

David Robert; Corinna Heuer: All That Glitters Is Not Gold: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Mali

The presidential elections held in April this year opened the door to another term of office for Amadou Toumani Touré, Mali's head of state. With more than two thirds of the vote, the electorate clearly demonstrated its trust in him, whereas the opposition accepted his election only after the constitutional court had dismissed its complaint. While the non-affiliated candidate, Mr Touré, also known as 'ATT', won 71.20 percent of the vote, his challenger, Ibrahim Boubakar Keïta, mostly called 'IBK', obtained only 19.15 percent. The front lines had already formed in the run-up to the elections. While 33 parties supported ATT, 16 parties formed the opposition coalition, FDR, which fielded no fewer than four candidates against him. Now, after the election, attention concentrates on the parliamentary elections scheduled for July, in which the FDR will again appear as the opposition block to ATT.

Amadou Toumani Touré was elected by a great majority before, in 2002. Having brought down the former military dictator, Moussa Traoré, in 1991, thus paving the way towards democracy in Mali, this lieutenant colonel is highly esteemed among the population. After his election, he appealed to all political forces to forge a consensus in order to solve together the problems of the country, which is regarded as one of the showpieces of democracy in Africa.

Mali, whose rise is being observed by the outside world with both astonishment and suspicion in equal measure, was strongly affected by the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire as its economy was greatly dependent on that country, from which numerous Malians now had to return to their homes. Other great burdens for Mali were the drought and the locust infestation in 2003 and 2004, which threatened farming and, thus, food security. Finally, the country is held down by massive economic and social structural problems, such as its high proportion of desert land, its low proportion of productive land, extreme illiteracy, and widespread poverty.

ATT praises himself for having combated especially the latter. In this context, he likes to mention the promotion of agriculture, the expansion of the cultivated area through irrigation, the privatisation of the cotton industry, and the establishment of new industrial enterprises. His further plans include erecting an assembly plant for agricultural utility vehicles, building streets to Senegal, Ghana, and Togo, realising literacy measures, and constructing various bridges. What has been realised and what is being planned is always presented by the president so as to have the maximum media appeal, a fact which causes his enemies to accuse him of personality worship.

For a long time, the political consensus proved advantageous for all sides, so that the question of a rival candidate against ATT hardly came up. However, having founded his own party, the RPM, specifically for the purpose late in 2001, Boubakar Keïta, the speaker of parliament, announced that he intended to stand for the office of head of state in September 2005. And he was not the only one: Soumeïla Cissé of the ADEMA also indicated his interest, but his party decided to support Amadou Toumani Touré in 2007. What is more, things became uncomfortable for the incumbent in 2006, when a book published in Paris revealed the clientelist structures surrounding his person. It was only the high degree of illiteracy in Mali that prevented the disclosures presented in the book from spreading, which would have been embarrassing for the president.

By now, supporters and opponents of Toumani Touré are confronting each other in clearly outlined groups. The ATT-friendly ADP has received backing from the defectors CNID and MPR. It is opposed by the FDR, which recently competed for the presidential office against Toumani Touré with four candidates – the leaders of the FDR's constituent parties: Next to the 62-year-old former prime and foreign minister IBK, a man of clear words and deeds, these include Tiébilé Dramé, the

chairman of the PARENA, Souleyman Boubéye Maïga of the Convergence 2007, a former minister of defence, and Mamadou Bakary Sangaré, a current MP. The candidates of those parties that are not integrated in alliances are Oumar Mariko, Madiassa Maguiraga, and Sibidé Aminata Diallo.

To maintain his lead over his seven opponents, ATT posed as a man of the people during the election campaign, visited the country, and praised his achievements. His challengers, on the other hand, criticised the supposedly corrupt leadership of the president and invoked the danger to democracy arising from the political consensus.

Now that the election is over, the outgoing has become the incoming president, and the opposition has accepted its defeat. It may be asked, however, whether the election actually was as free, transparent, and well-organised as it was judged to be by the observers and the constitutional court. On election Sunday itself, everything went according to plan, but the run-up to the elections was marked by both negative and positive aspects: Many election cards arrived too late, which led to problems. The election offices themselves, on the other hand, were staffed correctly, and each presidential candidate was able to watch what went on there. Some security officers showed a rather indiscreet attitude in controlling the access to the voting box, and the presence of the diverse political forces was questionable at times. There was some talk about vote-buying and about the fact that the chairmen of the offices had not informed the election workers and/or had appointed them to suit their taste. What is more, some election cards were collected by party officials using fake identification cards, and national television was criticised for being too clearly dominated by the sitting president.

The focus now is on the imminent parliamentary elections in which 1400 candidates, 175 of them women, will compete for 147 seats. The debates between and disputes within the parties about the arrangement of the lists have already started. In this context, the phenomenon of *transhumance* attracts attention: People who are interested in standing for office but are disregarded either leave or change their party, which is something the Malian public does not like at all.

To be sure, ATT is not the worst president for Mali, and when it comes to consolidated democracy, Mali, a showpiece of transition in Africa, still has a long way to go, but there is no alternative to the path adopted. On the one hand, the election process must be improved; on the other, the population must be informed in detail about what it may expect from its politicians. To aim for both is a task in which international donors should participate as well.