Senegal’s party system: the limits of formal regulation

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Senegal has a long history of multiparty rule. In the 1970s the regime used party regulation to restrict political competition; since the 1990s and notwithstanding a steady rise of the number of political parties to around 150 at the end of 2008, there have been only a few attempts to regulate the activities of political parties. Party bans have been effective in limiting the politicization of ethnicity in the party system, but other social and political variables have contributed equally to this outcome. Formal rules have not been applied in stopping the rise of religious parties, as the electoral success of these parties remains limited. The shrinking importance of political parties in the increasingly personalist regime of President Wade makes regulation of party activities a less contested issue.

Keywords: party system; Senegal; religious parties; ethnic parties; party regulation; party registration; elections

Introduction

By African standards Senegal has an excellent record as both a liberal democracy and as a peaceful country without military coups and with little civil conflict. Multiparty rule has existed continuously since 1976, and in 2000 the incumbent president was voted out of office. While in recent years concerns about the quality of the democratic process and media freedom have been raised,1 there is still reason to inquire about the causes behind Senegal’s rather singular trajectory. I will analyse to what extent Senegal’s positive record is caused by the country’s specific political-institutional arrangements, and the analytical focus will be on those institutions that regulate the existence and activities of political parties.

Senegal has indeed quite a long history of party regulation. Multiparty rule was re-established in 1976 by the official octroi of two parties besides the ruling Parti Socialiste (PS). The introduction of unrestricted multiparty rule in 1981 was accompanied by a ban on particularistic political parties and the adoption of a consciously designed electoral system. Senegal is thus an interesting case from a comparative perspective. It was one of the first African countries to introduce a party ban, and it should therefore

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be possible to verify the relevance of these regulations for the development of the party system in Senegal and the democratic process in general. More specifically, it is assumed that the relevance of party bans is closely related to regime type, a hypothesis which is sustained by other contributions to this special issue. Within the presidential systems of francophone Africa presidents rely much more on informal regulation, and rule of law lacks proper enforcement. As political parties lose their centrality in the political process, their regulation is not taken seriously by the government, but at the same time can still be used arbitrarily – as one of several instruments within a broader strategy – to influence political competition.

The article will proceed in five steps. I will first retrace the major phases of the party system starting from independence to the latest 2007 parliamentary elections. A second step consists of a detailed account of the legal instruments that the state administration used to influence the development of this party system. The main interest here is on party bans, i.e. the criteria that parties have to fulfil in order to participate in political competition and the way the state administration is applying these rules. On this basis I can then assess the relevance of party bans in shaping the party system. I will discuss in a third step the non-emergence of ethnic parties and then, fourth, look at some religious parties whose conformity with the constitutional provisions could be reasonably doubted. A final section presents the case of a prominent political party which was not registered for purely instrumental reasons before the main arguments are summed up in the conclusion.

**From controlled pluralism to a dominant party system**

In comparison to most other states in sub-Saharan Africa Senegal has a quite unusual political history. From 1879 the French citizens of the four municipalities Goreé, St. Louis, Rufisque, and Dakar elected a representative to the French National Assembly. The first political parties were created in the 1920s. During the later phase of colonial rule the Union Populaire Sénégalaise (UPS) became the only party with a relatively dense organizational structure, and it thus emerged as a leading political force after the 1958 referendums, when Senegal decided to remain part of the French confederation.

Leopold Senghor was elected president of independent Senegal in 1960. Senegal got a new Constitution in 1963 with a purely presidential system and a plurality electoral system within one national constituency, which created a *de facto* single party system. The 1963 Constitution explicitly recognized the role of political parties in generating political will. Although the government held all 80 seats in the National Assembly and dissolved the main opposition party, the Front National Sénégalais (FNS) of Cheikh Anta Diop in 1964 without providing specific reasons, there was no formal dismissal of the principle of multiparty system. The first Party Law was enacted at the end of 1964 which regulated the participation of political parties in elections. Since then, political parties have had to register with the Minister of the Interior. None of the then existing opposition parties did so, and by the end of 1966, Senegal still had only one legal political
party, the ruling UPS. This remained so until the mid-1970s with the UPS winning all seats in the parliamentary elections of 1968 and 1973.

Constitutional reforms in March 1976 marked a significant departure from the practice of the single-party state. In a context of growing political and social unrest the government had in 1974 legalized a second party, the newly created Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS), and prepared a new Party Law in 1975 (Loi 75-68 du 9 juillet 1975 relative aux partis politiques). The constitutional reform of 1976 introduced the principle of limited party pluralism. The new Article 3 of the Constitution fixed the number of legal political parties to three, and these three parties ‘have to represent different ideological perspectives’. In a period when nearly all African states were ruled by one-party systems or by the military this was an unusual step.

The new Constitutional Article 3 did not mention specific political parties or spell out ideological profiles, but a complementary law from April 1976 established that these three ideologies were a liberal-democratic one, represented by the PDS; a socialist-democratic one, reflected in the ideology of the party in power, the UPS (renamed Parti Socialiste in December 1976, one month after having been admitted to the Socialist International); and a Marxist–Leninist or communist ideology represented by the Party Africain de l’Indépendance (PAI). The government’s attempt at creating a three-party system via legal fiat was met with criticism, a low turnout in the 1978 elections, and outright opposition. Cheikh Anta Diop who had in 1976 formed a new political party, the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), claimed to represent the true left-radical interests instead of the PAI. The government attempted without success to convince the RND to merge with the PAI in order to be able to compete in elections. The 1978 elections, however, clearly revealed the limits of such political engineering. The PS gained a large majority with 81.7% of votes (and 83% of seats), while the PDS obtained 17.9% of the votes. The third party designed by constitutional fiat, the PAI, was boycotted by the electorate, and did not gain a single seat in parliament. After the elections, the Constitution was again amended to legalize a fourth political party, the Mouvement Républicain Sénégalais (MRS) as the official representative of a nationalist-democratic ideology.

Under Senghor’s successor Abdou Diouf the Constitution was once again amended in April 1981 and all restrictions on the number of legal parties lifted. At the end of 1983 there were 17 legally registered parties in Senegal, but most of them remained quite ephemeral. Notwithstanding this growing number of political parties, the 1983, 1988, and 1993 elections were essentially a two-party contest between the PS and PDS, with the former continuously losing its dominance. This was partly due to an ongoing reform of electoral governance that created a more level playing field for all competitors.

The decisive change in the Senegalese party system had, however, less to do with the changing institutional framework or the demonstration effects in francophone Africa. Rather, it had to do with President Abdou Diouf who lost control of his own party. Within the Parti Socialiste, factional battles led to open defection.
In the 1998 parliamentary elections, a breakaway party from the PS, the Union pour le Renouveau (URD) of Djibo Kâ, gained 11% of the votes, and the PS was reduced to 50.2% of the votes (although the majoritarian component of the electoral system manufactured a stronger majority of 93 seats out of 140). In 1999, a second PS heavy-weight, former prime minister Moustapha Niasse, formed his own party, the Alliance des Forces de Progrès (AFP). In the 2000 presidential elections, Diouf was thus defeated in the run-off, when both Niasse and Kâ shifted their support to opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade from the PDS.14

The newly elected President Wade dissolved the National Assembly, which was still dominated by the PS, and early elections were held in April 2001. The elections did mark not only the definitive defeat of the Parti Socialiste but also a more profound change in the party system. The former ruling party fell apart with other former key PS politicians forming their own parties such as Abdourahim Agne (Parti de la Réforme, PR), Abdoulaye Makthar Diop (Socialistes unis pour la Renaissance, SUR), or Robert Sagna (see below). The newly elected president also started to create what is usually called a mouvance présidentielle in francophone Africa, i.e. a loose coalition of a multitude of smaller parties around his own party PDS.15 Rightly fearing that the PDS alone could not win an outright majority in parliament, the formation of the SOPI coalition (meaning ‘change’ in Wolof) with nearly 40 parties allowed the president to win 49.6% of the votes, and with a little help from the electoral system, to get 89 out of 120 seats.

Fresh parliamentary elections to be held in 2006 were postponed by President Wade to February 2007 (the date of the presidential elections) amidst criticism by the opposition parties. In April 2007 most opposition parties decided to boycott these elections, as a protest against alleged electoral malpractices and the use of an outdated electoral register during that year’s presidential elections, when 81-year-old Wade had won a new mandate. In the June 2007 parliamentary elections the SOPI coalition won 131 of 150 seats with a historically low turnout of 34%.

The victory of the opposition in 2000–2001 thus led to a major restructuring of Senegal’s party system. It has become more like the francophone African average model of a poorly institutionalized dominant party with a myriad of smaller political parties crossing the floor at times and few genuine opposition forces whose main strategy is (to threaten) to boycott elections.16 The alternance in 2000 led to a sharp increase in the number of political parties from 26, at the end of 1997, to 57 (at the end of 2000), 94 (at the end of 2006), and then 145 (at the end of 2008). It is particularly noteworthy that President Wade has apparently no interest in strengthening his own party, the PDS, but prefers to rely on many small parties that are easier to manipulate and that to a certain extent have been deliberately created and funded by the government.17

**Party bans and other instruments of regulation**

The cursory overview on the evolution of Senegal’s party system has already emphasized the heavy influence of state regulation. I will now take a closer look
at particular strategies of state regulation of political parties which have changed over the years. The introduction and enforcement of party bans has thus to be understood as part of a broader institutional arrangement aiming at structuring and controlling political competition.

The first 15 years of independence were marked by a de facto single party rule of the UPS, even though the Independence Constitution attributed a central role to political parties. With the 1975 Party Law, for the first time the regime brought formal rules in line with actual practice. Senegal’s 1976 constitutional reform remains a very original (but inefficient) model of institutional engineering. It is important to stress that this attempt to manufacture an ideology-based party system (ignoring the lack of respective social cleavages) was accompanied by the banning of other potential socio-political cleavages within the party system. The 1978 constitutional amendment in fact included for the first time a provision according to which the three respective constitutional parties should have a national vocation and not be allowed to refer to racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender or regional identities. The preamble to the law clarified that these amendments were necessary to save national unity. This artificial creation of an ideological party system sparked a lively debate among Senegalese constitutional lawyers and political observers, while the exclusion of ethnic, religious or other particularistic parties did not. As Senghor himself remained silent about this constitutional provision and the only clandestine parties at that time were various Marxist-Leninist groups and no obviously particularistic party had emerged, one can only speculate whether Senghor reacted to the rise of particularistic parties in neighbouring countries and/or whether these clauses reflected his republican-nationalist personal convictions. It is, however, clear that the introduction of party bans was directly linked to the establishment of an ideology-based party system and was thus intended to pre-empt a politicization of other particularistic social cleavages.

After 1981 and Diouf’s adoption of multipartisme intégral, the strategy of the president and the ruling party changed. State regulation was from then on less used to limit political party competition but, on the contrary, to fragment and weaken the opposition. A rigid policy of restricting the number of political parties was, thus, against all contrary policy statements, not in the interest of the ruling party. The main instruments of controlling the party system were both the electoral system and the rules of electoral governance, heavily tilted in favour of the ruling party. For the 1983 elections, the Diouf government introduced a segmented (or parallel) system with half of the 120 seats elected by plurality at the departmental level (via party lists in small constituencies of different size) and the remaining 60 seats distributed to party lists at the national level via proportional representation. This system favoured the party with the most thorough territorial penetration, i.e. the Parti Socialiste, and as voters had a single vote for both segments of the electoral system, coordination of opposition parties was made impossible. In 1983 the PS won all departments and got 92.5% of the seats (with 79.9% of the votes won); in 1993 and 1998 the electoral system transformed narrow absolute majorities of
56.6% and 50.2% respectively of the votes into relative comfortable seat majorities in the National Assembly (70.0% and 66.4% respectively).

If the growth of political parties was in the government’s interest, this strategy thus paid off. At a practical level, this meant to create low entry thresholds which made a strict enforcement of party bans unlikely. Although a Party Law does exist, the creation of political parties in Senegal has been regulated on the basis of the law on associations (Art. 812-814 of the Code des Obligations Civiles et Commerciales), which means that there is, in principle, only an exam of the procedural conditions on completion of which the Ministry is supposed to deliver a receipt (récépissé de declaration) which gives the party or association a legal status. According to the law, the application has to be addressed to the local administration (prefecture) where the headquarters of the party is located. At prefecture level the application is formally evaluated (lists of party members, postal address of headquarters, copies of identity card, minutes of formative session, party programme and so on) and transferred to the Ministry of Interior, where the application is assessed against the material principles as mentioned in Constitution Art. 3 and Art. 2 of the Party Law.

When case errors are discovered or there is a discrepancy of registration dossier during the examination by the Ministry of Interior, then the application is sent back to the prefecture. During the last two decades some registration procedures were delayed due to such problems, in some cases also because the name of the party was already taken. My interviews in the Department of the Ministry of the Interior made very clear that the Ministry sees the legal exam as a procedural question. If a party writes in its programme that it intends to promote the interests of a specific region, the Ministry asks it to correct the formulation so as not to violate the letter of the law. It does not come as a surprise then, that there are very few cases of failed registration, all of which concern religious parties that refused to water down their programmes or parties formed by personal rivals of the President of the Republic, as discussed in more detail below.

While there are few obstacles to creating a political party, it is much more difficult to dissolve one. The Party Law provides for the dissolution of parties in a number of instances, and particularly so where a party, ‘through its general activities and public statements has severely violated the obligations of Constitutional Article 3’. The Party Law further stipulates that parties might be dissolved by a decree at the request of the Minister of Interior, but it fails to mention a specific procedure in a case when a political party after having been registered does no longer fulfil the conditions of Constitution Article 3. In practice, the Ministry is restricting itself to a formal review of the party statutes upon registering a party. Whether this party then adheres to the general principles in practice or has a hidden agenda is not observed or monitored. The Party Law also requires political parties to prepare annual reports on their financial situation and to give an update on the addresses and membership of the current board (Article 3). According to Ministry staff, none of the more than 100 parties, including the ruling party, fulfilled these conditions and yet no sanction was enacted. From a purely legal perspective
the Ministry should thus dissolve all political parties currently operating in Senegal. The formal regulations for initiating a ban of an existing party are not detailed enough and the government apparently never saw a need to formalize it.

No particularistic political parties were thus ever dissolved in the history of Senegal. Does this allow us to conclude that the constitutional provisions effectively blocked the articulation of ethnicity and religion within the party system, i.e. potential party-founders were convinced that there was no legitimate expression of these cleavages within the party system? The fact that there has not been an outright party ban still leaves us with another scenario: ethnic or religious parties are allowed to participate in the political competition (against the constitutional provisions) provided that the government does not perceive them to be dangerous to regime survival, as long as these particularistic parties might be useful allies in the political process, or simply because the regime might use other – informal – ways to limit the political relevance of these parties.

I now turn to a more detailed analysis of particularistic parties, some of which apparently did not fulfil the constitutional criteria of not having a racist, sexist, ethnic, regional, linguistic or religious orientation.

The lack of ethnic parties

Like nearly all other African states, Senegal is an ethnically heterogeneous country. The ethnic group of Wolof is the largest group, and since colonial times, has dominated economic and political life. Wolof has thus become the lingua franca in the country. Ethnic relationships within the strongly urbanized Senegalese population have been peaceful since independence.

During the early 1980s, however, a violent conflict erupted in the Southern province of Casamance, virtually cut from the rest of Senegal by the enclave of the Gambia. The mostly Dioula and Christian population resented a growing economic and social marginalization and a large influx of ‘Northerners’ within the administration and business elites of the Casamance. The local populations eventually started to give widespread support to a rebel movement (Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de Casamance, MFDC) fighting for the separation of Casamance from Senegal. Large-scale violence was brought to an end in the early 1990s, but violence has persistently erupted and no sustainable political solution has been found yet. Many Senegalese deny that the conflict in Casamance is really about ethnicity or religion as not all of the Casamançais are Dioula and there are numerous non-Christian among them.

As surprising as it might sound, among the 145 Senegalese parties there are indeed no openly ethnic or regional parties, irrespective of whether we define an ethnic party on the basis of its programme and behaviour or its voter support. We certainly lack any systematic assessment of the party programme and behaviour of all parties, but students of Senegalese party politics, local political analysts and journalists agree that within the ‘visible’ part of the party spectrum there are no parties with an ethnic or regionalist programme or rhetoric. While some parties
exist only on paper, the large majority are based in the capital city Dakar and have never reached out to the rural population. Many of the new parties are clearly the result of economic reforms since the late 1980s, in so far as the party leaders are former teachers or employees of the public sector who lost their jobs in the various civil service reform programmes.

Even more interesting is the fact that among the 145 parties there is not one single political party of the Casamansois. During peace negotiations, the MFDC was offered the opportunity to participate in politics and to transform into a political party (although with a different name). So far, it has declined. During the latest presidential elections in 2007, Robert Sagna, a popular (Christian) mayor of Ziguinchor (capital city of Casamance) between 1984 and 2009, ran a clearly regionalist electoral campaign and obtained 2.58% of the national vote. Sagna, formerly a cabinet minister with the PS for many years, decided to stand in the presidential elections as independent candidate, and subsequently, in October 2007, created his own party, the Rassemblement pour le Socialisme et la Démocratie (RSD). This RSD, however, soon joined the national oppositional party coalition, Takku Défaaraat Sénégal, and is therefore, an unlikely candidate for an ethnic party. In the municipal elections of 2009 Sagna’s party fielded again common candidates with other opposition parties, particularly the Parti Socialiste.

Do we find political parties that receive electoral support exclusively or mostly from one ethnic group in Senegal? This is clearly not the case for the two traditional strongest parties of the country, the PS and the PDS. The smaller the electoral support of the political party, the more likely it is that it will get significantly more votes in the home province of its party leaders. Some few parties have thus a strong support from specific towns where their leaders originate from, such as the URD of Djibo Kå among the Peulhs populations, or the smaller parties Parti pour la Démocratie et la Citoyenneté (PDC) in Rufisque, and the Action patriotique de Liberation (APL) in Kaolack, but they do not openly promote the interests of these regions nor do they field candidates exclusively in these districts. The URD is also not an ethnic party in the sense that the Peulhs comprise up to 30% of the national population and are settled throughout the national territory in many regions where the URD does not get any votes. It is quite telling in this regard, that demands for regulations that require parties to prove their national character through party offices nationwide or by membership in all regions of the country (such representation requirements aiming at the prevention of regional parties exist in many other African countries) have been totally absent in Senegal.

Should we infer from this that ethnic party bans have been a particular powerful instrument in de-politicizing ethnic identity and blocking the emergence of ethnic parties? The astonishing lack of ethnic parties is certainly as much reflecting the structural contexts as it is resulting from party regulation.

The often ridiculed idea of manufacturing an ideological party system in an African country might still have created an institutional legacy that strongly
benefited the two large parties. Until very recently the party system was still largely dominated by the two traditional parties, the PS and PDS, and their various breakaways, all of which are strongly committed to a centralist and republican state. The particularistic party-ban provisions may have had a role in strengthening this already existing consensus among the party elites. At the same time, these party-ban provisions reflected underlying political culture, the existing strong social integration (cousinage à plaisanterie) and the common membership in religious communities as cross-cutting issues.34

Party bans and the rise of religious parties

In contrast to ethnic parties, there is no lack of religious parties in Senegal, with several of them clearly pursuing religious or sectarian objectives. Over the years there have been three cases of denied registration. In 1979 El Hadji Ahmed Khalifa Niasse, a marabout from the brotherhood of the Tijanes, left the Parti Socialiste and wanted to register a party with the name Hisbollah. We have to remember that this was still the time of the constitutionally mandated four-party system, and the Constitution had clearly not provided for an Islamic party. Inspired by the Iranian Revolution, the ‘Ayatollah from Kaolack’ publicly denounced President Senghor and asked for the mobilization of several hundred thousand talibés and the introduction of the sharia in Senegal. The government not only refused to register the party, but started to act against Ahmed Khalifa Niasse because he was recruiting armed men for the so-called Islamic Legion of Libyan leader, Muammar Qadaffi. When he was denied political asylum in France he fled to Libya, and Senegal broke relations with Libya over this issue in 1980. Niasse was later arrested in Niger and detained in Senegal until 1982, when Abdou Diouf pardoned him.35 Clearly, this episode was about much more than restricting party competition.

There were two further cases of denied registrations, but both of them are scarcely documented. In 1981 a party called Rassemblement pour le salut national applied for registration, but its application was refused due to its religious objectives.36 In 1991 the Ministry of Interior denied registration to the Parti pour la Libération et la Démocratie Islamique.37 Since the Ministry does not have a proper archive, it proved impossible to check the background of these two cases.

The character of the relationship between religion and politics has undergone a slow but steady change over the last three decades.38 In Senegal the boundaries between a religious and a civic sphere were always blurred. Since colonial times the Islamic brotherhoods (the two important ones being the Murides and the Tijanes) were deeply involved in economic and political issues. During the period of Senghor’s rule and the first decade of Abdou Diouf’s rule there was a clear alliance between the brotherhoods and the Parti Socialiste. The secular Senegalese state, indeed, promoted the local interests of the religious leaders (marabouts), while these religious leaders asked their followers to vote for the PS. These direct orders to vote (ndigel) became more contested since the early
1990s, as the brotherhoods gained more autonomy from the political leadership, and it became more risky to fully align with one political party.\textsuperscript{39}

Under President Diouf the Tijanes had grown more important, but President Wade clearly shifted the loyalty of the new government in a very explicit way towards the Murides.\textsuperscript{40} In unprecedented way the current president is instrumenta-

lizing and politicizing allegiance to Islamic brotherhoods, which has created resentment among other such groups and the Christian minority, and puts at risk the secular character of the Senegalese state.\textsuperscript{41} As a reaction to this growing politi-

cization there is also a growing pluralization of religious groups and beliefs with intergenerational conflicts within the brotherhoods and a growing social and econ-

omic influence of more radical Arab versions of Islam.\textsuperscript{42}

There are five religious parties currently active in Senegal, all of which are officially registered by the Ministry of Interior.\textsuperscript{43} There are obviously no disaggregated voter data for religious groups; I therefore classify a party as religious based on the composition of its leadership and its actual party programme and rhetoric. There are two political parties ‘representing’ the Murides. One is the Mouvement des Citoyens pour une Démocratie de Developpement (MDC) of Serigne Fall, created in March 2000. The MDC participated in the 2001 elections and failed to win a seat (0.47% of votes in 2001). Serigne Fall had also run as candidate in the 2000 presidential elections for another party (PRS) because the MDC had not obtained registration from the Ministry in time. In 2007 the MDC became part of Wade’s SOPI coalition, but still did not get elected. While Serigne Fall’s religious discourse is moderate, this is not necessarily the case for the second Muride party: the Parti de la Vérité pour le Developpement (PVD), headed by Marabou Serigne Modou Kara Mbacké, a nephew of the current Caliph of the Murides. After his movement had operated as a religious association, Mbacké transformed it into a political party in 2004. The PVD participated in the 2007 elections, also as part of the SOPI coalition, without any seat being won by PVD candidates. Although electorally insignificant, the PVD is important because of the religious stature of its leadership; these are, in fact, religious leaders who count much more on having talibés than on having party members or a regular party organization. The PVD leadership at times uses an Islamist discourse, but refrains from acting publicly in a way that would challenge the president’s policies.\textsuperscript{44} President Wade appointed Mbacké’s wife Sokhna Dieng Mbacké to the newly created Senate, and the PVD can hardly be seen as a political-religious threat to a civilian-

don-en-republican regime.

There also exist two parties led by religious leaders from the Tijanes brother-

ood. The Rassemblement pour le Peuple (RP) headed by the Marabou Mamoune Niasse was created in 2004. It participated as one of few opposition parties in the 2007 elections and won two seats in the parliament (4.25% of votes). In fact after the elections Niasse declared himself ‘leader of the opposition’.\textsuperscript{45} During the electoral campaign for the local elections in March 2009 he made a spectacular turn-around and asked (as official representative of the
Caliph Mouhamed Dame Ibrahima Niasse) the local talibés to support President Wade and his government, a declaration which created a lot of protests.46

The Front pour le Socialisme et la Démocratie/ Benno Jubël (FSD/BJ), on the contrary, has a longer history. It was created by Cheikh Abdoulaye Dieye in April 1996 and has a strong territorial base in the northern city of St. Louis. It gained one seat in the 1998 elections (1.33% of the national vote), but failed to earn any in the 2001 elections (0.42%). Cheikh Bamba Dieye, the son of the party leader, got elected in the 2007 elections (2.18%). In the presidential election of February 2007, he ended up in the ninth place after managing only 0.5% of the valid votes. As the party’s more radical religious rhetoric used by Cheikh Abdoulaye Dieye (such as collective prayers during the electoral campaign, strict demands for a change of the code de la famille, defence of female circumcision, introduction of obligatory HIV testing for young men before marriage) was not honoured by the voters in 2001, and he was officially reprimanded by the Haut Conseil de l’audiovisuel (HCA), his son softened the party’s religious character in the 2007 elections.47

All four parties discussed so far are controlled by religious leaders from one of the two main brotherhoods. This is not the case for the Mouvement de la réforme pour le développement social (MRDS). This movement is directed by Imam Mbaye Niang and represents the still minority strand of radical Wahhabism in Senegal. The MRDS was registered in October 2000 and participated with minimal success in the 2001 (0.55%) and 2007 elections (1.12%, one seat for party leader Imam Mbaye Niang). The MRSD has promoted a different type of Islamic discourse with a more serious commitment to Islamic values in daily life, which has failed to attract a larger number of the electorate but seems to have gained popularity among the urban youth in the suburbs of Dakar. Its relevance seems to have increased over the last years as evidenced by their financial support from the diaspora and Arab donors. In 2007 the MRSD was behind several public protests against gay people, and has publicly demanded the introduction of sharia in Senegal. The MRSD is clearly an opposition force, and should it gain political importance, both the government and the brotherhoods will try to act against them. According to many observers, the pure form of Islam advocated by MRSD is, however, facing many challenges in a society which has a long history of syncretist beliefs and a tradition of electing Presidents of the Republic with Christian wives (Senghor himself was also a Christian).

What remains to be seen is whether the rise of religious parties really marks a new phase in the evolution of the Senegalese party system. It certainly marks a transformation of the religious actors and their relationship with the political system.48 The ideological position of the religious parties in the Wade or opposition camp seems rather unclear. The Islamization of parts of the public life is less visible in the elections but is reflected in different forms of resistance against a political system with ‘corrupt politicians’ (and allied brotherhood leaders), which are sometimes radical and violent. Viewed from this perspective, political parties such as PVD, FSD/BJ or PR are neither an electoral threat for the government nor
indeed an obvious attempt to question the existing mode of governance with a President of the Republic spending a considerable part of his time going to pray at Touba. Their growing importance is an indicator of the government’s minimal resistance against the politicization of religion. Electoral results show so far that the population is not inclined to support this trend. The assessment of MRSD is different. From a purely constitutional perspective, the Ministry of the Interior is bound to dissolve political parties which do not respect the secular and republican character of the state, and henceforth, the government ought to have banned the MRSD. As long as the MRSD commands some electoral support, a formal ban against a religious party creates unnecessary problems for the government, because it would raise many questions concerning other religious parties and the many links between political and religious actors. In a context of growing social and economic crisis toleration of radical strands of Islam might, however, backfire against a government which has at various times publicly questioned the secular character of the country.49

The Rewmi saga

The possibility of a manipulative use of the party-ban provisions in structuring political competition might be finally demonstrated by the recent emergence of a party led by the former Prime Minister Idrissa Seck (2002–2004). Seck fell out with the President of the Republic, was sacked, and accused of financial malpractices. One of Seck’s lieutenants, Yankhoba Diattara created the FIDEL (Forces Intégrées pour la Démocratie et la Liberté) party, which was never registered. Diattara was arrested in November 2005 after he had publicly announced on a popular radio station that he wished his comrades to ‘welcome’ President Wade to Thies, the stronghold of Idrissa Seck. During the visit violent clashes occurred. Diattara was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment, and was later pardoned by President Wade after serving three months.

Seck eventually became leader of another newly created political party, six months ahead of the presidential elections in February 2007. The party, named Rewmi (Wolof for ‘the country’), had been created by Insa Sankharé, and FIDEL was merged into the new party. Rewmi applied for official registration with the Ministry of the Interior, but the Ministry simply did not respond, and consequently the party was never legalized.50 Idrissa Seck nevertheless participated quite successfully as independent candidate in the presidential elections and then announced the boycott of his would-be party in the June 2007 parliamentary elections. Even without having registered his party, he participated in the municipal elections on a common opposition list. Senegalese observers have very different interpretations about the creation and mixed success of Rewmi. According to some observers, Seck never intended to turn his back on Wade and hoped to return as soon as possible into the fold of the PDS. Wade, who is attempting to promote his son Karim as his successor, would like to keep Seck as a second-best choice in case his not-so-popular son does not succeed in becoming
Thus, neither Wade nor Seck were particularly interested in formalizing the creation of a separate party, and Rewmi could be considered rather as an autonomous courant within the PDS. Indeed, by early 2010 Seck and his followers formally rejoined the PDS.

Officials from the Ministry of the Interior made it very clear that the President of the Republic had communicated to Sankhare and Seck that he had never allowed the registration of a party called ‘the country’ because the name of the party and its implicit message of making Senegal a Wolof country violated the constitutional principles of Art. 3. Rewmi actually had no regionalist or ethnic bias, and was ‘banned’ for the only reason that Seck would have always been introduced as the ‘President of Rewmi’ which is for all Wolof-speaking, i.e. the vast majority of Senegalese, the ‘President of the country’. President Wade has added to the legal uncertainty by publicly announcing several times that in the perspective of the parliamentary and then local elections ‘members of the two parties’ (i.e. PDS and Rewmi) should discuss their co-operation and presentation of common lists.

From a legal point of view a party which is refused registration by the Ministry could apply to the Conseil d’Etat. The Ministry’s apparent strategy in the cases of FIDEL and Rewmi was simply not to react, because there were no legal arguments to deny the receipt. They knew Sankhare, Diattara or Seck already understood that the Conseil d’Etat was not going to officially act against the President in such a politically delicate issue.

**Conclusion**

Formal party regulation was introduced in Senegal in 1976 from the perspective of a liberalizing regime which wanted to control the degree of political competition. After the introduction of a fully fledged multiparty system, the regime strategy was more directed at using the electoral system and rules of electoral governance to secure control of the political process. The specific constitutional qualifications of Article 3 were introduced in a pre-emptive sense, i.e. there was no actual particularistic party which threatened the republican character of the political system. Although there has been considerable change within the party system, no ethnic parties have emerged over the last 30 years. It has been argued that the interaction of social and institutional factors best explains this rather unusual development and has thus also contributed to democratic stability.

The Senegalese case, however, also illustrates the relevance of broader features of the political system for the use of party bans. The growing presidential character of the government system since the accession of President Wade has produced both an enormous rise in the number of parties and a concomitant loss of influence of parties within the political system and for making policy decisions. President Wade shows no interest of building up a strong government party but rather relies on ad hoc party coalitions or informal networks and good contacts with Islamic leaders, and it does not come as a surprise if he has ignored the certainly
still limited but growing role of Islamic parties in political competition. Formal rules were used, on the contrary, to prohibit the formation of a political party, when the personal interests of the President were concerned.

All this warns us against being overly enthusiastic about formal party regulation and its beneficial effects in managing state-society relations in Senegal. Enforcement of formal rules needs both administrative capacities and respect for the rule of law, both of which have been on the wane in Senegal over the last decade.54 There remains a solid tradition of less formalized ways of solving conflicts, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as Casamance or the relationship with the Marabouts, and a huge majority of the population which still does not favour voting instructions from religious leaders or the ethnicization of party politics.55

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Notes
2. The article thus applies an institutionalist approach, and considers party bans as formal institutions that restrict the menu of options available to political actors.
6. Several smaller parties, such as the PRA-Sénégal were co-opted by the UPS and thus disappeared; cf. Tine, ‘Du multiple à l’un et vice versa?’, 67–8.
7. In the original French version, the political parties ‘doivent représenter des courants de pensée différents’. The new Article 3 also complemented the existing provision by saying that the party law did determine the conditions under which the parties were created and existed, and now for the first time also under which parties ‘ceased to exist’.
11. All information on electoral data within this article are based on Bendel, ‘Senegal’ and Kamara, Les élections au Sénégal.
15. President Wade’s victory also allowed the PDS to re-integrate parties that had left the PDS long ago, such as the PDS/R of Serigne Diop (after 15 years of separate existence).
16. For critical assessments of Senegalese authors cf. Dia, Sénégal: Radioscopie d’une alternance avortée; Coulibaly, Une démocratie prise en otage par ses élites; Diop, ‘La Sénégal à la croisée des chemins’.
17. This seems to be the case for the Waar-Wi coalition directed by Wade’s former environmental minister; see Mbow, ‘Senegal: The Return of Personalism’, 159.
20. The separatist conflict in the Casamance broke out fully only in late 1983.
21. In order to win in the small multi-member constituencies they needed to build coalitions, but this minimized their chances of winning seats in the PR segment (national list). For an insightful and more comprehensive analysis of the electoral system change (including changes in electoral governance and lowering voting age in 1993) see Mozaffar and Vengroff, ‘A “Whole System” Approach to the Choice of Electoral Rules in Democratizing Countries’.
23. There seems to have existed one case of a failed registration of a party called Parti des Jeunes du Senegal in 1993, because it intended to promote the interests of young people, and this was considered as a violation of the constitutional principles of Art. 3. The party was later registered as Parti de l’Unité et de Rassemblement (PUR) in 1996 without reference to the particular promotion of young people’s interests. No official documentation could be obtained. I refer here to the remarks of PUR leader Khalifa Aboubacar Diouf as quoted in Moegenburg, Die Parteienlandschaft im Senegal, 250.
24. Article 4, Party Law (1989) explicitly mentions the respect for a republican, secular and democratic state, the republican institutions, national independence, territorial integrity and national unity as well as public order and public liberties.
25. The Party Law also does not mention the possibility of suspension.
26. Parties which merge with others do not necessarily report to the Ministry, and the Ministry’s list is thus not very reliable with regard to the exact number of legal and actually operational parties.
27. As previously mentioned, some parties were not registered, and the FNS of Cheikh Anta Diop was dissolved in 1964, but the FNS was not a particularistic party.
As the opposition boycotted the 2007 elections, no recent data for regional voting behaviour is available. Data for the 2001 parliamentary election show a range of 33.2% to 70.1% for the PDS and between 9.4% and 28.8% for the PS. The third party in the 2001 elections, AFP, got a minimum of 6.7% in each province, but only 32.8% in party leaders Niasse’s home province Kaolack. Data from Osei, *Party-Voter Linkage in Ghana and Senegal*.

Interview with Ibrahima Fall, 28 February 2008, Dakar.

Moroff, ‘Party Bans in Africa’, this issue

*Cousinage à plaisanterie* refers to social norms widely accepted in West African societies which allow joking relationships between members of different communities, for an introduction to the socio-cultural context of Senegalese politics cf. Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation*.


Ibid., 137.

Sud Quotidien, 10 May 2000.


In 1993 the Tijane Marabout Moustapha Sy heavily criticized Abdou Diouf, but his family distanced itself from him and a spokesperson of the Tijanes affirmed 1993 in television ‘ceux qui refusent de voter pour Abdou Diouf sont des imbéciles’. Interview with Soro Diop, *Le Quotidien*, Dakar, 6 March 2008.

In what was a hotly contested gesture Wade went directly after his election in 2000 to Touba, the capital city of the Murides, and kneeled in front of the Caliph. The scene was broadcast on national television.

According to some of the author’s interviewees the main purpose of the president’s religious zeal – besides its political usefulness – is to hide his non-Islamic beliefs and way of life: Wade also has a Christian wife. The brotherhoods also remain important economic players, less because they control groundnut production but because their religious networks are the main channels for the transfer of the many remittances that represent a growing part of Senegal’s national income.

Villalón, ‘Generational Changes, Political Stagnation’; Dahou and Foucher, ‘Le Sénégal, entre changement politique et révolution passive’.

All Senegalese interviewees agreed about these parties being religious, although some did not consider them serious actors on the national political scene.

Audrain, ‘Du “Ndigel” avorté au Parti de la Verité’.

*Sud Quotidien*, 16 June 2007.

*Sud Quotidien*, 11 March 2009.

Interview with I. M. Fall, Dakar, 28 February 2008. It might be, however, questioned, whether the party would have won a single mandate without the boycott of the major opposition parties. The HCA has the task to monitor the behaviour of candidates during the electoral campaigns. During the debate about the constitutional revision in 2001 the FSD/BJ advocated a deletion of the attribute ‘secular’ in Article 1 of the Senegalese Constitution. *Sud Quotidien*, 24 November 2000.

Religious actors keep their role as mediators in many instances, such as the Christian bishops in the Casamance, or the *marabouts* in several conflicts between the president and his prime minister. Interview with Abdou Latif Coulibaly, Dakar, 4 March 2008.

In the end, President Wade’s attempt at minor modifications of the Constitution, for example, in the field of family law, failed after civil society protests.

The evidence presented here is based on interviews with staff members of the Ministry of Interior. During the interviews they insisted that the Rewmi case was never handled by the competent department within the Ministry but directly by the Minister.

This is the theory of Abdou Latif Coulibaly, among others. Interview, Dakar, 4 March 2008.
52. Interview with Antoine Diouf (Redacteur en Chef, RJN), Dakar, 26 February 2008.
53. It could be argued that a heavy military presence and rebel activities hindered true regional parties from emerging in Casamance.
54. cf. Thiam, ‘Une constitution ça se révise.’

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