



Freedom in the World 2013 - Senegal

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2013 Scores

Status: Free
Freedom Rating: 2.5
Civil Liberties: 3
Political Rights: 2

Status Change Explanation

Senegal's political rights rating improved from 3 to 2, and its status improved from Partly Free to Free, due to free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections that resulted in a peaceful rotation of power, as well as nascent efforts by the new president to increase government accountability and transparency.

Overview

Tensions rose in the run-up to the February 2012 presidential election, in which Abdoulaye Wade ran for a constitutionally questionable third term. Wade's candidacy sparked demonstrations, leading to several deadly clashes between protesters and police. After losing to opposition candidate Macky Sall, Wade quickly conceded defeat, leading to a peaceful transfer of power. Legislative elections held in June saw an overwhelming victory for Sall's United in Hope coalition. Shortly after his election, Sall launched an audit of state institutions and initiated talks with rebel groups over the long-running conflict in the Casamance region.

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Senegal has avoided military or harsh authoritarian rule and has never suffered a successful coup d'état. 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 secured victories in the 1988 and 1993 elections.

Four decades of PS rule ended when Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) leader Abdoulaye Wade 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. A coalition led by the PDS won a majority of seats in the 2001 legislative elections.

After taking office in 2000, Wade worked to increase the power of the presidency and demonstrated a willingness to persecute those threatening his authority, including former Prime Minister Idrissa Seck, who was stripped of his position and charged with undermining state security. In 2006, Wade led a successful drive to amend the constitution to postpone legislative elections by a year and reestablish the Senate, where most of the members would be appointed by the president. Wade secured a second term in the 2007 presidential election amid 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. In 2008, the National Assembly approved Wade's proposal to restore the seven-year presidential term beginning in 2012.

In September 2009, Wade announced his intention to run for a third term in 2012, prompting critics to allege that he was trying to circumvent the constitution's stated two-term limit. Supporters contended that Wade's current term was his first under the 2001 constitution, which introduced term limits, making his run for a possible third term legal. In October 2010, Wade appointed his son, Karim, as energy minister, in addition to his existing role as minister of international cooperation, national planning, air transport, and infrastructure. The move prompted fears that the president was positioning his son to succeed him. In January 2012, Senegal's Constitutional Council, made up of presidential appointees, ruled in favor of Wade's bid for candidacy in the 2012 election.

Throughout 2011 and early 2012, those opposed to Wade's candidacy organized demonstrations and riots in Dakar and other urban areas. In June 2011, a wave of protests broke out in response to a constitutional amendment proposed by Wade to lower the threshold for victory in the first round of a presidential election from 50 percent to 25 percent and to include the vice president on the presidential ticket. The protests resulted in numerous injuries, and prompted the PDS to withdraw the bill. In early 2012, government authorities repressed public demonstrations, and a number of protestors opposing Wade were beaten or killed by security forces.

Despite apprehension about escalating public unrest, the first round of the presidential election took place on February 26 without incident. Wade won 32 percent of the vote against 13 opponents, and a run-off against front-runner Macky Sall, of the Alliance for the Republic party, was held on March 25. Sall won 66 percent of the vote in the second round, and Wade quickly conceded defeat. The election results were internationally hailed as a victory for democracy in Senegal and West Africa more broadly. On April 3, Sall appointed Abdoul Mbaye, a former banker, as prime minister. In the July 1 parliamentary elections, which were deemed free and fair, Sall's United in Hope coalition, which includes the Alliance for the Republic, captured 119 of the 150 seats, followed by the PDS with 12 seats. Around a dozen parties captured the remaining seats.

The separatist conflict in the Casamance region remained unresolved at the end of 2012. The peace process had wavered since the 2007 death of the head of the separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. Throughout 2012, at least 10 individuals were killed as a result of the conflict, compared to 83 related deaths in 2011. The level of violence related to the conflict declined after Sall led a new round of peace negotiations with the rebels in Rome in October 2012. Subsequently, the MFDC released eight Senegalese military prisoners. From October through December, the armed forces did not undertake any offensive operations. Meanwhile, progress has been made in recent years in clearing the region of land mines, which have caused nearly 800 deaths and 60,000 displacements since 1988.

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. Constitutional amendments that took 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. In September 2012, members of parliament voted to abolish the Senate in order to increase funds for the prevention of flooding in Dakar.

There are 73 legally registered political parties in Senegal. The pre-election protests led to the creation of the June 23 Movement (M23), a coalition made up of approximately 60 opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which united against then-president Abdoulaye Wade in March 2012 and endorsed Macky Sall in the run-off election. The June 23 protests were sparked in part by a younger group of activists led by rap musicians known as the Y'en A Marre (Enough Is Enough) movement. Both groups have drawn comparisons to the Arab Spring movements in 2011.

Corruption has long been a serious problem in Senegal and provoked growing public outrage under Wade's second term. To address corruption and increase transparency, President Sall began a far-reaching public works audit to investigate all members of the Wade regime, shut down 59 state bodies to save public money and attract investors, and reshuffled his cabinet. Senegal was ranked 94 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2012 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. In recent years, several journalists have been targeted for expressing opposition to the government. In the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, at least a dozen incidents of security or other government officials harassing, threatening, or physically harming journalists were documented. After the Constitutional Council's January 2012 decision to allow Wade to run for re-election, three journalists covering the event were beaten by police, including Malick Rokhy Bâ, a correspondent from Agence France-Presse, and two female reporters from the Senegalese daily *Le Populaire*. A French freelance photographer, Romain Laurondeau, was also injured during anti-Wade demonstrations. There are a variety of public, private, and community radio stations and many independent print outlets. The government operates a television station, and there are several private television stations, which are subject to government censorship. Access to the internet is not restricted.

Religious freedom is respected, and the government provides 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, including in the political arena. Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and respected in practice.

Freedoms of association and assembly are legally guaranteed. Street protests and demonstrations have been on the rise in recent years, and the government has taken action to repress some of them, including in the run-up to the presidential election. There were sporadic demonstrations throughout 2011 and 2012 against Wade's bid for a third term. During several of these demonstrations, including in January and February 2012, several protestors were assaulted and imprisoned by security forces. Six protestors were killed, including four who were shot, one who was hit by a gas grenade, and another who was run over by a police vehicle. On January 23, the interior minister passed an order temporarily prohibiting public demonstrations without clear rationale. On February 16, security agents used force to prevent members of the opposition movement from organizing a sit-in in Dakar.

Human rights groups and other NGOs generally operate freely in Senegal, but the political tensions in 2011 and early 2012 resulted in some efforts by the government to curb their work. On

January 30, 2012, Alioune Tine, the secretary general of the human rights group Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme, was arrested for his involvement with the M23 movement and held in police custody for 48 hours before being released. Although workers' rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike are legally protected for all except security employees, the labor code requires the approval of the Interior Ministry for the initial formation of a trade union.

The judiciary is independent by law, but inadequate 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 inmates, and Amnesty International documented several cases of torture of prisoners in 2012. Human rights groups praised Sall's decision in August to sign an agreement with the African Union to establish special chambers in the Senegalese judicial system to prosecute former Chadian president Hissène Habré, who has been living in Senegal for 21 years, for crimes committed under his regime in Chad in the 1980s. Senegal had been criticized for several years after the government had stalled his prosecution and refused four extradition requests.

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. Women hold 64 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly. Many elements of Islamic and local customary law, particularly regarding inheritance and marital relations, discriminate against women. Rape and domestic abuse are widespread problems.

Child trafficking is a problem in Senegal. In particular, boys are often drawn in by Koranic teachers' promises to provide religious education, only to be physically abused and forced to beg in the streets. According to the U.S. State Department's 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report, approximately 50,000 child beggars lived under these circumstances.

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