

World Report 2024 - Senegal

During 2023, arbitrary arrests of opposition figures and activists, security force use of excessive force, unjustified restrictions on civic space, and other human rights violations continued in Senegal.

On July 3, President Macky Sall [announced](#) he would not run for a third term in the 2024 presidential elections, many having said his candidacy would breach the country's constitution. On July 28, gendarmes arrested prominent opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, head of the political party Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity, PASTEF), on [charges](#) of fomenting insurrection and undermining state security.

Abuse of students remained a serious concern [with](#) girls facing high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, sexual exploitation, harassment, and other abuses, by teachers and school officials. The low retention rate of girls in secondary schools, where most of these cases go unreported and perpetrators are seldom held to account, is linked to these abuses.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and activists continued to be subjected to smear campaigns and abuse, including arbitrary arrests, threats, and physical assaults. The law punishes any person who commits an "unnatural act" with a person of the same sex with a prison sentence of up to five years.

[Exploitation, abuse, and neglect](#) of children living in Senegal's traditional Quranic schools continued. Tens of thousands of these children, known as *talibés*, live in conditions of extreme squalor, deprived of adequate food and medical care.

Excessive Use of Force

During protests in March, May, and June, security forces used excessive force to maintain public order.

On March 16, in Dakar, Senegal's capital, police [used](#) tear gas on protesters supporting opposition leader Sonko, ahead of a court case in which he was facing charges of libel. Police forcefully extracted Sonko from his vehicle and drove him to the courthouse. The previous day, March 15, police had also fired teargas at Guy Marius Sagna, an opposition member of parliament, while he attempted to visit Sonko at his home.

In mid-May, young protestors took to the streets in Dakar's Ngor neighborhood, denouncing an increasingly "repressive state." Security forces responded with excessive use of force, [firing bullets and tear gas](#). The violence [resulted](#) in one teenager being killed and 30 people wounded.

Between May 31 and June 3, violent demonstrations broke out in Dakar after Sonko was sentenced to two years in jail on June 1 for allegedly corrupting youth, undermining his chances to run in the 2024 presidential election. On June 2, the [army](#) was deployed to strengthen security in Dakar. Demonstrators built barricades, blocked main roads, burned tires, destroyed and looted public and private property, and threw stones at the police, who responded with teargas. Various witnesses reported the presence of armed "thugs" among the security forces, and the opposition has [accused](#) the authorities of using armed civilians, alongside security forces, during protests. The media reported similar accounts during [these](#) demonstrations and [previous](#) ones in Senegal. International media also reported the use of live bullets during the protests in Dakar, leading to the deaths of a [15-year-old boy](#) and a [26-year-old male student](#).

On June 4, Minister of the Interior Antoine Diome [said](#) the violence led to 16 deaths and 500 arrests across Senegal. In a statement on the same day, PASTEF [said](#) security forces and “militias” killed 19 people and urged Senegalese people “to defend themselves by all means and to fight back.” According to lawyers and the opposition, from May 30 to June 2, in and around Dakar alone, security forces [arrested](#) at least 250 people, including children—mostly PASTEF members and supporters, but also [civil society activists](#)—and beat some of them.

Crackdown on Media and Dissent

Throughout the year, the authorities cracked down on the media and dissent. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained journalists and other dissenting voices. They also restricted access to mobile internet and some social media platforms and banned demonstrations organized by the political opposition.

The National Council for Audiovisual Regulation suspended Walf TV over its coverage of the opposition-led demonstrations in Senegal for [seven days](#) on February 10 and again for [one month](#) on June 9.

On March 10, security forces arrested Senegal’s former prime minister Cheikh Hadjibou Soumare on charges of libel after he asked President Macky Sall in a public letter if he had provided funds to French far-right leader Marine Le Pen. He was [released](#) on March 13 and placed under judicial supervision.

On May 16, security forces [arrested](#) journalist Ndèye Maty Niang, also known as Maty Sarr Niang, at her home in Dakar and charged her with “calling for insurrection, violence, hatred,” and other crimes, following her Facebook posts in which she criticized Senegalese authorities.

On June 1, as protests rocked Dakar and other parts of the country, the interior minister [announced](#) restrictions on social media, [including](#) Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and Tik Tok, to stop the “dissemination of hate and subversive messages.” On June 4, the government [extended](#) the restrictions to mobile internet access. Those restrictions prevented journalists, human rights activists, and others from communicating, getting information, or reporting on unfolding events.

During the June protests in Dakar, security forces intimidated journalists and prevented them from covering unfolding events. On May 29, gendarmes [stopped](#) a team of three journalists working for Senegalese online media Senegal7, seized their telephones and cameras, and prevented them from filming PASTEF protesters who had gathered in Dakar’s Sacré-Cœur neighborhood.

On June 15, the authorities [banned](#) an opposition-led demonstration in Dakar. Dakar’s prefect said the demonstration, organized by Sonko’s supporters, posed threats to public order.

On July 28, gendarmes arrested Sonko on [charges](#) of fomenting insurrection, undermining state security, creating serious political unrest, and criminal association, among others.

On July 31, Senegal’s interior minister announced the [dissolution](#) of PASTEF for rallying its supporters during violent protests in June 2023 and in March 2021. PASTEF [condemned](#) its dissolution as “anti-democratic.” On the same day, the government also [restricted](#) access to mobile data internet services to stop what it called the spread of “hateful and subversive” messages on social media. On June 6, Sonko, who started a hunger strike in protest against his detention, was [admitted](#) to emergency care at a hospital in Dakar.

On July 29, police [arrested](#) Pape Alé Niang, the outspoken editor of the news site Dakarmatin, on charges of “insurrection” at his home in Dakar, following comments he made in a live broadcast on his Facebook page about Sonko’s arrest on July 28. He was [provisionally released](#) after a 10-day hunger strike. This was the [third time](#) security forces had arrested Niang since November 2022.

On October 28, [Khalifa Sall](#)—leader of the [Taxawu party](#), former mayor of Dakar, and a presidential candidate—denounced the police who prevented his convoy from entering the Fatick region, southeast of Dakar. The police said the 30-vehicle convoy had not been [authorized](#). Khalifa Sall’s intent had been to continue his campaign to collect the sponsorships necessary for the approval of his candidacy.

On October 27, security forces arrested PASTEF leader, Amadou Ba, at the end of a television [show](#). At time of writing, Ba’s lawyers said no reason for his arrest had been given.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

LGBT people and activists continued to be subjected to smear campaigns and abuse.

Article 319 of Senegal’s penal code punishes sexual intercourse termed “acts against nature” between persons of the same sex with up to five years in prison.

On August 15, police arrested 10 young men during a party in a private home in Dakar and detained them for “acts against nature” and possession of digital content that was “contrary to public decency.” They were beaten, extorted, and physically abused by the police, then released one month later for lack of evidence. Some were not able to return to their families for fear of stigmatization.

On October 28, in Kaolack, a mob [dug up](#) the body of a man suspected of having been gay, dragged it through town, and then burned it in an egregious incident that was caught on camera, and the video was posted on social media. On October 29, Senegal’s state prosecutor announced an investigation had been opened. On October 30, four suspects were arrested in connection with the incident.

Abuses against Talibé Children in Quranic Schools

Abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children attending Senegal’s still-unregulated, traditional Quranic boarding schools (*daaras*) continued at alarming rates. Tens of thousands of children known as *talibés* are forced by their Quranic teachers in Senegal to beg daily for money, food, rice, or sugar. Many Quranic teachers (also known as *marabouts*) and their assistants continue to set daily begging quotas, enforced with beatings, while subjecting talibés to neglect. Many daaras are housed in decrepit or unfinished buildings without water, sanitation, electricity, or security, exposing the children to health and safety risks. Each year, thousands of talibés, including Senegalese and foreign children, migrate to major cities to attend Senegal’s daaras. Thousands of talibés are victims of human trafficking, which under Senegalese law includes the act of exploiting children for money through forced begging as well as the recruitment or transport of children for this purpose.

Despite strong domestic laws banning child abuse, neglect, endangerment, and human trafficking, these are rarely enforced against Quranic teachers. The government has made some efforts to improve daara conditions and remove children from the streets, but sustained commitment by authorities to stop forced begging and abuse of talibés has proven elusive.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Senegalese girls face high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, harassment, and abuse by teachers and school officials as well as rape and sexual abuse by other students.

In March, 27 girls filed rape charges against their Quranic teacher, 34-year-old Serigne Khadim Mbacké, in Touba, central Senegal. On June 5, after several weeks on the run, Mbacké

was [arrested](#) by security forces.

The government has yet to accept the scale of school-related sexual violence or take concrete actions to tackle school-related sexual violence and protect survivors when and after they report abuses.