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Senegal

# Tension in Senegal as regime faces elections

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**While Senegal's opposition won the municipal elections in January 2022, taking control of several major cities, including the capital Dakar, incumbent president Macky Sall is now trying to prevent the opposition repeating its electoral success in the parliamentary elections. A showdown being played out against a backdrop of social crisis.**

A strategy of tension was put in place as soon as the new mayors took office. Prefectural appeals vetoed the first measures of the city councillors. In Ziguinchor, the biggest city in Casamance, won by Ousmane Sonko, Sall's main opponent, the prefecture challenged the replacement of city street names from the colonial past by others more linked to the country's history. A name change demanded by elected officials as an act of dignity for the Senegalese people. Other measures under attack include the creation of a municipal civic service and the internal reorganisation of the municipality. In Dakar, the administration filed an appeal to challenge the hiring of Guy Marius Sagna, one of the main activists of the radical left who has been active in the struggle against the presence of French imperialism in the country.

## Removing the opposition

Now, Macky Sall is attacking the right of the opposition to participate fully in the parliamentary elections by hiding behind the decision of the Constitutional Council. The High Court has simply annulled the electoral list of the opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) ("Liberate the People") because one candidate was also on the list of substitutes. The main opposition leaders will therefore not be able to compete in the parliamentary elections to be held on 31 July 2022. Macky Sall argues that his list was also invalidated because of the non-respect of parity. A much less disabling measure for the presidential coalition Benno Bokk Yakaar ("Uniting around the same hope"). Sall's goal is to win the majority of the 165 seats to continue his neoliberal policy.

## The authoritarian drift of the regime

An initial demonstration of tens of thousands of people took place on 8 June to protest against the exclusion of the opposition-led list. Faced with its success, the government has now undertaken to ban all demonstrations by the opposition. The latter maintained its call to demonstrate on 17 June. A violent crackdown fell on the demonstrators. Three people were killed including at least one by shooting in Ziguinchor, while two hundred demonstrators were arrested including two deputies, Déthié Fall and Mame Diarra Fame. The first was given a six-month suspended sentence. As for Ousmane Sonko, the police prevented him from leaving his residence. If Senegalese justice is extremely picky in dismissing a list, it shows much more freedom when it comes to ignoring the decision of the ECOWAS Court of Justice of 31 March 2022 condemning Senegal for attacking the right to demonstrate. The violence stems from the fact that demonstrations are prohibited and that the police are encouraged to confront peaceful demonstrators.

## Popular discontent

Ousmane Sonko called on people to express their discontent about the deterioration of living conditions through a

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concert of car horns and banging pots. Youth unemployment is structural, with only a third of young graduates finding a job. Forty percent of the population lives below the poverty line and social protection benefits only a tiny part of the population. This situation pushes some young people to try to reach Europe at the cost of their lives. The fire in a dilapidated maternity ward caused by an electrical short circuit, in which eleven babies died, reflects the state of the country's social infrastructure.

While YAW had originally planned to call for a new protest, this was cancelled, indicating a change in strategy. The idea now is to participate in the election with the list of substitutes alone and win the elections to avert the threat of a third presidential term. If the constitution allows only two consecutive terms, the presidency maintains doubt on this issue.

This case is not new in Senegal. The previous president, Abdoulaye Wade had also tried to stay in power by imposing a third term with the approval of the Constitutional Court. His prime minister at the time campaigned against this anti-democratic behaviour and won the presidential election. It was a certain Macky Sall.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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