

## Change Is Bound To Occur In Cameroon - Fomunyoh

**There are a lot of smiles in Senegal and across Africa for what most people say were free, fair and credible elections. Except for the attempt at tinkering with the constitution to give out-gone Abdoulaye Wade a third mandate, Dr. Christopher Fomunyoh, who is currently Senior Associate and Regional Director for Central and West Africa at the US-based National Democratic Institute, NDI, says the Senegalese Presidential election was among the best, most transparent and credible elections witnessed across the African continent. In this exclusive interview with The Post, he maintains that, for a peaceful transition to occur in Cameroon, Government should develop the political will and respect for citizens in order to create the appropriate framework and mechanisms for credible democratic elections to take place. He argues that, with just a little focus and commitment to democratic governance, Cameroonians, too, could renew their political leadership, peacefully, through the ballot box. Excerpts:**

**The Post: You've observed elections on the continent for a long time. How do you assess the last presidential elections in Senegal?**

Chris Fomunyoh: These presidential elections in Senegal are among the best, most transparent and credible elections I have witnessed across our continent of Africa. The Senegalese people should be very proud of themselves and their democracy. They have also given democrats across this continent, especially the African youth, reasons to be proud and hopeful about the future, and so they deserve our collective applause and appreciation. After a series of flawed or fraudulent elections, the continent needed a real boost and a happy success story to show that we Africans can conduct peaceful and credible elections just as is the case in established democracies on other continents.

**What impressed you most?**

First, the Senegalese youth and civil society organisations were the first to reject outright and forcefully, attempts by outgoing 85-year-old President Abdoulaye Wade to extend his stay in power. It was their courage and extensive mobilisation across the entire country that emboldened the political parties and the electorate in general to realise that the stakes were extremely high for the country and the elections were worth fighting for. Besides public demonstrations in Dakar, civil society groups also recruited, trained and deployed thousands of observers to monitor the elections in the country's 12,000 polling sites. These citizen monitors also harmonised their actions through a common platform, with one of coalitions undertaking parallel vote tabulation (PVT) to fasten the transmission and analysis of data and information by SMS mobile phones in order to crosscheck the veracity of official election results.

The Senegalese media were also on top on the situation as they covered all aspects of the electoral process including the announcement of election results; polling site by polling site as the polls closed. That level of transparent handling of election results made it extremely difficult for anyone to tinker with the electoral outcome. Finally, I was impressed by the unity of opposition parties who put aside their personal and philosophical differences to line up behind Macky Sall, so their country could have a peaceful transition. The combination of these elements was so powerful that no leader in his right mind would have dared to undermine the voices and votes of the people. The two main coalitions in competition had political party poll watchers at the polling sites, and they too were compiling results on behalf of their respective candidates.

**What would you say worked?**

The combination of factors I just listed worked so well that by Sunday evening,

most people in Dakar - including both Wade and President-elect Macky Sall - already had a sense of the election trends. Moreover, the results were being centralised at the local level so they could be tracked division by division and region by region. The Sunday evening phone call from Abdoulaye Wade to Macky Sall, acknowledging his defeat and congratulating his opponent, was the icing on the



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cake and diffused the tension that was beginning to rise as election returns were being announced on national and international radio and television stations. Everything seemed to have fallen in place for Senegal and, as in 2000, the Senegalese earned the right to a genuine and legitimate transition of power as the country confirmed its credentials as an effective democracy.

**And, what did not work so well?**

I would have loved to see higher voter turnout. Although more voters turned out this time than for the first round election in February, the voter turnout was approximately 55 percent. It would have been nice to have more people at the polls - but even there, too, it is to the credit of the Senegalese election authorities that

they did not try to inflate the percentages as we have seen in some other African countries.

**How does the Senegalese experience compare with that of our own country Cameroon?**

The comparison between Senegal and Cameroon with regards to elections is as dramatic as the difference between day and night. For the past 50 years in our country, the opaque handling of electoral processes, administrative hurdles that constantly impede the ability of Cameroonian civil society organisations and the media to monitor and report on our elections, the fragmentation of our political parties, the apathy of our youth prompted by their lack of hope and confidence in both our leaders and the future - the cumulative effect of all these elements make the Cameroonian electoral environment pale in comparison to that of Senegal. Honestly speaking, our leaders of today lack both the political will and the respect for our fellow citizens to create the appropriate framework and mechanisms for credible democratic elections in our country.

**Are you saying that Cameroon**

despair; but I also know that change is bound to come to our country, and that as we reinforce our commitment to democratic governance and if we stay focused and keep our eyes on the prize, we too will live to see meaningful renewal of political leadership in our country through the ballot box.

**What lessons can Africa learn from the Senegalese presidential polls?**

That while a few tin pot autocrats continue to suppress their people and stifle their democratic aspirations, the continent is not doomed to failure, and so Africa too has its share of success stories. Along those lines, the African Union charter on democracy, governance and elections that sets standards for credible elections, and has now been ratified by many countries, needs to be domesticated across the continent so our leaders can practise and implement the conventions that they sign.

**Would you say that Wade has come to the end of his public life or can you see him playing some other role?**

Outgoing President Wade is a highly educated and worldly man, and probably will find many ways to continue to make a positive contribution to humanity even out of the public eye. He may want to spend more time with his kids and grandkids, or even write his memoirs, something that will enrich future generations too. As I have always said, African leaders need to show the rest of the world that they too understand there's always a life after state house.

**What, according to you, are the challenges that Macky Sall will be grappling with in the days ahead?**

Many challenges await Macky Sall, including the thorny question of high youth unemployment, rebuilding various state institutions including the legislative and judiciary branches of government that have been significantly weakened in the past decade, and finding ways to mobilise new resources into state coffers for development projects. Politically, Macky Sall would also need to figure out how to sustain the very broad coalition that supported his candidacy, many members of whom expect to play prominent roles in governing.

**Do you think Macky Sall will live up to expectations?**

I have known Macky Sall since he was prime minister and then President of the National Assembly, and he has the temperament and experience to succeed. He is also aware that his reputation and popularity would suffer if the Senegalese don't think he is delivering on his campaign promises. He is young, energetic and very open-minded; he also interacts very well with others and so should be able to build consensus around his policy priorities. I have high hopes for Senegal and I believe Macky Sall will succeed.

**Any final word?**

We also cannot lose sight of the symbolism of Macky Sall's election. At 50, Sall represents an emerging new generation of African leaders that was born after independence. Macky Sall's election also epitomizes recent democratic progress in the sub-region of West Africa where all but two Presidents in the sub-region have been in office for less than 10 years. Africans and friends of Africa can only hope that the standards set by Senegal are emulated in other countries on the continent.

INTERVIEWED BY FRANCIS WACHE