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Spring 2006

## Democracy in Senegal: A Case Study of Democratic Success in Africa

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Democracy in Senegal:  
A Case Study of  
Democratic Success in Africa

RACHAEL LAMBERT

SPRING QUARTER 2006  
HONORS THESIS

## HONORS THESIS

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Democracy as an ideal is an integral part of the Western understanding of the world. The spread and growth of democratic governments is seen as a victory of Western values. Democracy, however, has not been an easy transition for many developing countries. The troubles facing emergent democracies are numerous and multifaceted. For the continent of Africa, the last four decades have been a testament to the difficulty of building a stable democracy in former European colonies. With fifty-three countries dividing Africa, only a handful can claim the status of being a consolidated democracy. Senegal is an example of a former French colony that has enjoyed relative success in comparison to its fellow former colonies. The triumph of democracy, a stable government and a relatively secure economy are anomalies on the African continent, but seem to have been fostered by the Senegalese government. The process of democratization in Senegal is equally unique in its lack of bloodshed, violence or revolution. Why has Senegal been successful in establishing a stable democracy? Senegal's history of political liberalization and democratization can be understood by examining its historical experiences as a French colony, the processes of democratic transition, and its unique cultural experience.

#### **A. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS**

Democracy as an ideal was introduced during the "first wave" of democratization. This process was marked by revolution and bloodshed during the Revolutionary War in the United States from 1775-1783 and the French Revolution from 1789-1799. (Huntington, 1991, 16). The French and American revolutions provide the modern basis for understanding democratic principles and ideals. The notion of "*liberté, égalité, and fraternité*" sparked the movement that led to the democratization of France and the United States. While these ideals remain in place and have spread across the globe, the

international political context has changed dramatically. The countries which themselves struggled for independence and democracy spent much of the nineteenth century ensuring that other countries would have delayed opportunity at sovereignty by instituting colonial policies. The results of decolonisation beginning in the late 1950's are difficult to gauge, but while the international context has changed, the rules of democracy for former colonies have not.

Democracy has ultimately become synonymous with representative democracy. It has come to be understood that, "the most basic requirement for democracy is that citizens be empowered to choose and remove leaders...as long as that election is freely and fairly conducted within a matrix of civil liberties." (Van de Walle, 1997: 12). However, this alone does not constitute a democratic government. The process of democratic transition includes democratic consolidation whereby citizens recognize democracy and the outcomes of elections as the "only game in town". Only after the acceptance of election results does the true development of democratization reveal itself through the consolidation process, because "only true democracies can become consolidated democracies." (Stepan, 2001: 296). This includes many hurdles for governments in transition such as a rise in civil society whereby citizens may voluntarily participate in political discourse, independent election administrations to ensure that elections and transfers of power are free and fair, viable political opposition parties, constitutional courts ensuring rule by law, independent legislative bodies and a free press. These requirements are at the center of building a stable democracy. While the elections are the initial step in democratic transitions, they are just the beginning for building the institutions necessary for a consolidated democracy.

Free and fair elections and the subsequent democratic consolidation are processes whereby countries become stable democracies. Countries are considered stable by, “the degree to which the political system may be expected to remain in existence.” (Huntington, 10). Many factors help ensure the survival of political systems including leaders committed to democratic transitions, lack of ethnic conflict and economic improvements. But the most important factor influencing the durability of democracy is liberalization. The establishment of a liberal democratic government in its most infantile stages is itself an aid to stability whereby, “democracy also contributes to stability by providing regular opportunities for changing political leaders and changing public policies.” (Huntington, 28). These incremental efforts at building a consolidated democracy through institutions are affected by the corresponding liberalization of institutions. It is seen that, “indeed, liberalization was a necessary precondition of democratization.” (Van de Walle, 277). The progression of liberalization and democratization is not, however, a process with linear patterns. The trend towards democracy has been countered by reversals to authoritarian regimes and military coups. But for countries on their way towards achieving consolidation, “change rarely occurs dramatically overnight; it is almost always moderate and incremental.” (Huntington, 29). This can result in countries that proceed through the initial stages of democratic elections but stall on consolidation and institution building and can be characterized as “semi-democracies”. These countries can institute liberal election policies but fail to create viable political opposition. Therefore, democracy as an ideal can only be achieved by liberal policies and institution building to create consolidated and stable democratic governments.

## **B. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN AFRICA**

Democratization in Africa did not proceed, as in the Western part of the world, along linear paths in its democratic transitions. African politics have been marked by turmoil and bloodshed that have left lasting impacts on the democratization process. The “second wave” of democratization that began after World War Two included some of Eastern Europe, Japan and Korea along with the “third wave” of democratization that began in 1974 and included much of Africa produced mixed results in the immediate years to follow. (Huntington, 19). In places such as Botswana and Mauritius which were democratized during the “second wave”, democracy has endured. The success of these two countries is countered by the many democratic reversals including those in Nigeria, Ghana, Lebanon and the Sudan. Beginning in 1960 as countries in Africa began decolonialization, state building became the most crucial responsibility of decolonialization because with, “no state, no democracy.” (Stepan, 296). Through the process of state building many factors have been singled out to explain the success and failures of the African countries. These include the economic development of the country, social modernization, political leaders committed to democracy, “occupation by a pro-democratic power” (Huntington, 37), and the absence of civil violence. While these factors aided in the eventual success of some countries, they cannot be used to explain all post-colonial experiences.

The motivations for countries in Africa to pursue democratization following decolonization were varied and greatly impacted the survival of stable governments. Democracy initially was a method of reform that was primarily seen as “the removal of the potent arsenal of repressive restrictions on political organization which all colonial

states had assembled, enormously facilitated the task of mobilizing mass support for independence.” (Joseph, 1999: 17). Democracy and elections were seen as being one and the same as independence. Furthermore, the development of democratic institutions was in many cases part of the decolonialization pact between colony and colonizer.

Democracy was seen as a way to achieve independence from their colonizers and produced incentives for African states to democratize. Independence as an incentive to democratize did not however instill Western liberal democratic values and ideals. While democracy was seen as a theoretical ideal for many African countries, the reality of their situation was harsh. After independence the main task of state building required rapid economic development and social organization in part due to the long period of economic exploitation from the colonizers. The tasks at hand were daunting and the chaos that ensued was partly caused by the forcible acceptance of democracy before instituting liberal social and political policies. These countries all too frequently fell to the forces of authoritarian regimes that were trying to achieve state-led development without opposition and the goals were, “in most African countries, the setting into place of an authoritarian state and a one-party regime, aimed at concentrating all decision making powers in the hands of the central authorities and at eliminating any group liable to oppose the established power structure.” (Diamond, 1988: 149).

Many variables have been used to explain the failure of democratization in Africa and one of the most frequently used correlations is that between political democracy and economic wealth. Following independence, the majority of African countries were considered low-income nations. The struggle to establish a stable economy was mirrored in the struggle to establish a stable government. Huntington’s research led him to believe,



“the correlation between wealth and democracy implies that transitions to democracy should occur primarily in countries at the middle levels of economic development. In poor countries democratization is unlikely, in rich countries it has already occurred.” (Huntington, 60). If this analysis proves to be correct, Africa would be prepared for dismal failure in democratic transitions. The lack of stable economic wealth led many nations to centralize finances and establish state-led economies that allowed for political power to remain in the hands of the few and even in places like Mauritius where democracy had prevailed “the country's political stability has been underpinned by steady economic growth and improvements in the island's infrastructure and standard of living.” (*Freedom House: 2005 Mauritius*). Mali, however, provides a compelling argument against this variable. After being controlled by a military dictatorship under Moussa Traore for over thirty years, Mali underwent democratization in 1991 despite being considered by Freedom House as “desperately poor”. While the economic development of a country provides compelling evidence to explain democratic potential, it is not the only contributing factor to democracy. The years that followed independence give compelling testimony to the varying factors and struggles facing democratic consolidation.

Nearly thirty years after decolonialization, only eighteen countries in sub-Saharan Africa were considered to have competitive elections and of those only five were multiparty systems, whereas twenty-nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa were functioning without any form of competitive elections. (Van de Walle, 79). The early nineties brought with it “democratization in fits and starts” (Fomunyoh, 2001: 37). marked by gradual shifts in leadership. The places that enjoyed the most success on their

way towards democracy seem to have been former British colonies. Among the “variables that have been said to contribute to democracy and democratization,” having an “experience as a British colony” (Huntington, 37). In Africa, this variable remained true. The majority of democratic transitions occurred in former British colonies. Portugal and Belgian did not have similar success with their former colonies, and France, although not to such an extreme extent, also lagged behind Great Britain in democratic developments in its former colonies. Great Britain’s success in producing stable democracies was in part due to the structure of “rule of law” and electoral systems that were implemented during colonialization under policies of indirect rule. Indirect rule usually was synonymous with the policy of “association” whereby local institutions and social structures remained intact and only an indirect form of administrative rule was imposed. (Delavignette: 1968, 50). Most colonies were afforded general voting rights to determine local leaders who governed under the British Empire. These policies and practices established a strong sense of democratic identity and firmly rooted liberal policies into their colonies.

While former British colonies were initially more successful, the nineties brought new opportunities for francophone Africa to democratize. Democratization began to carry new incentives for African countries especially from former colonizers such as France who, “publicly embraced democratization by linking vital economic assistance to democracy promotion.” (Fomunyoh, 41). With the rise of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and their influence on political development, there were even greater reasons to embrace democracy. The politics that motivated the IMF and the World Bank inevitably were influential to the recipients and the distribution of

funds heavily depended on the former colonies ability to follow through on liberal and democratic policies. Although the international community had become more proactive in human rights advocacy and promoting democracy, the response was varied in francophone Africa.

By 2001, only four countries in francophone Africa were considered by the Freedom House to be on their way towards achieving democratic consolidation. Benin, Mali, Mauritius and Senegal were the only countries where democratic transitions were considered a certainty. Benin has become the model for democratic transitions since in 1991 when the military rule of Mathieu Kérékou came to an end through an election and he peacefully stepped down from power. Mauritius, where democracy has endured since independence, is considered to be one country that has already attained consolidation. (*Freedom House: 2005 Mauritius*). Mali and Senegal both have taken gradual steps since independence to transition from “semi-democracies” into full democracies. The success of these countries lies in part with the political leaders that facilitated democratic changes. Kérékou in Benin and Leopold Sedar Senghor in Senegal both relinquished power in an attempt to bolster democratic processes. Their success was countered by the many failures in places like Le Côte D’Ivoire and Mauritania where ethnic and regional strife have continued to be prevalent.

### **C. EXTERNAL CAUSES FOR DEMOCRATIC**

The causes for democratic transition and consolidation in Senegal have their roots in its unique colonial experience. Under the French, Senegal developed many liberal and democratic policies which would affect their social expectations and norms about politics

after independence in part because, “From the mid-nineteenth century, the Senegalese elite acquired the habit of political debate and skills of political mobilization, organization, and management.” (Diamond, 9). The views and the policies of colonisation had varied results and outcomes throughout the colonies of French West Africa. The wide differences in success those former French colonies had in establishing stable governments following independence is a testimony to the diverse experiences of the colonies. The transition towards democratic consolidation was unique for Senegal and can be explained in part by the effects of French colonisation. To understand the success of Senegal, it is imperative to explore its unique colonial history under French rule.

As imperialism swept through Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, France was busy ensuring its interest in building a colonial empire in western Africa. French West Africa was a vast area of land which was divided by distance, climate, culture, religion and ethnicity. This immense acquisition to the francophone world, as culturally and ethnically different as it may have been, was ruled through the same method of direct administrative rule. The implementation of French rule was done through a system of assimilation. The goal of assimilation was centered on the belief that French culture was superior and more civilized than their African counter-part. It is also assumed through assimilation that due to the superiority of French culture it was mandatory to convert their newly acquired regions in Africa to the same French standard. Assimilation referred to the ‘civilizing’ of African religion, law, social structure and language. The term that was employed to describe the brave mission the French were undertaking in West Africa and abroad in 1895 was *mission civilisatrice*, literally

referring to a civilizing mission. (Conklin: 1997, 4). The mission's goals went beyond those of economics, nationalism and politics. It was a way to reconcile its aggressive imperialism with its republican values and ideals that dated back to the French Revolution. (Conklin, 5). The goals of the mission were complex and reflected nationalistic pride and beliefs in their own superiority. The dominant sentiment was that "while the material control of nature through science and technology was certainly central to French definitions of civilization, it always shared pride of place with a belief that republican France had achieved unparalleled supremacy in moral, cultural, and social sphere as well."

In contrast to other imperialist nations at the time, France employed the techniques of "assimilation" instead of "association" in regards to ruling their new "possessions". While assimilation is usually synonymous with direct administrative rule, the French policy varied from country to country. The policy was to only keep African institutions in place when they did not conflict with French ideals. This policy was quickly abandoned after continued problems in the Western Sudan. It became commonplace practice to "eradicate all African institutions including language, slavery, customary law and "feudal" chieftaincies." (Conklin, 6). However, Senegal was a special case. It was the most economically profitable colony due to the lucrative peanut industry it had developed. The continued success that the peanut crop had throughout their colonial history was due to the collaboration between the old chiefs and the French administrators. This special treatment was mutually beneficial because "by agreeing to allow the former aristocracy to stay and carry out routine administrative tasks, even when Dakar's instructions were to the contrary, the different lieutenant governors of the colony

had ensured that the successful peanut crops of the pre-colonial era had continued under colonial rule” (Conklin, 156). This would have been very beneficial for Senegalese. They were in essence allowed to continue their practices with minimal interference by the French. This led to a much more minimal impact on the lives of the Senegalese than other communities in French West Africa. France employed a unique technique of implementing both association and assimilation policies in Senegal that produced beneficial results.

The treatment afforded to the Senegalese may in part have been due to their status as an important port town. Dakar, the capital of Senegal, had been in contact with Europeans as early as 1445 on the Senegal River and contact with France was made in the early 1600’s (Ngom, 2002: 1-2). Dakar and St. Louis became international hubs for commerce within West Africa. Their situation along important navigable rivers ensured that they were the port of entry into Western Africa. Not only were the Senegalese in contact with Europeans from an early date, their location was a crossroads for many different African cultures. They were introduced to Islam long before the arrival of the Europeans and had established trade routes throughout Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, due to the location of the Senegal River, large cities such as Dakar and St. Louis became Europeanized ports that included communities of Euro-African families who were educated in French and European culture. The early exposure that the Senegalese had early on to Western culture may have softened the blow of colonialism because of their earlier familiarization with the French culture in the port towns. Although the process of assimilation produced many negative outcomes in West Africa, the experience was buffered by its early introduction in Senegal. Because of its early

interactions with the outside world especially Europe, it was afforded opportunities for further education in Europe and abroad. It was especially common for children who were of Euro-African descent to participate in overseas education programs. This opportunity for higher education was more common in Senegal than many other French colonies and helped to, “diffuse democratic values and aspirations to some extent.” (Diamond, 9). The status of their relationship with France only became stronger.

During the mid nineteenth century Senegal, under the French, began exercising democratic rights and privileges in the districts known as the Four Communes. These Communes included Saint Louis, Dakar, Gorée and Rufisque. (Diamond, 142). With the creation of these districts, a small number of Senegalese citizens were granted French citizenship and were able to participate in electing a deputy to the French National Assembly to represent Senegal. (Diamond, 142). Senegal which was seen as the preferred colony of French West Africa, was the first colony before liberation to ensure representation within the French National Assembly. Continuing the democratic tradition, in 1879 the French government instituted a General Council in Senegal that included elected representatives from the Four Communes. And in 1914 Blaise Diagne became the first black African deputy to serve in the French government. This policy was much more similar to British colonial policy of indirect rule, whereby local leaders were allowed to exercise their political power under the advisement of the British government, than it was to the practices in other French colonies that did not experience the same political liberalization that Senegal did. Although these rights were limited and did not include the entire Senegalese population, “it clearly had an important impact on Senegalese political life. It fostered the habit of political competition, mobilized social forces around political

groups, and, above all, allowed a few Africans to be members of consultative bodies.” (Diamond, 142). This experience was not mirrored in other French colonies whose first experiences with democratic elections were oftentimes not until independence. Cochinchina was the only other French colony at the time to have elections and representation institutionalized in a General Council. (Roberts, 1963: 85). These policies and institutions were reflected in the 1960 constitution following independence which was influenced by the 1958 French constitution. The establishment of the Senegalese constitution, “called for a liberal, parliamentary democracy in which power is shared and civil liberties are guaranteed.” (Coulon, 1988: 146).

The rights afforded the Senegalese no doubt shaped their eventual success in establishing a constitutional democracy. But their achievements are also an indication that instituting liberal policies before democracy was beneficial in order to instill democratic ideals. Although French citizenship and election rights were limited initially to the Four Communes, in 1920 a decree allowed for extended voting rights to other areas in Senegal. (Roberts, 87). It is, “interesting to note that the French colony in which the African elite was given the earliest and most significant role in political life, Senegal, is today the most democratic of France’s former African colonies.” (Diamond, 8). Since independence Senegal has continued to establish and respect civil liberties throughout the country which has contributed to the success of democracy. Senegal’s colonial history, including its favor with the French, contributed to the current political climate in the country. The policies of France are crucial to understanding the process of democratic transition that Senegal underwent throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s. The colonial experience of Senegal, however difficult and unjustified, reinforced many liberal



democratic values that are reflected in their modern political institutions. But their colonial experience only helps to explain part of their democratic success. The internal dynamics of the country provide another set of explanations that are helpful in deciphering why Senegal was successful with democracy while others failed.

#### **D. INTERNAL CAUSES FOR DEMOCRACY**

The diversity of Senegal's culture and communities are reflections of the pluralistic society that has developed there and its roots can be found in the unique history of the country. The population of Senegal is comprised of different religious, ethnic and linguistic communities that have cohabitated in relative peace for the past hundred years and has been the key to the stability of the country. The success of democracy in Senegal is in part due to the ability of different social leaders to find common ground and support conflict resolution through dialogue instead of violence and is a feature of the Wolof society that is captured by the word "Masla" which literally means 'problem' but also carries the significance of "A question raised for consideration or solution." (Webster's Wolof/English Dictionary).

The strong influence of the Marabouts, Muslim clerics, on society has extended into the political realm. While in many cases in Northern Africa such as Nigeria and the Sudan, the rise of fundamentalist groups has destabilized the government, in Senegal the moderate clerics took a different approach to politics that has affected the political outcomes. The rise of political and religious leaders who were committed to democracy has been the driving force behind democratic consolidation. This coupled with the large

and vibrant civil society and a lack of ethnic violence have ensured that democracy will endure.

While the strategic port at Dakar led to early contact with the West, it was Senegal's location on the Trans-Saharan trade route that brought it into contact with North Africa and Islam. The early introduction of Muslim beliefs during the eleventh century was adopted rather quickly in Senegal and eventually led to a society that today is over 94% Muslim. (Gellar, 3). During the early stages of colonialization, the Muslim leaders were in conflict with the imperialist powers. The brotherhoods provided the strongest resistance to imposed governance as well as to assimilation. These groups organized themselves in rural areas and promoted the authority and teachings of the Muslim brotherhood. Prominent among these groups was the Mouride and the Tijaniyya brotherhoods. Their anti-assimilation campaign led them to develop rural schools that taught Arabic and the Koran instead of the French language. (Gellar, 11). This led to rural consolidation because, "the decline of chiefly authority and the peaceful spread of Islam throughout much of Senegal was accompanied by the rise of Muslim brotherhoods, which provided a new form of political leadership for the rural masses." (Gellar, 1995: 11). But, these schools also alienated the Muslim groups with the growing urban populations in the Four Communes. A strong dichotomy developed between urban leaders from the Four Communes, who spoke French and dressed in Western attire, and the rural leaders who were Muslim clerics and spoke indigenous languages. This growing rift was reflected in the exile of a prominent Mouride leader, Amadou Bamba, in an attempt to, "Stifle the growing influence of the marabouts." (Gellar, 11). The threat that the Muslim brotherhoods posed to the French officials was chiefly of authority. The

French were met with resistance that compromised the assimilation of their colony to their standards.

Beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century, the French modified their assimilation policy towards the Muslims by accepting their regional authority, if in turn the Marabouts would, “preach the acceptance of the authority of the colonial state.” (Gellar, 12). This began a tradition of co-optation that continued through independence and into the present day. The main tenets of their agreement allowed the Muslim to preach and practice their religion and exercise authority in the religious sector and in return the Muslim’s would accept colonial rule and law, but not accept assimilation policies and, “with few exceptions, the French made no effort to contest the Muslim identity accorded to ethnic groups; nor did they oppose the process of Islamization in which they were engaged.” (Robinson, 2000: 78). These policies continued to be respected even while the Marabouts built and developed Koranic schools dedicated to the teachings of Sufi Islam and discouraged rural Senegalese from participating in French schooling. The French respected this authority and went so far as to keep Catholic missionaries out of Muslim areas. The compromise formed between the French administrators and the Muslim brotherhoods did not keep the Marabouts from extending their influence into politics. But while the French supported the Muslim brotherhoods they were careful to extend that support to moderate sects of Islam and avoid groups they thought were fanatical such as the Tokolor. France, “sought to channel the process, classify Muslims into “tolerant” and “fanatical” groups, and limit the influence of the latter.” (Robinson, 78). By doing so, the French acceptance of certain groups supported their position in political activity.

Although the Marabouts tried to limit the influence of French culture on the rural areas, they did not isolate themselves from political activity. Because the Marabouts were aware of their political influence and their authority, they were able to work within the political structure for their benefit by supporting politicians and leaders because,

“Although the marabouts resisted cultural assimilation, they were very much involved in Senegalese colonial politics, offering their support and that of their following to Senegalese citizen politicians in exchange for certain favors such as government subsidies for building mosques, jobs, and trading licenses for their faithful followers, and redress against abuses perpetuated by the colonial administration.” (Gellar, 12)

This began a tradition of compromise and co-optation between the Muslim marabouts and Senegalese politicians that was in the pursuit of mutual self-interest but was marked by moderation. The marabouts of influential Muslim brotherhoods such as the Mourides and the Tiyaniyya were also unlikely to support an Islamic state based on fundamentalist principles because it would be a threat to the power and African identity they had developed over the many years through compromise. The position of the Muslim brotherhoods was of strong influence in the political realm and ensured that their needs and concerns were voiced. Without the dynamic between the politicians and the marabouts, the Muslim brotherhoods power would be compromised because it would be “a threat to their own authority and privileged relationship with the Senegalese state.” (Gellar, 114). The strong resistance the marabouts had towards fundamentalist Muslim groups ensured that a theocracy would not take power. Instead the leaders chose to support politicians who were committed to democracy.

The support that the marabouts gave to the politicians was not, however, based solely on religious goals. In a unique set of events following independence, the Marabout leaders threw their support to Senegal’s most influential leader who happened to be a

Roman Catholic, Léopold Sédar Senghor. This provides evidence that the success in Senegal may have been due to the charisma of Senghor but also due to the cultural ability to compromise. Senegal, before colonialization, was a stable country with relative local autonomy and stability. (Gellar, 2). Before the French colonized, “Senegal’s state structures and social patterns were comparatively stable by the end of the sixteenth century.” (Gellar, 3).

The marabouts influence and Senghor’s success was due to the “religious power which was a definite factor of political stability, and the success of Senghor and his party can be explained a great extent by the relationship of trust he was able to cultivate among this class of religious leaders.” (Diamond, 145). The compromise between the leader and the marabouts went beyond the structure of religious affiliation and placed primary importance on the policies and actions of Senghor. As has already been noted, Senghor was a leader who was committed to liberal democratic ideals and this commitment was reflected in the Marabouts support for his campaign. In return the Marabouts were supported through government subsidies and other funding but the emphasis of their relationship should be placed on the moderation and ideals that were projected. The support for powerful political leaders was seen by the Mouride leader Abdoul Lahat who continued his support for the PS and Diouf. His support was influential to the democratic reforms that took place under Diouf’s presidency. Following his death, Lahat’s successor as the leading Marabout was Abdoul Khadre who continued to have close ties with the opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade. The strong relationship between the political and religious leaders ensured compromise on political action including democratic transitions. The relationship between the politicians and the marabouts is an example of the dynamic

that co-optation and compromise had on democratic stability. The leaders, religious and political, committed themselves to democratic reforms and ideals and ensured the consolidation of democracy by safeguarding their own cultural and social interests.

The relationship between the rural Muslim clerics and the urban Senegalese politicians is a unique circumstance that has continued to shape democratic stability. Senegal has long had a tradition of political participation and activity that stems back to the inclusion of the Four Communes in French politics. The tradition has been supported and has burgeoned into a vibrant set of organizations that are implemented to address a variety of needs within the communities. Senegal, although it has gone through a number of economic crises caused mainly by draught and adverse weather, has remained politically stable. The ability of the general public to address concerns and needs in a healthy environment has ensured that social unrest does not lead to violence. In the case of economic crises, the Senegalese have organized themselves into groups where, “communal values stressing helping those in need coupled with membership in diverse solidarity networks explain how the Senegalese have been able to cope during current economic crises.” (Gellar, 119). The needs of the community and the problems within have been met frequently through social ties holding the fabric of society together. These organizations have been built around a number of different causes and needs such as the Walo Farmers Association and the Soninké Federation who developed in an attempt to address the rural agricultural problems and focus on solutions such as irrigation work.

The freedom and liberal values that the citizens of Senegal enjoy today were in part due to the political unrest and persistence of civil society. During the process of democratization “liberalizing the regime was an attempt to give new life to a state that

was up against social, economic and political constraints that it could hardly control.” (Diamond, 153). The growing unrest in Senegal produced liberal changes instead of authoritarian oppression, due to the tendency of Senegalese politician to lean towards democratic reforms. And while the population underwent periods where their civil liberties were violated “freedom of speech was never throttled...social and political life in the country was constantly enlivened by debates on issues, by the voicing of opposition, and by the confrontation of clans and ideas.” (Diamond, 146). The country also boasts a vigorous opposition press and independent investigative journals who, except for a period of time under Diouf, have maintained freedom of the press. But perhaps the most surprising aspect of Senegal’s civil society is its diversity.

Although Senegal has a consolidated democracy and relative stability, its obstacles include a diverse ethnic population. The success of democracy has in part been due to the ability to forge a national identity that included the various sectors of society. While French is the official language of the country, there are six other national languages that are spoken throughout the country. Wolof, Puular, Serer, Diola, Mandinka and Soninké are languages that divide the countries ethnic groups into distinct communities. Although there are a number of different languages and ethnicities dividing the country, it is not uncommon for Senegalese citizens to have a working knowledge of more than two languages. The communities have been successful in overcoming boundaries and barriers to linguistic communities by participation in the public sector. The bonds that tie the groups together are stronger than the differences between them in part because, “Senegal’s pre-colonial traditions and long colonial history have helped forge a strong sense of Senegalese national identity among the majority of the people,

particularly among the urban youth.” (Gellar, 116). This identity has allowed for the relative peace among the ethnic groups who are brought together by political and religious identity.

While Senegal has been successful in creating a national identity, it has not been immune to unrest. Beginning in the 1980’s the southern region of Casamance began developing its own regional identity that was in conflict with nationalistic goals. The region, long divided from the rest of Senegal by Gambia, has experienced unrest and efforts directed at the Senegalese government for self-rule. Their movement for secession has continued to be a point of conflict between the government and the Diola and Joola in the region but has made progress by negotiations aimed at extending more government help to the region. Recently “peace accords between the government and the separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) were signed in 2001,” (*Freedom House, Senegal 2005*) and the armed resistance have subsided into low-level conflict. While this conflict could have led to a civil war or worse, the ability of the leaders of the separatist movement and the government under Wade to establish a compromise and facilitate negotiations is an obvious sign of the success of liberal democratic ideals over armed insurrection.

#### **E. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN SENEGAL**

Francophone Africa has continued to struggle with democracy and liberalization. The success of Senegal has been an irregularity in a region where the future of democracy remains uncertain for most countries. Although democratic consolidation has been an anomaly for most of former French colonies, the success and stability of



democracy in Senegal can be determined by examining its democratic transition. As of 2005, Senegal is ranked by the Freedom House index as a “Free” country. Not only does the survey provide information about the overall freedom of the country, it provides an overview of the political rights and civil liberties by analyzing their political and electoral institutions. It also accounts for the rights afforded citizens and the relative freedom of labor unions, expression, association, the press, dissenters and religion. Senegal, while being ranked as a free country does not receive top rating in the other two categories. While these provide an abstract guide to the level of freedom the country has obtained, its process of democratic transition provides the clearest evidence of its success.

Senegal was granted independence from France April 6, 1960 with the peaceful shift in power. Léopold Sédar Senghor who was educated in France and later became well known as an author, poet, and political leader worked closely with the French during his terms on the National Assembly in 1951 and 1952. (Diamond, 144). He was praised by the French and popular with the people. His party, the Senegalese Progressive Union (UPS) came to be known later as The Socialist Party (PS) and would dominate the political scene for nearly forty years following independence. During the period of time following decolonialization Senegal underwent a shift from a de facto one-party state under The Socialist Party to “one of the most liberal and open societies in Africa, and indeed in the postcolonial world.” (Galvan, 2001: 52). Although Senegal achieved liberalization of certain institutions such as the media, the lack of competitive multi-party election caused the delay of democratic consolidation until 1974. During the early seventies, despite a lack of competitive elections, Senegal was a haven in francophone Africa for intellectuals and artists who were allowed a “range of freedom expression,

despite the government's efforts to incorporate them within Senghor's vaguely democratic corporatist vision of one-party rule." (Galvan, 52).

Beginning in 1974, with growing international pressure, Senghor began the most crucial phase of democratic transition by opening up elections to opposition parties. After independence elections and voting were restricted to particular political parties who slowly were eliminated. The parliamentary elections prior to 1974 did not include opposition parties and the presidential election was done through an electoral college made up of parliamentarians. Through intimidation, buying out and other obstacles Senghor had established one-party rule and eliminated any viable opposition from the election process. While this created a highly authoritarian power system, it never was fully transformed into an authoritarian state. After the reforms of 1974, he allowed for the controlled admission of political parties into the election process and officially kept Senegal on the path towards consolidation. Two parties became more viable opposition parties following the first multi-party election in 1978, the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) and the African Independence Party. Although neither party was able to secure a majority, the leader of the PDS Abdoulaye Wade received 17.5% of the vote. The election of 1978 was not the last the Senegalese voter would see from Wade. He would continue leading the opposition party the PDS until the present. It was, however, with growing unrest that Senghor opened the election procedure. The establishment of liberal policies in Senegal was in part due to the nature of Senghor's background because, "Senghor's international status and his prestige as a writer were important factors in his moderation and liberalism." (Diamond, 1988: 151). As a noted poet and writer, Senghor was committed to certain liberal policies especially the press, and he did not want his

party to become an authoritarian one-party state because, “he had always been very sensitive to the image that Senegal projected abroad, and he did not want to appear as the oppressor of the country’s intelligentsia.” (Diamond, 151). This concern was precisely what caused for the opening of the election in 1978 to a moderate amount of opposition. Even with this electoral reform, Senghor soundly won the election.

Two years later Senghor would resign the presidency but continue to shape the role of president through his successor Abdou Diouf. In doing so Senghor became the first African head of state to voluntarily step down and retire. While his electoral reform allowed Senegal the opportunity to participate in a multiparty election (the first step in democratic transitions), the fairness of the election results would come to be questioned by the opposition. The solution for Diouf and the PS was a form of co-optation whereby members of opposition parties were incorporated into the government through cabinet and ministerial positions. These appointments were, however, seen as favoring only those who were aligned with the agenda of the PS. This co-optation was met with resistance by many opposition leaders including Wade. But the acceptance of these posts was seen as beneficial to those leaders to show the citizens their capabilities. The outcome of the initial multiparty elections which provided the PS with a majority in the Parliament and a PS president, were replicated in successive elections until 2000. This lack of power exchange between different political parties was what categorized Senegal as a “semi-democracy” for much of the 1980’s and 1990’s. Although the PS was committed to allowing multiparty competitive elections, their refusal to allow for an independent election committee to review the results of the elections seriously tarnished the image of democracy in Senegal.

The problems that threatened democracy in Senegal for much of the 1980's and 1990's included the lack of viable opposition parties and the degree to which the elections were free and fair. The accusations by the opposition parties of foul play in the elections were growing concerns for politicians and citizens. The threats to democracy were the lack of secret balloting and the lack of a review board. Elections were conducted in public settings with officials present who may have caused intimidation to the voters. Also, balloting was done in open areas without any protection for secrecy. And despite the oppositions continued request for an impartial international review board, The PS refused to open their elections to review by a committee. These threats to democracy became hostile points of contention with student and civil uprisings protesting election results in 1988. Otherwise, Senegal had taken many of the proper steps towards becoming consolidated. It had a vibrant civil society including many organizations under the FASC, the Front for Civil Society Action, and an open press. Senegal had also established an independent legislative body, the Parliament, which was elected using semi-proportional representation. And finally, "rule of law" was ensured through the Judiciary Branch that was considered a constitutional court. The reforms which led to the renewal of democracy in Senegal were primarily instituted under Diouf. His ability to liberalize election procedures were the key factor in democratic consolidation. In 1981, Diouf proposed constitutional reform that would end the law of 1976 which restricted the number of political parties. But, the fairness of election procedures would continue to be questioned. His victory in the 1988 elections produced a series of mass demonstrations that protested the election results and the, "allegations of procedural irregularities, ballot intimidation, and manipulated vote counts." (Galvan, 55). This along with the

international response from the IMF who required structural adjustments in order to receive aid produced a series of reforms to the electoral system that included input from the opposition parties. The inclusion of the opposition leaders in the government added credibility to the reforms but also created institutional changes that would influence the power of the PS. Although, the changes that were made were effective in quelling the protests, they did not solve the problems within the party that would soon lead to its loss in the 2000 Presidential election. There was a sort of “patronage compression” within the PS due to Diouf’s refusal to retire. This caused a lot of tension and opposition within the ranks of would-be leaders and led to fracturing of the party. This fracture is what led to the eventual victory of an opposition party. Senegal elects a President through the process of two-round voting, and because of the split within the PS; new candidates arose out of the PS that would otherwise not have been present in the election. This drew votes away from Diouf but still allowed for Diouf and Wade to enter into the final round of voting. The split further aided Wade’s chances at victory because both of the other candidates, who were former PS members, put their support towards Wade in an effort to end Diouf’s presidential domination.

The year 2000 was a landmark year for democracy in Senegal. In that year the presidential election was overseen by The National Observatory of Elections, which was created in 1997. This election committee was considered by the international community to produce free and fair elections. The committee oversaw the election of Abdoulaye Wade to the Presidency in 2000. His victory was the first time in forty years the Socialist Party lost the presidential election. The implications this had were overwhelming. The viability of an opposition party was clearly established in this election. Also, changes to

the 1992 Electoral Code allowed for secret balloting, lowering the voting age to 18 and a “nominally fairer electoral framework.” (*Freedom House*, Senegal 2005). After his election as President, Wade continued to implement reform that would shape the future role of the president and establish boundaries to protect the viability of opposition parties. In January of 2001, the citizens of Senegal approved a new constitution which focused on “reducing presidential terms from seven to five years, setting the number of terms at two, and giving women the right to own land for the first time.”(*Freedom House*, Senegal 2005). Senegal’s success at democratic consolidation has been a process that has spanned over forty years. Their ability to create a vibrant civil society whereby citizens could voluntarily participate in political discourse, independent election administrations to ensure that elections and transfers of power are free and fair, viable political opposition parties, constitutional courts ensuring rule by law, independent legislative bodies and a free press have ensured the stability and endurance of democracy in Senegal. Although the process of democratic consolidation is evident by analyzing the institutions, the causes for success remain unclear. The factors that influenced the triumph of democracy are multifaceted and include their historical experience as a former French colony, as well as their unique cultural experience. We will now turn to the external causes for stable democracy in Senegal.

## **CONCLUSION**

The events leading to the 2001 election in Senegal are of the utmost importance for democracy in West Africa. The gradual shift from a semi-democracy into a consolidated democracy has produced a set of guidelines for transitioning governments

and although the transition for Senegal has lacked bloodshed and frequent civil violence, the process of democratization was incremental and difficult. The continued consolidation of democracy in Senegal has been a balanced dynamic between the external and internal forces acting on the country.

The external influence France had on Senegal during colonialization was immense. It's combined use of assimilation in the Four Communes and association with regard to the rural society allowed for the preservation of their unique African culture and society while instilling democratic processes and procedures in the urban areas. While it could be likely that Senegal may have achieved the same outcomes without colonialization and the difficulties associated with it, the experience they had under the French contributed to the eventual success of democracy. The inclusion of Senegalese citizens in electoral procedures and their early inclusion in the National Assembly, all influenced the eventual political outcomes. While this provides compelling evidence regarding Senegal's success, the most substantial proof is in the cultural and domestic social structure.

The internal social structure and unique ability of the religious, regional, political and social leaders to compromise and communicate peacefully has been a testament to the strength of democracy. This along with the charisma and dedication to democracy by political leaders such as Senghor, Diouf and Wade provide the true explanations for democratic consolidation in Senegal. The ability of the citizens and leaders to forge this kind of national identity can be explained by their cultural affinity towards compromise and autonomy. Although it was religious and political leaders who forged the bonds that would hold together the country's national and African identity, it was the tradition in the

society that stressed mutual benefit and progress that supported the decisions to compromise.

The success of democracy has been shown to be more than just the colonial legacy. While many other African countries that combine strong Muslim influences and a secular state have been in conflict over authority and power, Senegal has formed a national identity based around co-optation and the sharing of power among groups. The success of democracy in Senegal has been achieved through the early inclusion of liberal democratic policies under France, but also on the cultural tradition of compromise. The internal cultural dynamics in Senegal provide perhaps the most compelling argument for its success. Leaders committed to reform combined with a vibrant civil society are a combination that has produced democratic results that have endured for the last thirty years. The future of a stable democracy in Senegal is evident considering the difficult situations already overcome and the continued commitment by its citizens and leaders for a democratic government. The problems the economy and growing fundamentalist Islamic groups present to Senegal can be manageable in a country that has battled authoritarianism through moderation, compromise and co-optation. While most of Africa has lagged behind in political development, the experience of Senegal and other stable democratic regimes in Africa can be used to evaluate and qualify the problems and concerns facing instable governments around the continent.



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