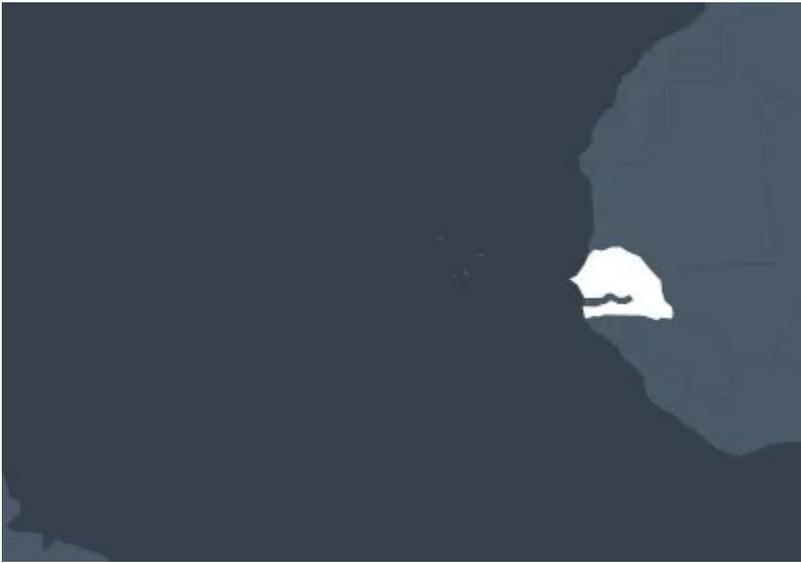


Freedom in the World 2025



header1 Status Change

Senegal's status improved from Partly Free to Free because the country's democratic institutions resisted an attempt to unduly delay the presidential election, and an opposition coalition overcame significant barriers to win both the presidency and a majority in free and fair parliamentary elections.

header2 Overview

Senegal is one of Africa's most stable electoral democracies and has undergone peaceful transfers of power between rival parties since 2000. However, politically motivated prosecutions of opposition leaders and changes to the electoral laws have posed obstacles to the competitiveness of the opposition in recent years. The country is known for its relatively independent media, though restrictive laws and intimidation continue to constrain press freedom. Other ongoing challenges

include corruption in government, weak rule of law, and inadequate protections for the rights of women and LGBT+ people.

header3 Key Developments in 2024

- After multiple criminal cases hampered his ability to run for president, opposition leader Ousmane Sonko endorsed Bassirou Diomaye Faye as his replacement candidate in January.
- In February, term-limited incumbent President Macky Sall and progovernment lawmakers moved to delay the election—originally due that month—until December, prompting mass protests and related violence. The Constitutional Council blocked the effort, however, and a new election date was set for March.
- Both Faye and Sonko were released from detention before the election, and Faye defeated incumbent Prime Minister Amadou Ba to win the presidency. He then named Sonko as his prime minister.
- In September, Faye dissolved the National Assembly and called for snap legislative elections in November. The elections were conducted without major disruptions, and Faye’s political party, African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (PASTEF), won a sweeping majority, taking 130 out of 165 seats.

PR Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

3.003
4.004

The president is chief of state and head of government, and is directly elected to a maximum of two consecutive terms. In 2016, the presidential term was reduced via referendum from seven years to five, effective after the end of President Macky Sall’s first term in 2019.

In January 2024, the Constitutional Council released the final list of candidates for that year’s election, due in February. It excluded Sonko, the PASTEF leader, as the Supreme Court had recently upheld his six-month suspended jail term for defamation; he faced several other criminal charges and remained in detention at the time. Faye, PASTEF’s secretary-general, was in pretrial detention on separate defamation charges but had not been convicted, allowing him to secure his candidacy. A number of other opposition figures were excluded due to criminal cases or accusations of dual citizenship.

In February, Sall announced that the election would be postponed due to disputes over the candidate list, prompting objections from PASTEF and public protests. A parliamentary majority passed legislation to move the election to December, allowing Sall to remain in office after the end of his mandate in April. However, the Constitutional Council rejected the move, and Sall set a new election date for March. Both Sonko and Faye were released from detention after the National Assembly passed amnesty legislation in early March.

With Sonko’s endorsement, Faye won the presidency, taking more than 54 percent of the first-round vote against Prime Minister Amadou Ba of the ruling Alliance for the Republic (APR). Faye ran as independent due to a 2023 government order that had legally dissolved his party, though the order was reversed after the election. Vote counting proceeded smoothly, and Ba quickly conceded his defeat. Faye took office in early April and named Sonko as his prime minister.

A2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?	4.004 4.004
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Members of Senegal’s 165-seat National Assembly are elected to five-year terms, with 112 elected in single-member districts and 53 by proportional representation.

In September 2024, President Faye dissolved the National Assembly elected in 2022, which was dominated by the APR and its allies, and called snap legislative elections for November, within the 90-day timeframe set by the country’s constitution. PASTEF won an overwhelming majority, with 130 seats, and left an APR-led coalition with just 16. Ten smaller parties and coalitions divided the remainder. The balloting proceeded smoothly, and election observers from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States reported no major irregularities.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because election monitoring groups did not report any significant problems with the conduct of snap parliamentary elections.

A3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	3.003 4.004
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The National Autonomous Electoral Commission (CENA) administers elections. Although the CENA is nominally independent, its members are appointed by the president. The opposition criticized the government for making important changes ahead of the 2017 legislative balloting, including the introduction of a new biometric voting system, without engaging in dialogue or building political consensus.

An electoral law passed in 2018 requires all aspiring presidential candidates to collect signatures from at least 0.8 percent of the overall electorate before their names could appear on the ballot, and all groups presenting National Assembly lists to obtain signatures from 0.5 percent of voters in at least seven regions. The Constitutional Council has excluded many opposition candidates in practice, citing a variety of legal obstacles.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	3.003 4.004
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Registration requirements for new political parties are not onerous, and registered parties can organize and operate without government interference. However, opposition candidates still face major financial inequities when competing with incumbents. There is no public financing for political parties, but ruling parties have generally been able to deploy state resources to garner support, whereas opposition leaders are often forced to rely on personal wealth to finance party operations or on political alliances to access power.

B2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	3.003 4.004
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Opposition parties can increase their support or gain power through elections, though governments have frequently taken steps—including prosecuting opposition politicians—that appear designed to interfere with their ability to do so. The 2018 electoral law was criticized by opposition leaders for making it more difficult for candidates to appear on the ballot, and was widely seen as a move to clear the field and ensure President Sall’s 2019 reelection.

The prosecutions of some of Sall’s most prominent political opponents in recent years have presented an obstacle to rotations of power. This pattern escalated in 2023 as multiple prosecutions of Sonko progressed. In 2021, Sonko had been arrested on charges of rape, leading to widespread protests. He repeatedly denied the allegations, saying that the charge was a politically motivated attempt to exclude him from the 2024 presidential race. Sonko was later charged with the defamation of Senegal’s minister of tourism over a 2022 speech. In March 2023, Sonko was found guilty on the defamation charge, following a trial that prompted destructive protests in Dakar by his supporters. After an appeal, he was eventually handed a financial penalty and a six-month suspended jail sentence. That result was confirmed by the Supreme Court in January 2024, leading to his exclusion from the presidential candidate list. Separately in June 2023, Sonko was convicted of “corrupting young people” but acquitted of rape. In July of that year, he was arrested again and charged with offenses including fomenting insurrection, and the Ministry of the Interior announced the dissolution of PASTEF.

Faye was also in detention for much of 2023, having been arrested in April on charges of contempt of court, defamation, and acts likely to undermine public peace; the case related to his criticism of the courts on social media. Sanko and Faye were released before the presidential election in March 2024 after the enactment of an amnesty law that applied to political or protest-related offenses between 2021 and 2024, though the measure drew criticism for excusing state officials who engaged in human rights abuses associated with the suppression of protests.

Shortly after Faye’s presidential election victory, outgoing President Sall repealed the decree that had dissolved PASTEF the previous year, clearing the way for the party to win a strong majority in the November parliamentary elections.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because the main opposition party was able to win both the presidency and a majority in the parliament despite a series of obstacles imposed under the previous government.

B3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	3.003 4.004
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People’s political choices are largely free from domination by groups that are not democratically accountable. Despite the constitutional separation of religion and state, Sufi Muslim marabouts exercise some influence on voters and politicians, particularly on subjects like homosexuality, marriage, and abortion rights.

B4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	3.003 4.004
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Senegalese citizens formally enjoy equal political rights regardless of gender or ethnicity, but women face informal discrimination that limits their participation in politics as voters, candidates, and party officials. Women’s representation in the cabinet is relatively poor. Women are better represented in the National Assembly, holding 68 seats or about 41 percent of the body after the 2024 legislative elections. This is partially due to a 2010 law requiring gender parity on candidate lists, though gender parity is less respected at the local level.

Due to high levels of discrimination and social stigma, LGBT+ people have no meaningful ability to advocate for their interests in the political sphere.

C Functioning of Government

C1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? | 3.003
4.004

The elected president, his cabinet, and national legislators determine government policies. However, power is concentrated in the executive branch, and the National Assembly is limited in its ability to check the president. The executive has in the past blocked certain parliamentary inquiries into its activities. Many lawmakers objected to President Faye's September 2024 dissolution of the National Assembly to hold snap elections, though the process was permitted under the constitution.

C2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? | 2.002 4.004

Corruption remains a serious problem. Anticorruption laws are unevenly enforced, and enforcement actions are sometimes viewed as politically motivated. A 2022 report by the Court of Auditors identified extensive misuse of funds in connection with the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its initial efforts to combat corruption during 2024, President Faye's administration published reports from the accounts courts, the National Office for the Fight against Fraud and Corruption, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative that had been withheld from the public under former President Sall.

C3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? | 3.003 4.004

The government generally operates with openness. However, authorities have frequently awarded contracts without any formal tender process and failed to publicly release contracts or bilateral agreements before they were signed.

A 2014 law requires confidential asset disclosures by cabinet members, top National Assembly officials, and the managers of large public funds; the president's asset disclosures are made public.

CL Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 2.002 4.004

The constitution guarantees freedom of speech, and Senegal is home to many independent television and radio stations and print outlets. Although the overall media situation initially

improved under President Sall after his election in 2012, several subsequent developments have constrained press freedom.

A controversial law enacted in 2021 allows for prison terms of up to two years for defamation and three years for publishing “fake news” deemed likely to “discredit public institutions” or “prejudice public decency.” The law has been applied multiple times against journalists and activists.

While attempting to cover protests against the postponement of the presidential election in February 2024, several journalists experienced beatings, arbitrary detentions, and targeted use of tear gas by police. Also that month, authorities temporarily cut the broadcast signal and suspended the license of the privately owned television station Walf TV, echoing similar actions against the station in 2021 and 2023.

Under the Faye administration later in the year, journalists continued to face the threat of defamation charges, police questioning, and short-term detentions. Media outlets remained exposed to economic pressure, including potentially debilitating tax debts owed to the government.

D2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	4.004 4.004
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There is no state religion, and freedom of worship is constitutionally protected and respected in practice. Muslims constitute about 97 percent of the population.

D3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?	4.004 4.004
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Academic freedom is guaranteed by the constitution and generally respected in practice.

D4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	3.003 4.004
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Private discussion is generally open and free. However, individuals have occasionally been arrested for social media posts deemed offensive by the government.

A 2018 law on electronic communications included a vaguely worded provision that expanded the regulatory power of the government over social media companies. Rights activists expressed concern that the law could be used to shut down, tax, or surveil communications on popular social media platforms. In 2021, the National Assembly amended the penal code and the code of criminal procedure, allegedly to combat terrorism. Opposition parties and civil society groups argued that the amended laws were too broad and could be used to silence dissent and expand police surveillance powers.

Political activist Bah Diakhate and Muslim preacher Cheikh Ahmed Tidiane Ndao were sentenced in June 2024 to three months in jail for “spreading false news,” having posted a video on social media that accused Prime Minister Sonko of helping to promote homosexuality. Separately during the year, Reporters Without Borders highlighted a pattern in which PASTEF supporters engaged in organized online harassment of perceived political opponents, including a number of journalists.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? | 1.001 4.004

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstrations, but the Ministry of the Interior must approve protests in advance. The government has often cracked down on assembly rights by banning protests at politically sensitive moments and violently dispersing some demonstrations. The assembly rights of LGBT+ groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that support people living with HIV and AIDS are limited in practice.

During protests against Sonko's criminal cases in June 2023, some 29 people were killed, hundreds of others were injured, and at least 500 people were arrested. At least three people were killed in the February 2024 protests against the delay of the presidential election; police used live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas against demonstrators, who in some cases built barricades and threw objects at security forces. Hundreds of people were arrested.

In recent years, the government has disrupted internet service and partially blocked major social media outlets such as WhatsApp and YouTube in a bid to suppress protests. The tactic was employed again in February 2024, when authorities temporarily suspended mobile internet service and access to social media platforms.

The enactment of the amnesty law in March 2024 raised concerns about whether perpetrators of protest-related abuses since 2021 would ever be held accountable.

E2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights— and governance-related work? | 3.003 4.004

NGOs generally operate without interference from state or nonstate actors, though the ability of LGBT+ groups to function is affected by assembly restrictions. While anti-LGBT+ draft legislation introduced in 2021 was defeated in 2022, the operations and effectiveness of LGBT+ rights NGOs are also impeded by homophobia and the criminalization of homosexuality.

Revisions to the penal code and code of criminal procedure in 2021—ostensibly intended to strengthen Senegal's antiterrorism laws—included provisions allowing NGO leaders to be criminally charged for alleged offenses committed by their organizations. Local and international rights groups warned that the legislation could lead NGOs and their employees to self-censor for fear of being punished for their work.

E3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 3.003 4.004

Workers, apart from security employees, have rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike, though the right to strike is impinged by legal provisions that ban pickets and sit-down strikes, among other activities. Trade unions must be authorized by the Ministry of the Interior, and unions lack legal recourse if registration is denied.

F Rule of Law

F1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 2.002 4.004

The judiciary is formally independent and enjoys a relatively good reputation, but the president controls appointments to the Constitutional Council, the Court of Appeal, and the Council of State. Judges are prone to pressure from the government on matters involving high-level officials. The Higher Council of the Judiciary, which recommends judicial appointments to the executive branch, is headed by the president and minister of justice, which critics argue compromises its independence.

The courts' role in numerous prosecutions of opposition politicians in the last several years, including Sonko in 2023, underscored concerns about political influence. However, ahead of the 2022 local elections and the 2024 presidential election, courts reinstated some candidates who had previously been disqualified. The Constitutional Council's February 2024 rebuff of efforts by President Sall and the National Assembly to significantly delay the presidential election also provided evidence of that institution's autonomy.

F2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 2.002 4.004

The law guarantees fair public trials and defendants' rights, but arbitrary arrest and extended detention remain a concern. Though the government is obligated to supply attorneys to felony defendants who cannot afford them, this representation is inconsistent in practice. Lengthy pretrial detention is a persistent problem. The judicial system's reach does not always extend to rural areas, which often rely on traditional methods of conflict resolution.

F3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? | 2.002 4.004

Individuals are generally protected from the illegitimate use of physical force. However, security forces have used violence against protesters, killing several dozen and injuring hundreds in the past three years. Senegalese prisons are overcrowded, and human rights groups have documented incidents of excessive force and cruel treatment by prison authorities.

A low-level separatist conflict in the Casamance region is ongoing, though attacks by the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) have lessened since a de facto cease-fire was reached in 2012. After fighting intensified again in 2022, the government and one of the MFDC separatist factions signed a peace agreement in August of that year.

F4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? | 2.002 4.004

The caste system is still prevalent among many of Senegal's ethnic groups. Individuals of lower castes are subject to informal discrimination in employment. Despite some legal protections, women face persistent inequities in employment, health care, and education.

Same-sex sexual activity remains criminalized and is punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine. While these laws are rarely enforced, LGBT+ people risk individual acts of violence, threats, and mob attacks, as well as discrimination in housing, employment, and health care. Some LGBT+ people are forced to flee the country for their safety.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?	3.003 4.004
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Citizens generally enjoy freedom of movement and can change their residence, workplace, and educational institution without serious restrictions, though the threat of land mines and rebel activity has hindered travel through parts of the Casamance region. The intensification of the Casamance conflict in early 2022 displaced several thousand people.
G2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?	3.003 4.004
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The civil code facilitates ownership of private property, and property rights are generally respected. Commercial dispute-resolution processes can be drawn out. Property-title and land-registration protocols are inconsistently applied, though the government has worked to ease property acquisition and registration. Husbands are legally regarded as heads of households. Traditional customs limit women's ability to purchase property, and local rules on inheritance make it difficult for women to become beneficiaries.
G3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?	3.003 4.004
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Residents are generally free from restrictions on their decisions regarding marriage, divorce, and other personal status issues. The government has promoted policies aimed at reducing early marriage, as nearly one in three girls are married before age 18. Rates of female genital mutilation have declined, due in part to campaigns to discourage the practice, but it remains a problem.

The law allows abortion in life-threatening cases only, and abortions for medical reasons are difficult to obtain in practice. Several groups that consider abortion contrary to national values, including religious organizations, have campaigned against legalizing abortion in cases of rape and incest.
G4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	2.002 4.004
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Child labor remains a problem, particularly in the informal economy, and laws restricting the practice are inadequately enforced. Forced begging by students at religious schools is common, and teachers suspected of abuse are rarely prosecuted.

According to the 2024 edition of the US State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the Senegalese government made significant strides in its efforts to eliminate trafficking during the coverage period, but still fell short of minimum standards in several areas, including prosecutions, victim identification, and shelter services.