

Senegal's new government faces legacy of colonialism, pledges 'full independence'

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Opposition figure Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a former tax inspector from the Patriots of Senegal party (PASTEF), was sworn into office as Senegal's new president on April 2 after his historic election on March 24. Following his confirmation, he appointed the party's high profile leader Ousmane Sonko as prime minister.

Faye won more than 54% of the vote in the first round, beating rival Amadou Ba from outgoing president Macky Sall's ruling Alliance for the Republic (BBY) coalition. Sall has ruled Senegal since 2012.

[Reporting for Peoples Dispatch](#), Tanupriya Singh wrote that the poll "took place against the backdrop of a political crisis ... that had escalated dramatically since 2021, punctuated by bouts of protests that were met with severe state repression and violence".

Singh wrote that Sall's attempt to remain in power beyond a second and final term under Senegalese law, "coupled with what was seen as the [instrumentalization](#) of state institutions" to target the opposition, generated mass anger, much of which coalesced around Sonko's arrest in March 2021.

Like Faye, Sonko was also a former tax inspector, and founded PASTEF in 2014. He "was elected to the National Assembly, and went on to contest the 2019 presidential election — coming third with 16% of the vote".

"Positioning themselves outside 'the system', Sonko and PASTEF drew huge support among Senegalese youth, addressing long standing issues of unemployment and poverty in a country where a 5% economic growth rate has failed to translate into better living conditions for the population," wrote Singh.

Constitutional coup thwarted

Sonko's arrest in 2021 "triggered five days of massive protests, during which at least 14 people were killed by state forces. His subsequent conviction and sentencing in June 2023 would trigger another round of unrest, with at least 15 people killed.

PASTEF was declared dissolved in July, but announced in November that it would support Faye — the party's secretary general — as a candidate, wrote Singh.

Faye was detained in April "over a social media post criticizing the proceedings in a defamation case against Sonko," wrote Singh. "Despite this, and even as Faye remained in prison, his candidacy was accepted by the Constitutional Council. The continuity between Sonko and Faye's political project was reinforced by the phrase '*Diomaye moy Sonko, Sonko moy Diomaye*' ('Diomaye is Sonko, Sonko

is Diomaye’).

“On the eve of the start of the campaigning period, Sall announced the postponement of elections, [triggering](#) another round of protests in which at least three people, including a 16-year-old child, were killed by state forces.

“Sall’s ‘constitutional coup’ was ultimately [thwarted](#) by the Constitutional Council, as the Senegalese people and civil society groups firmly rejected any attempts to postpone the election,” wrote Singh.

“Meanwhile, in a gesture of appeasement, the Sall administration fast-tracked a general amnesty law, covering ‘all acts likely to be classified as criminal or correctional offenses committed between February 1, 2021 and February 25, 2024 both in Senegal and abroad, relating to demonstrations or having political motivations’.

“The move was condemned as a way of ensuring impunity for those responsible for the killings of protesters between 2021 and 2024. For the families of the over 1,000 people imprisoned during this period, the demand was for unconditional release and not the granting of ‘amnesty’.

“Nevertheless, on March 14, ten days before the election, Faye and Sonko were finally released from the Cape Manuel prison, with celebrations held in the streets of Dakar.”

Hope

Following the election Faye announced that the “Senegalese people have chosen a break [or rupture] with the past to give substance to the immense hope that our social project has raised and “pledged to ‘govern with humility and transparency, to fight corruption at all levels, and to devote myself fully to rebuilding our institutions and strengthening the foundations of our way of life together’ and ensuring ‘national reconciliation’,” wrote Singh.

“On the economic front, Faye has pledged to renegotiate mining and energy contracts signed by the Senegalese government, to maximize revenues from oil production and to ‘make the mining industry an important lever of our socio-economic development’.

“Faye’s electoral campaign also outlined plans for a new national currency, breaking away from the neocolonial CFA Franc which is in use by 14 African countries and is pegged to France’s currency (the Euro), historically accruing immense benefits to the French state and its corporations.”

Faye said that “[F]ull independence cannot be achieved without controlling the economy, livestock management, fisheries and agriculture ... [and that his government is] “fully committed to achieving food, digital, fiscal, energy and scientific sovereignty” and announced plans to review Senegal’s fishing agreements, including under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) signed with the European Union.

Challenges

In a piece for the [website aliran.com](http://website.aliran.com), former Malaysian Socialist Party MP Dr Jayakumar Deveraj wrote that the incoming PASTEF government faces huge challenges. “They are taking over a country which now imports about 70% of the food that the people consume.

“This is the result of pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to slash trade tariffs. These agencies are fixated on the idea that free unhindered trade will speed up development in developing countries.

“What happened instead was agricultural surpluses from Europe (which heavily subsidises its agricultural sector) flooded the markets of Senegal and other African countries, wiping out local food producers.

“Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, which once supplied food to Europe during the colonial period, depend now on food imports to feed their people.”

Deveraj said Senegal’s negative trade balance, where the country’s exports have less value than its imports, is worsened by the “outflow of dividends, profits and loan repayments”.

“So, Senegal is desperately short of the foreign exchange it needs to import food, medicines and other consumer essentials. The country also needs foreign exchange to bring in machinery and spare parts to raise its productive capacity,” Deveraj wrote.

“The conundrum facing the incoming government in Senegal is similar to what many nations in the Global South have faced over the past 60 years: how does one find the resources to meet the people’s legitimate expectations while rapidly developing the productive base of a society ravaged by colonial (and neocolonial) plunder.”

Susan Price

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P.S.

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