From the colonization period up to the 1990s, a large number of national and local religious authorities considerably supported the ruling government in Senegal by guaranteeing the French government’s control over rural areas or by expressing clear recommendations to the voters after the independence. Nevertheless, the mutual loyalty of the secular and the religious powers has not always functioned without resistance. In the middle of the 19th century, the French governor Faïdherbe, who counted on the purchased loyalty of local marabouts in order to control rural areas, was fought by the Haj Oumar. Senegal’s first president after the purchased loyalty of national marabouts in order to control rural areas, was fought by Abdou Diouf. His victory was a personal pilgrimage to his marabout. The first act of the new president just after his victory was a personal pilgrimage to his marabout in Touba, in order to thank him for support and prayer. Senegalese marabouts have repeatedly refused to express openly their support for Wade, but it is not forbidden to phone home. ‘This statement was met with applause, reflecting a belief in the real chance of political change. We can assume that his influence was considerably increased on an individual level. People’s will to take autonomous political decisions, independently from the advice of marabouts, was obvious. This evolution was the fruitful ground for Abdoulaye Wade’s strategy to count on transnational networks. Wade himself organized his political campaign from his residence in Versailles near Paris. Political claims of the migrants constituted the claim of the ‘programme: a favourite customs policy, governmental aid for investments in Senegal, bilateral social insurance agreements, human living conditions for migrants in France, etc. Wade systematically addressed the migrants during electoral meetings that were organized in the centres of transnational communities’ homes and in and around Paris. He presented himself as the only candidate who is close to the migrants and who best knows their problems.

Migrants as vote multiplicators

The central reason for this election campaign beyond Senegal was the importance of the migrants as free information between the political leaders and the voters in Senegal, especially in rural areas, where religious authorities have played the role of counsellors in electoral affairs for a long time. In Paris, at the end of the official campaign on Friday night before the elections, several speakers urged the migrants to influence their relatives and friends in Senegal: ‘The campaign is officially closed, but it is not forbidden to phone home.’ This strategy worked also in Senegal, where people from Dakar came to visit their family before the day of elections in order to convince them to choose Wade. Abdou Diouf, who was conscious of the importance of the opposition parties in urban areas, scheduled the elections during the Aid feast, hoping that people from Dakar or other cities would celebrate the Aid in their home villages instead of voting in the city. This plan failed, as residents of the big cities organized themselves very well in order to be back in town in time. Ultimately their presence in rural areas was favourable for the opposition. Wade’s strategy of multiplying votes from migrants back to Senegal and from Senegal to France was very successful. Another important aspect was the growing speed of communication and the Internet. The private press company Sudonline published the main opposition journal Sud Quotidien online, so that Senegalese abroad were very well informed about the political and economic situation at home – particularly about the corruption scandals in which members of the socialist government was very implicated. In Paris, the printed version of the online journal circulated among migrants who, in majority, had access to the Internet. Another important factor for Wade’s victory in 2000 was the efficient survey of the elections by journalists who assisted at the counting of the votes, and communicated the results via mobile phones to the private radio station of the ‘Sud’ group. The mirror effect continued via satellite radios which spread the results in Senegal. Senegalese migrants celebrated Wade’s victory in the suburbs of the French capital as well as in Dakar even before the government had time to officially count the votes.

Notes

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