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Freedom in the World 2011 - Senegal

Capital: Dakar

Population: 12,500,000

Political Rights Score: 3 *

Civil Liberties Score: 3 *

Status: Partly Free

Overview

President Abdoulaye Wade's appointment of a new Constitutional Council president in August 2010 was viewed as an attempt to preempt any legal challenges to his intention to run for a third term in the 2010 elections. The revelation of cases of wasteful government spending and ongoing social problems led to growing public discontent throughout the year.

Since independence from France in 1960, Senegal has avoided military or harsh authoritarian rule and has never suffered a successful coup d'etat. President Leopold Senghor exercised de facto one-party rule through the Socialist Party (PS) for nearly two decades after independence. Most political restrictions were lifted after 1981, when Abdou Diouf of the PS succeeded Senghor. Diouf went on to win large victories in unfair elections in 1988 and 1993.

Four decades of PS rule ended when Abdoulaye Wade, the leader of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), defeated Diouf in the 2000 presidential runoff vote, which was deemed free and fair by international observers. A new constitution was approved in 2001, reducing presidential terms from seven to five years, setting the maximum

number of terms at two, and abolishing the Senate created in 1999. A coalition led by the PDS won a majority of seats in that year's legislative elections. Wade secured a second term in the 2007 presidential election, which saw 70.5 percent turnout and fervent opposition accusations of vote rigging. The opposition coalition, including the PS and 11 other parties, boycotted legislative polls later that year, leading to an overwhelming victory for the PDS, whose Sopi (Change) coalition secured 131 of 150 seats, with a record low turnout of 35 percent.

After taking office in 2000, Wade worked to increase the power of the presidency and demonstrated a willingness to persecute those threatening his authority. In a move approved by the National Assembly in 2006, he amended the constitution to postpone legislative elections by a year and reestablish the Senate, where over half of the members would be appointed by the president. The National Assembly also approved his 2008 measure to restore the seven-year presidential term beginning in 2012, as well as his 2009 decision to create the unelected position of vice president.

Meanwhile, leading politicians faced corruption allegations when they challenged Wade's dominance within the PDS. Idrissa Seck was dismissed as prime minister in 2004 based on accusations of embezzlement and threatening national security. Former National Assembly president Macky Sall was removed from office in 2008 when his term was shortened from five years to one. Sall resigned from the PDS in 2008, losing both his seat in the parliament and his position as mayor of Fatick. In 2009, Sall was charged with money laundering, although he was not prosecuted due to lack of evidence. Charges against Seck were dropped in May 2009 and he began working to reclaim his place in the ruling party.

Following nearly two years of delays, municipal elections were held in March 2009 amid free and fair conditions. The PS and its opposition coalition, United to Boost Senegal (BSS), performed well. BSS members won in the majority of the main towns, including Saint Louis and Dakar, where Wade's son Karim was defeated. Despite the postponements and unfavorable results, the ruling coalition accepted its losses peacefully.

In September 2009, Wade announced his intention to run for a third term in 2012. Critics argue that this move violates the constitution, which sets a two-term limit. Supporters contend that Wade's current term is his first under the 2001 constitution, which introduced term limits, making his run for a possible a third term legal. Wade's appointment of a new Constitutional Council president in August 2010 was seen as an attempt to preempt legal challenges to his bid for another term. Some believe that Wade publicly stated his intention to run for reelection as a ploy designed to stave off

rivals within the ruling party until he can position his son as his successor. In October 2010, fears of Karim Wade's succession were reignited when he was named Energy Minister in addition to his existing role as Minister of International Cooperation, National Planning, Air Transport, and Infrastructure.

The separatist conflict in the Casamance region remained unresolved at the end of 2010. The peace process has wavered since the 2007 death of the head of the separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), Augustine Diamacoune Senghor, which left the group's leadership in disarray. Sporadic violence began in May 2009 when separatists attacked a military convoy near the Gambian border. Since then, clashes between the rebels and the army have continued. In April 2010, an MFDC leader issued a statement calling for negotiations with the government. The government agreed to meet, but refused to concede to the MFDC's demand to hold talks in a neutral country. In December, seven Senegalese soldiers were killed in clashes with suspected separatist rebels.

In 2009, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) offered its qualified approval of Senegal's financial performance, while the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) announced that it had approved a five-year, \$540 million grant to Senegal for poverty reduction. However, the U.S. ambassador to Senegal warned in May 2010 that Senegal had to reduce corruption in order to maintain MCC assistance, a statement Wade described as an "insult."

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Senegal is an electoral democracy. The National Observatory of Elections has credibly overseen legislative and presidential polls since its creation in 1997. The president is elected by popular vote for up to two terms, and the length of the term was extended from five to seven years by a constitutional amendment in 2008. The president appoints the prime minister. In recent years, President Abdoulaye Wade has repeatedly replaced the prime minister. In April 2009, he shuffled his cabinet and appointed Souleymane NdénéNdiaye – Wade's former spokesman – to the premiership.

Constitutional amendments that were put into effect in 2007 converted the National Assembly into a 150-seat lower house and created an upper house, the 100-member Senate. Members of the National Assembly are popularly elected every five years, though the most recent vote was postponed from 2006 to 2007 as part of the amendments. The Senate consists of 65 members appointed by the president and 35 members elected by public officials.

There are more than 75 legally registered political parties in Senegal. Major parties include the ruling PDS and the opposition PS. The PDS currently controls most national political offices, but the opposition performed well in the 2009 municipal elections. Many of the smaller parties revolve around individual personalities rather than firm party structures or policy platforms.

Corruption remains a serious problem. While the government pledged to improve transparency and management of public expenditures, it was revealed in February 2010 that Senegalese officials had demanded \$200 million from a telecommunications company in exchange for an operating license. Wade sparked additional controversy in August when he asserted his right to royalties on a \$27 million monument recently constructed in Dakar in celebration of Senegal's 50th anniversary of independence; the monument itself was viewed by many as an abuse of public funds. In response to chronic power outages and public criticism, Wade called for an audit of the state-run electricity company in October. Senegal was ranked 105 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is generally respected, and members of the independent media are often highly critical of the government despite the risk of criminal defamation charges. There are approximately 20 independent radio stations and many independent print outlets, but the government owns the only national television station. In May 2010, Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour was finally allowed to launch his station, Télévision Futurs Media, under the condition that it covers cultural issues rather than politics. Commentators argue that the restriction is aimed at silencing N'Dour's outspoken criticism of Wade's regime. In November, Abdou Latif Coulibaly, the editor of a weekly newspaper and a frequent critic of Wade, was found guilty of defamation against a special advisor to the President over stories accusing the government of malfeasance in a mobile telephone deal. Coulibaly, along with two colleagues, were sentenced to one month in prison. Access to the Internet is not restricted.

Religious freedom is respected, and the government continues to provide free airline tickets to Senegalese Muslims and Christians undertaking pilgrimages overseas. Senegal is a predominantly Muslim country, with 94 percent of the population practicing Islam. The country's Sufi Muslim brotherhoods are very influential; Wade has close ties with the most powerful brotherhood, the Mouride. Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and respected in practice.

Freedoms of association and assembly are guaranteed. The number of street protests and demonstrations has been on the rise in recent years, and the government has taken action to repress some of them. Public unrest over electricity outages, flood water, and

food prices increased in 2010. In July, protests over electricity cuts grew violent, resulting in one death. In August, peaceful protests in Dakar against the Wade administration drew some 2,000 people.

Human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations operate freely in Senegal. Although workers' rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike are legally protected for all except security employees, the labor code requires the president's approval for the initial formation of a trade union. In August 2010, union members working for SONATEL, the national telecommunications company, went on a one-day strike, severely crippling inbound and outbound telecommunications. The workers were protesting a government contract with U.S. telecommunications company Global Voice, which would provide for the monitoring of international calls and allow the state to place a surtax on call volumes. Following protests, the contract was canceled.

The judiciary is independent by law, but poor pay and lack of tenure expose judges to external influences and prevent the courts from providing a proper check on the other branches of government. Uncharged detainees are incarcerated without legal counsel far beyond the lengthy periods already permitted by law. Prisons are overcrowded, often leading to hygiene and health issues for the inmates.

Women's constitutional rights are often disregarded, especially in rural areas, and women enjoy fewer opportunities than men for education and formal employment. In May 2010, the National Assembly passed legislation requiring parity between men and women on candidate lists for public office. In June, Wade created nine new cabinet posts, 30 percent of which were given to women, although this move was seen by some as an attempt to strengthen his position within the party. Women hold 34 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly. Many elements of Islamic and local customary law, particularly regarding inheritance and marital relations, discriminate against women.

Child trafficking is a problem in Senegal. In particular, boys are often drawn in by Koranic teachers' promises to provide religious education; however, the boys are then subjected to physical abuse and forced to beg in the streets instead. According to an April 2010 Human Rights Watch report, approximately 50,000 child beggars lived under these circumstances in Senegal. In August, Prime Minister Ndiaye issued an edict requiring authorities to round up beggars, including children. In September, seven Koranic teachers were arrested and convicted of using children to beg, marking the first application of a 2005 law banning organized child begging.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

