

From Hope to Crisis: Senegal's Victory and Togo's Setback

by Nyasha Mcbride Mpani, Project Leader, IJR



Reports from Togo indicate that the President and his ruling party members unanimously approved changes to the constitution, eliminating direct universal suffrage for the presidency. Instead, the president will now be elected by Parliament for a single six-year term.

A few hours after 44-year-old Senegal's President-elect Diomaye won the hotly contested elections, which had seemed impossible due to outgoing President Macky Sall's attempt to tamper with the constitution and defer elections to November 2024, a sense of relief swept through Senegal and the region.

The elections brought a sigh of relief to a region struggling with a decline in democracy, marked by excessive executive power and a rise in popular coups. His victory comes at a crucial moment and is seen as an opportunity to strengthen democracy not only in Senegal but also in West Africa. Senegal's return as Africa's and West Africa's poster child for democracy is hoped for, as the region has witnessed democratic backsliding over the past years. This regression has been characterized by pervasive corruption, authoritarian regimes, press restrictions, human rights abuses, discrimination against minorities, and economic downturns, eroding public trust.

However, this celebration was short-lived. Less than 48 hours after people across the continent celebrated Senegal's democratic win, Togo re-emerged as another West African nightmare. Reports from Togo indicate that the President and his ruling party members unanimously approved changes to the constitution, eliminating direct universal suffrage for the presidency. Instead, the president will now be elected by Parliament for a single six-year term, without any debate, effectively depriving Togolese citizens of their right to choose their leader. This move directly violates the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, which prohibits any amendments or revisions to constitutions that undermine democratic principles.

This constitutional manoeuvre in Togo follows a similar one in May 2019, which allowed the current President Gnassingbe to seek re-election and potentially extend his stay in office until 2030. This action sparked massive protests in 2017-18, tarnishing Togo's democratic image. This recent move further stains Togo's history, as it was the first country in West Africa to experience a military coup in 1963.

Despite these troubling developments, what do the people of Togo think about democracy? According to the latest Afrobarometer data (2021/2023), 68% of Togolese prefer democracy over any other alternative, but 64% express dissatisfaction with how democracy functions in their country. Moreover, 82% reject one-party rule, 53% reject military rule, 78% reject autocratic rule, and 82% advocate for presidential term limits. Additionally, 52% believe that Togo is not a democracy or is a democracy with significant problems.

Respecting the views of the Togolese people on democracy and aligning with their vision of an ideal democratic country would restore confidence in democratic governance. It is imperative to develop mechanisms to curb such parliamentary actions that deny citizens the right to choose their leaders, especially in a country where 74% of citizens prefer elections as the only method for leadership selection.

Togo's ongoing constitutional crisis requires decisive action from ECOWAS and the African Union, considering the potential implications for the security and stability of the already fragile region. While the continent and the region are in the euphoria of Senegal's successful elections, all eyes should be on Togo, the events unfolding in Togo should not be overlooked, as there is a risk of contagion if the democratic crisis is not addressed and condemned swiftly.

The opinions or recommendations expressed in this news column are strictly those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

Stay updated and follow us on social media



WEBSITE
IJR.ORG.ZA



EMAIL US
INFO@IJR.ORG.ZA

