinet members hailed from minority ethnic groups

2013 – 2021	Macky Sall	Half Pulaar (father) and half Serer (mother)	Persecution of opposition candidates, Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade but no evidence of ethnic exclusion in the national government
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Source: Author's construct based on data from multiple sources

A look at the ethnic composition of leaders of government and other state institutions from 1960 to date suggests that the different governments in the different political dispensations have maintained some level of pluralism in government. Senghor, for instance, was a member of both a religious and ethnic minority (a Catholic Serer), which assuaged the fears of smaller groups that they would be dominated by the largest group, the predominantly Muslim Wolof, who account for more than 40% of the Senegalese population⁴¹. Interethnic tensions are not completely absent and there are complaints about ethnic favoritism, but these tensions and complaints are unrelated to the question of who qualifies as a Senegalese citizen⁴². Ethnicity has historically been of very limited political significance in Senegal. While people who identify themselves ethnically as Wolof make up about 40 percent of the population, the Wolof language serves widely as lingua franca, which is spoken (often as a second or third language) by perhaps as many as 90 percent of the population, and in all major urban areas⁴³.

Interfaith Peace And Dialogue / Religious Coexistence

Senegal is a country with a large Muslim population (about 95 percent) and Christians and other religious groups represent a small minority⁴⁴. Senegal is renowned for its commitment to interfaith peace and dialogue, and the government has long promoted interreligious harmony⁴⁵. Officially, Islamic and Christian holidays are recognized, however, both Muslims and Christians in the country join in the celebration of the different religious festivities. People from the different religious backgrounds also come together to perform funerals. Even though some communities still practice a caste system where certain groups are not allowed to intermarry, generally interreligious marriages occur,

³⁶Creevey, L., Ngomo, P., & Vengroff, R. (2005). Party politics and different paths to democratic transitions: A Comparison of Benin and Senegal. *Party Politics*, 11(4), 471 – 493.

³⁷Cheeseman, N., & Ford, R. (2007,). Ethnicity as a political cleavage. *Afrobarometer Working Papers*(No. 83), November.

³⁸Creevey, L., Ngomo, P., & Vengroff, R. 2005, op cit.

³⁹Fall, A. (2010). Understanding the Casamance Conflict: A Background. *KAIPTC Monograph* (7), 10.

⁴⁰O'Brien, D. C. (1998). The Shadow-Politics of Wolofisation. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36(1), 28.

⁴¹Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2020). *BTI Senegal 2020 Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Villalon (2011). op cit.

⁴⁴See Naila Salihu & Devante Duncan, 2022. Potential Drivers of Jihadism and Radicalisation in Senegal. Occasional Paper 45, Accra: KAIPTC.

⁴⁵Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs (2016). op cit.

where both a priest and an imam are allowed to officiate the ceremony. However, there have been isolated incidents of religious intolerance in recent years such as the vandalism of Christian statues and graveyards⁴⁶.

Historically, the country has positioned itself as a leader in interfaith dialogue and relations, with various religious leaders and communities involved in interfaith activities and global interfaith organizations⁴⁷. Examples of Interfaith groups include the Cadre des Religieux pour la Santé et le Développement (Group of Religious Leaders for Health and Development), composed of Muslim and Christian leaders representing Senegal's main religious traditions and institutions who work together to improve maternal and child health in their communities⁴⁸. An important factor that has promoted peaceful coexistence between the different religious groups is education. Religious education plays an important role in driving these sociocultural values. Children of Muslim and Christian parents go to the same schools – particularly schools run by the Catholic Church where they learn from an early age to be tolerant and respectful of people from other religious groupings.

Political Committee for National Dialogue

This Committee was created by President Macky Sall in 2020 to deal with the issues of widespread mistrust and suspicion regarding the 2019 general elections. Composed of representatives from various political parties in the country, 27 issues were put before the committee for resolution. A consensus was reached on 25 issues. The issues on which consensus has been reached include, among other things, the election by direct universal suffrage of mayors and presidents of departmental councils, and the harmonization of the percentage distribution of seats in departmental elections with municipal elections⁴⁹. Two issues were left unaddressed. These include: (a) the proposition for all opposition parties to come under one leader and (b) the status of a sitting president doubling as leader of the political party he or she represents and the tenure of office of sitting presidents. With the regards to the issue of leadership of opposition parties, there was opposition from members of the National Assembly who had divergent views on the

issue. The view of the members of the opposition parties is that they prefer to maintain their diversity. The other issue relating to the resignation of a sitting president from his party when he is elected president has been deemed by the ruling government to be non-negotiable. The contention is that the Head of State comes to power through mobilizing the support of voters, 'so to tell this man to break with that is to cut the cord that connects him to his people. That does not make sense. A president must be political first and foremost⁵⁰.

It is, however, envisaged that if this separation between the president and party leader is done, the risk of conflict between the interests of the Senegalese people and the party will be reduced⁵¹. The disagreements over the dual role of President and leader of one's political party has become paramount in the country because some citizens feel that the ruling government wields too much influence over state institutions and tends to protect members of their party who commit crimes from being prosecuted.

The Political Committee for National Dialogue has made some progress with its deliberations and it is expected that this will pave the way for other outstanding issues such as the audit of the voters' register and the evaluation of electoral processes which would involve members of all political parties⁵².

Le Médiateur de la République (Mediator of the Republic)

As an independent administrative authority, the Office of the Mediator provides a medium for receiving and addressing grievances regarding the operations of the Administration, state institutions, and local authorities⁵³. The current Mediator of the Republic used to be a minister of foreign affairs who was sacked by President Macky Sall. There are reports that he was appointed as a Mediator to appease him. However, following the March 2021 protests, the Mediator of the Republic, Alioune Baadara Cissé, exerted his authority by making statements on the events leading to the protests and proposing a

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid .

⁴⁹Sakhanokho, S. (2020,). *Fin de la première phase des travaux du Dialogue politique : 23 points d'accords, 2 désaccords et 5 questions en suspens*. September 10. Retrieved from Pressafrik: https://www.pressafrik.com/Fin-de-la-premiere-phase-des-travaux-du-Dialogue-politique-23-points-d-accords-2-desaccords-et-5-questions-en-suspens_a221093.html

⁵⁰Faye, E. M. (2020). *Dialogue Politique au Senegal*. , December 13. Retrieved from Enquetepius: <https://www.enquetepius.com/content/dialogue-politique-au-senegal-les-v%C3%A9rit%C3%A9s-du-pr%C3%A9sident-macky-sall>.

⁵¹Kante (2021) ,op cit.

⁵²Faye (2020), op cit.

⁵³CDIIG-Department OF Relations with Institutions. (2015). *The Mediator of the French Republic*. Retrieved from Directorate of Relations with Institutions: <https://www.dri.gouv.sn/le-m%C3%A9diateur-de-la-r%C3%A9publique-r%C3%A9gulateur-des-rapports-entre-les-pouvoirs-publics-et-les-citoyens#read>

solution. Even though his position does not allow him to intervene in political issues, his speech purportedly contributed to calming tensions. He called on the President of the country to speak to the protestors, calm tensions, and promise compensation for people who have been affected by the protests⁵⁴. Portions of the statement made by the Mediator were also directed to the Minister of Interior who was advised to stop threatening and terrorizing protestors⁵⁵. The Mediator's statement also targeted disaffected youth groups and other protestors who were advised to choose a peaceful means of resolving their grievances. Though his statement was widely perceived to be neutral, there were views that the Mediator was able to speak up because: (i) his term of office ends in August 2022 and, (ii) he was eyeing the position of presidential candidate in the next presidential elections.

Conclusion

This paper discusses two enduring features of Senegalese politics: coopting of opposition parties by

the ruling government to weaken the opposition and the political maneuverings of sitting presidents to extend their stay in power beyond the constitutionally mandated term limits. The paper highlights the fact that of these two main features, the major source of political tension emanates from the contestation over presidential term limits and the manipulation of the electoral process by ruling parties. Using political protests from 2000 – 2021 (from the Wade administration to date) as case studies, the paper identifies the underlying causes of the protests and the different actors involved. What is striking about these protests is the level of involvement of civil society and how their mobilization tends to influence electoral outcomes in the country. The remaining sections of the paper then provide some sort of explanatory framework for why Senegal has not experienced a takeover despite the different sources of political tension in the country. These sections look at the resilient factors, the conflict resolution mechanisms, and how they have contributed to the transformation of sources of political tension in Senegal.

⁵⁴Daily. (2021). *Alioune Badara Cissé asks Macky to "talk to the Senegalese"*. March 7. Retrieved from Le Quotidien: <https://lequotidien.sn/alioune-badara-cisse-demande-a-macky-de-parler-aux-senegalais/>

⁵⁵Ibid.



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