

Local elections of January 23, 2022 in Senegal: First lessons.

This Sunday, January 23, 2022, local elections took place throughout Senegal. Finally! Some will say! As a reminder, the last local elections in Senegal were held in 2014. Normally, new elections should have been organized after five years but, for various reasons invoked by the government, they have been postponed several times¹.

Some 6.6 million voters were called to elect their mayors and departmental councilors. 3149 lists in total, for 557 towns or cities and 43 departments. This is the first ballot since the re-election of Macky Sall in 2019, the first also since the violent riots of last March 2021 which left 13 dead. Many observers of the Senegalese political scene understand these local elections as a life-size test to test the solidity and popularity of the various coalitions and political leaders. Another particularity of this election: for the first time the mayors will be elected by universal suffrage.

Campaign progress

The electoral campaign was sometimes punctuated by rather violent incidents involving the various political parties engaged in the the conquest of the localities. Thus, in Dakar as elsewhere in Senegal, clashes have been reported between activists of the various candidates; but in general, this did not significantly affect the organization and conduct of the voting process. In other words, the population was able to vote without great difficulty, as underlined by the observers mandated by civil society.

Challenges

These local elections made it possible to get a more or less concrete idea of the real state of the opposition forces, with the main protagonists in this duel: on the one hand, the presidential coalition Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) and its political allies; on the other hand, the opposition and the slew of political parties or coalitions including: Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW) of Ousmane Sonko, Barthélemy Diaz and Khalifa Sall, Guem sa Bop, Defar Senegal, Bunt-Bi, etc.

For the presidential coalition, as political analyst Barka Baⁱⁱ points out: *the elections will be a good barometer before the legislative elections to see if the grip of power on local communities will erode and undermine the omnipotence of the ruling coalition. , whose driving force remains the APR, the Alliance for the Republic, the president's party.*

For the opposition and YAW in particular, the challenge is as the newspaper *L'Enquête*ⁱⁱⁱ mentions: weaving its web, testing the popularity of leaders such as Barthélemy Diaz, Ousmane Sonko or Khalifa Sall, and setting the date for the legislative elections of June 2022 and the presidential election of 2024.

Some lessons

The control of certain regional capitals (Dakar, Ziguinchor, Thiès, Saint-Louis, Diourbel, Kaolack in particular) remained crucial and therefore constituted a major challenge, both for the presidential party and for the opposition. Dakar is a perfect illustration of this since it has escaped the control of the ruling party since 2009.

For the time being, the provisional results (which have yet to be validated by the National Electoral Commission and the Courts of Appeal) published in the Senegalese press show that the main regional capitals have been largely won over by the opposition, in particular YAW. Two regional capitals had thus raised many hopes in the presidential camp: Dakar and Ziguinchor. In Ziguinchor, Ousmane Sonko, leader of the *Pastef-les-patriotes* party, succeeded in defeating the outgoing mayor as well as the presidential coalition with a significant difference in votes. On Sunday evening, he was congratulated by the representative of BBY, Benoit Sambou and the mayor of Ziguinchor, Abdoulaye Balde.

In Dakar, where the main electoral battle was taking place for which the BBY presidential coalition had apparently devoted enormous financial resources^{iv}, Barthélemy Diaz defeated the presidential coalition led by the Minister of Health, Abdoulaye Diouf Sarr. Similarly, Aliou Sall, brother of the President of the Republic, outgoing mayor of Guédiawaye in the suburbs of Dakar acknowledged his defeat and congratulated the YAW coalition. Many political leaders of the ruling party, ministers or general managers of state-owned companies have also been beaten in Dakar and the major regional capitals by representatives of YAW or other opponents. Even Thiès, a large city 70 kilometers from Dakar and bastion of Idrissa Seck (main ally of President Macky Sall) for many years and deemed impregnable, has been conquered by YAW. It should also be noted that young YAW candidates have won many town halls.

Certainly, the ruling party and the BBY coalition claim in a press conference held on January 25, 2022, victory through the number of capitals, or departments won, especially in the rural world; but the acknowledgment of failure is implacable for BBY, which has not succeeded in reconquering these large cities, despite the colossal means deployed.

For the opposition and its main leaders, we obviously savor a resounding victory which augurs an encouraging future for it, barring a major incident. As for the presidential coalition, it is high time to ask

the right questions and explain the extent of its electoral defeat, especially since the legislative elections are already looming in June 2022.

ⁱ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89lections_municipales_s%C3%A9n%C3%A9galaises_de_2022

ⁱⁱ https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/senegal-des-elections-locales-aux-enjeux-nationaux-23-01-2022-2461617_3826.php

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.enqueteplus.com/content/les-batailles-d%C3%A9cisives>

^{iv} Le directoire de campagne du parti au pouvoir a parlé lors d'une conférence de presse d'un budget de campagne de trois milliards de FCFA