Senegalese successfully protest proposal of change to Constitution, 2011

Time period notes: The constitutional change was announced on the 16th, protests were called on the 21st, and the campaign succeeded and concluded on the 23rd.

June 16th 2011
to: June 23rd 2011
Country: Senegal
Goals: To prevent the passage of the proposed change to the Constitution.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:
Methods in 2nd segment:
Methods in 3rd segment:
Methods in 4th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols

Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 036. Performances of plays and music  Musicians would perform what they called "urban guerilla poetry," or spontaneous performances of political rap
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 162. Sit-in

Classifications

Classification: Defense
Cluster: Democracy
Group characterization:
• Journalists
• Politicians
• Youth
• rappers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Y’en a Marre, RADDHO, Chieck Bambe Dieye
Partners:
Youth, opposition parties
External allies:
Doudou Wade, Amadou Sall
Involvement of social elites:
Some politicians participated in or aided the protests.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

• Y’en A Marre

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:

• Chieck Bambe Dieye
• RADDHO
Groups in 5th Segment:

• Opposition Parties
• Youth
Groups in 6th Segment:

• Amadou Sall
• Doudou Wade
Segment Length: 1 1/3 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
Abdoulaye Wade
Campaigner violence:
While unsanctioned, there was fairly extensive stone throwing and burning of tires and other property from protesters. There
were also a number of fights between protesters and police, although protesters were using only their bodies in the fights.

Repressive Violence:
Police used extensive tear gas, rubber bullets, and beatings of protesters.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
6 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
3 points out of 3 points

Abdoulaye Wade became the democratically elected President of Senegal in 2000. The country was one of Africa’s most stable democracies, and had never experienced a coup. During his term as President, the Constitution was changed to limit Presidents to two terms. In 2009, Wade announced that he would not run for a third time. However, his government still suffered from low popularity. Frequent power outages, government scandals, and economic problems bred popular discontent. These grievances helped prompt the January 2011 creation of Y’en a Marre, which translates to “fed up.” The youth-led group focused on protesting problems in the government and registering voters. Rappers Chieck Omar Cyrille Toure, also known as Thiat, and Mbessane Seck, also known as Kilifeu, founded the group with journalists Fadel Barro and Alioune Sané. Hip-hop played an extremely important role in the operation of Y’en a Marre. Senegal had one of the most vibrant hip-hop scenes on the continent, and it held great popularity with youth. The presence of popular rappers helped mobilize young people. While the movement did not affiliate with any political party, it expressed strong opposition to the Wade regime. In May 2011, Wade announced that he planned to run for a third term. He said that since the Constitution had been changed to limit Presidents to two term limits during his Presidency, the rule did not apply to him. Regarding his past announcement that he would not run again, Wade issued the famous phrase, “I said it, I can take it back.” The public received Wade’s announcement poorly, but large sections of the population, especially outside major cities, still supported Wade. Protests remained limited as he had not changed the Constitution and the focus remained on legal inquiries into the Constitution. However, on 16 June Wade proposed a two-part change to the Constitution. The first part involved the lowering of the threshold required for Presidential victory from 50% to 25%. Previously, if no candidates received over 50% of the vote there would be a runoff between the top two candidates, but the proposed change would give a candidate with over 25% of the vote the Presidency. Critics saw this as a way to ensure Wade’s victory over a divided opposition. The second part of the proposed change was the creation of a Vice-Presidency. Senegal’s system of government had a President and a Prime Minister, and had never needed a Vice President. Senegalese widely saw Wade’s proposal as a way to ensure that the 85-year-old’s son Karim Wade could succeed his father. Wade’s party had majorities in the House and Senate, and he expected that the measure would pass. However, on 21 June Alioune Tine and Chieck Bambé Dièye held a press conference criticizing the proposal. Tine served as the president of RADDHO, a Senegalese human rights organization, and Dièye was a politician in the Front for Socialism and Democracy and the mayor of the city of Saint-Louis. They launched a campaign under the slogan “Don’t touch my constitution,” and called for political parties, unions, and other associations to join together in opposition to the amendment. They also called for a protest at the National Assembly on 23 June. Y’en a Marre endorsed these call and took up a major organizing role in the protests. Protests took a variety of forms. The largest was the demonstration outside the National Assembly, and estimates place the number of protesters in the hundreds of thousands. Protesters expressed their grievances and chanted the popular slogans “Wade Leave” and “Don’t Touch My Constitution.” The crowds contained a high number of young protesters, and they focused on Wade’s age and a feeling that he was out of touch with young Senegalese. Protesters also held discontent with the benefits on offer for Karim Wade. Protester Assane Ndiaye said, “We are not against Karim Wade. Karim Wade can be a candidate like any
other, but he shouldn’t be carried into office on his father’s shoulders.” Dièye chained himself to the gates of the National Assembly, and a number of protesters tried unsuccessfully to break through security blockades to enter Parliament. There were a number of separate demonstrations throughout Dakar and in Saint-Louis.

Y’en a Marre also brought their particular brand of protest to the events. A large part of their efforts took the form of what they called “urban guerilla poetry.” These protests took the form of public performances of their music, typically with explicitly political lyrics. The term guerilla poetry was meant to evoke guerilla warfare. Rather than large planned concerts, they would typically perform their music in quickly arranged events and then fade back into their normal neighborhoods. The leaders of the protests planned for nonviolent protests, and Y’en a Marre’s movement was explicitly nonviolent. However, there was a significant amount of violence from uncoordinated protesters. Protesters threw rocks, burned tires, and attacked members of the police. Police also responded heavily with tear gas, rubber bullets, and beating of protesters. Hundreds of protesters were injured throughout the day. Police also arrested a number of protesters, including Tine and Thiat.

As protests mounted Parliament became increasingly concerned about the proposed change to the Constitution. During the afternoon, 150 members of Parliament called for a recess. By the evening, the leader of the majority Doudou Wade- no relation to the President- made clear that he would not sign the bill. Shortly after, the Justice Minister Amadou Sall made a private phone call to Wade. Whatever was said, Abdoulaye Wade released an announcement that he would retract the proposed Constitutional change afterwards.

While his proposed change to the Constitution had failed, Wade’s interpretation of the Constitution as allowing a third term was not defeated. Y’en a Marre continued to grow after the June protests, and many of the organizing groups coalesced into the 23 June Movement, also known as M23. Wade ran for a third term for President in 2012, but Macky Sall defeated Wade.

Research Notes

Influences:

The protests were partly influenced by the Arab Spring. They later influenced the 2014 Burkina Faso Protests.

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