

Brief overview of the role of CSOs role on the the democratic process in Senegal

In Senegal, civil society has long been associated with the defense of human rights and the emancipation of women, but it was President Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to fiddle with the constitution for a third term in 2011 that prompted civil society to take up the cause of safeguarding democratic gains. However, signs of its involvement in political life date back to 2005, when various organizations proposed the holding of a national conference, an idea taken up by the opposition after the boycott of the 2007 legislative elections.

It was in June 2011, just as the regime at the time wanted to pass a law in the National Assembly that would lower to 25% the minimum threshold of votes needed in the first round to elect a "presidential ticket", that civil society returned to the forefront, led by the Mouvement du 23 Juin (M23). A heterogeneous alliance ranging from the Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'homme (RADDHO) and the Forum civil to the most prominent opposition politicians of the day, including Macky Sall. The M23's massive demonstrations in every district of Dakar prompted President Wade to withdraw his constitutional reform.

In Senegal, civil society is protean. We have organizations labelled as radicals, moderates, negotiators... But it also includes all categories of social life, in other words, all the driving forces of the nation, from trade unions to traditional chiefs, not forgetting the religious leaders who, on several occasions, have saved Senegal from falling into crises.

Since Macky Sall's accession to the supreme magistracy in 2012, civil society has been divided between radicals and advocates of negotiation. During the first dialogue organized by the government, many civil society organizations did not take part. However, there is still a part of civil society that is ready to engage in dialogue, in line with a very Senegalese tradition. Among these CSOs, the best known is the Collective of Civil Society Organizations for the Elections (COSCE). The same scenario is being repeated in the 2023 dialogue, due to end on June 24.

However, the hard core of Senegalese civil society is the Mouvement forces vives du Sénégal (F24).

What does F24 stand for ?

F24 is made up April 16 2023 by members of civil society, opposition and independent politicians, trade unions... In other words, 112 political entities led by citizens' organizations calling on President Macky Sall to abandon his bid for a third term in office. But also the abolition of articles L 29 and L 30 of the electoral code and all the legal-political tricks, such as sponsorship and sponsored verdicts, which have prevented and/or are likely to render candidates ineligible for the 2024 presidential election...

The platform's coordinator is Mamadou Mbodj, an insider who was also a member of the M23 in 2011. His vice-president is Aliou Sané, coordinator of the Y'en A Marre movement. Y'en A Marre was founded by young people from urban cultural backgrounds, mainly to denounce the high cost of living and, ultimately, to fight against Wade's third candidacy.

All the major forces of the Senegalese opposition are represented in F24. Although at the time of its creation, F24 claimed that its sole compass was to defend the Constitution, many of its detractors believe that it is more concerned with the personal problems of certain opponents of Macky Sall, such as Ousmane Sonko. To avoid becoming a political tool, the platform still hopes to convince trade unions and religious leaders to join it.

Unlike President Abdoulaye Wade, who coincided with a time when the use of the Internet to improve democratic functioning (civic tech) was in its infancy in Senegal. Although there was an electoral monitoring initiative called Sunu2012 to ensure that the 2012 ballot was conducted properly.

Macky Sall is facing an opposition that is using the power of its keyboard and ideas to let the whole world know what's going on in Senegal in no time at all. Despite several attempts to control the Internet and social networks, it has recently become clear, with all the attempts to muzzle dissident voices, that cyberspace is the last bastion against an anti-democratic drift which, if we're not careful, will set us back ten years.

By Abdou Aziz Cissé