

ANALYSIS



Sympathy for the underdog has brought Wade newfound support

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SENEGAL

Karim's comeback

The former president's son is plotting his political resurrection from prison

Just one day before Karim Wade was sentenced to six years in jail for corruption in March, the son of Senegal's former president Abdoulaye Wade was nominated by his father's party, the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalaise* (PDS), as candidate for the next presidential elections. Karim, a once deeply unpopular figure, whose nomination to ministries including international cooperation, energy and transport sparked the worst rioting Senegal has seen in decades, has returned to the political spotlight.

Once nicknamed 'minister of heaven and earth' for his wealth of ministerial portfolios, Karim has already served two years of his sentence and could be offered amnesty and released from jail. But he is unlikely to be out in time for the next elections, prompting accusations that President Macky Sall is sidelining his political opponents. Sall's supporters say that the PDS is merely playing theatrical games with its quick-fire decision to nominate Karim, as the next elections are not until 2017. They argue that Karim is more valuable to the opposition in prison than on the campaign trail and that Wade cannot run for the presidency because the constitution bars candidates with dual nationality (he has French and Senegalese).

Karim's name and financial muscle could make him a strong candidate to face Sall at the ballot box. That does not necessarily make him popular, and it was Karim's apparent desire to become president in 2012, along with his nomination to senior positions in the government, that contributed to a

nationwide campaign to vote President Abdoulaye Wade out of power. But across the capital, Dakar, and especially around the area of Rebeuss prison where Wade Junior is serving his sentence, walls have graffiti slogans such as 'Free Karim.' Karim's sudden popularity has become a thorn in the side of Sall, who is struggling to remain in favour with people who feel that justice has not been done.

"In Senegal," says Moubarack Lô, a former adviser to Macky Sall, "if you are oppressed, people will be sympathetic to you. Memories are short, so you can go from a situation of being disliked to one of being loved. We forgive very quickly, even if you make a mistake."

Karim's 'mistake,' said the March verdict by a special court set up to try crimes of illegal enrichment, was to steal state money and hide it in offshore bank accounts. Although he was initially accused by prosecutors of having embezzled 700bn CFA francs (\$121m), the court was unable to prove it. Karim was eventually charged with having stolen 117bn CFA francs and sentenced to six years in jail. The court will also make him pay 138bn CFA francs in fines.

At the beginning of the trial, supporters lauded Sall for his attempts to bring transparency and good governance to the political system. But because of the court's inability to prove

how much Karim stole, Sall is now being accused of score-settling and removing his opponents from the political scene. The Senegalese are calling this failure to find a paper trail an injustice and Karim's popularity, as a result, is soaring. "This feeling of injustice is what has changed things," says Abdou Lô, a political commentator. "There are no documents, so he is now a political victim."

\$121m

The authorities charged Karim Wade with corruption but were unable to prove the case for the full sum