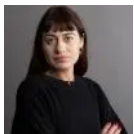


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Senegalese Government Dissolves Opposition Party, Cuts Internet

Assault on Democracy Ahead of Elections



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Gendarmes are deployed to calm protests after opposition leader Ousmane Sonko has been detained, in Dakar, Senegal, July 31, 2023. © 2023 Ngouda Dione/Reuters

On July 31, [Senegal](#)'s interior minister announced the dissolution of the opposition party *Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité* (Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity, or PASTEF) for rallying its supporters during violent protests in June this year and in

March 2021. 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.

These moves follow the July 28 [arrest](#) of PASTEF leader Ousman Sonko on [charges](#) of fomenting insurrection, undermining state security, creating serious political unrest, and criminal association, among others. A court had already [sentenced](#) Sonko to two years in jail on June 1 for corrupting youth, undermining his chances to run in next year’s presidential election.

On July 30, Sonko [announced](#) on social media that he had begun a hunger strike in custody and called on Senegalese citizens “to resist.” PASTEF meanwhile [condemned](#) its dissolution as “anti-democratic.”

Hundreds of Senegalese citizens have taken to the streets to protest Sonko’s arrest and detention. On July 31, protests erupted in [Dakar](#), Senegal’s capital, and in the southern city of Ziguinchor. Senegal’s interior minister announced that two people [died](#) during protests in Ziguinchor on July 31 but did not provide any details around these deaths.

Demonstrations had broken out in Dakar previously following Sonko’s earlier arrest and sentencing in June. The violence [led](#) to at least 16 deaths, including 2 members of the security forces. Score of others were injured and 500 people across Senegal were arrested.

“The government of Senegal must respect its human rights obligations. It must prioritize dialogue with the opposition over the use of indiscriminate repression that leads to violence and instability,” said prominent Senegalese human rights activist Alioune Tine.

The government’s decision to dissolve PASTEF violates freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and democratic participation. These rights are guaranteed under international law including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Senegal [ratified](#) in 1978.

Senegalese authorities should immediately reinstate PASTEF and ensure the elections process continues with full respect for fundamental rights and liberties. They should also restore internet, allowing the free flow of information and people’s ability to express their views.

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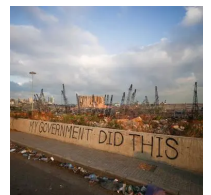
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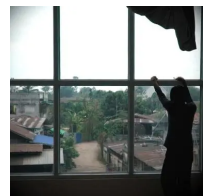
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