

## FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

# Senegal

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### OVERVIEW:

Tensions rose in 2011 in the run-up to the February 2012 presidential election, in which President Abdoulaye Wade planned to run for a constitutionally questionable third term. Protests and riots broke out in Dakar in June as the parliament debated constitutional changes, sponsored by Wade, that would have reduced the threshold needed to win in the first round of a presidential election and created the post of vice president. The bills were withdrawn in response to the protests. Sporadic demonstrations and opposition campaigns against Wade's candidacy continued through the end of 2011.

Since 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 went on to win large victories in elections in 1988 and 1993.

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. Idrissa Seck was dismissed as prime minister in 2004 based on accusations of embezzlement and threatening national security, though charges against him were later dropped. 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, which saw 70.5 percent turnout and fervent opposition accusations of vote rigging. Wade claimed 56 percent of the vote, compared with 15 percent for Seck, the runner-up. 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; turnout was just 35 percent. The National Assembly in 2008 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, which set a two-term limit. Supporters contended that Wade's

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current term was his first under the 2001 constitution, which introduced term limits, making his run for a possible a 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.

Protests and riots broke out in Dakar and other towns on June 23, 2011, as the PDS-dominated parliament considered constitutional amendments, introduced by Wade, that would lower the threshold for victory in the first round of a presidential election from 50 percent to 25 percent and create the position of vice president. Those changes would have virtually assured Wade victory in the first round against the fractured opposition, and, the protesters alleged, allowed the octogenarian incumbent to appoint his son as vice president and then pass the presidency on to him. The protests—unusual for Senegal—escalated during the day and prompted the PDS to withdraw the bill. More than 100 people were injured as police used rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons to subdue stone-throwing demonstrators, who were also angered by the declining standard of public services and the rising cost of living. Four days later, protesters ransacked the offices of the state electricity company, Senelec, in response to chronic, prolonged power cuts. In early October, a spokesman confirmed that Wade would be the PDS's presidential candidate in 2012.

The separatist conflict in the Casamance region remained unresolved at the end of 2011. The peace process had wavered since the 2007 death of the head of the separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance, Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. Although there were no major clashes in 2011, about 83 people were reported killed in connection with the conflict during the year. 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. However, there were widespread fears in 2011 that the Constitutional Council would rule in early 2012 in favor of President Abdoulaye Wade's bid to run for a third term in the February 2012 election, a move that many legal scholars believed to be unconstitutional. The president appoints the prime minister. In April 2009, Wade appointed his former spokesman, Souleymane Ndéné Ndiaye, to the post.

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, 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. The June 23 Movement (M23)—comprising about 60 opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and formed out of the June 23, 2011, protests—was created in an effort to prevent Wade from running in the 2012 presidential election. The June 23 protests were sparked in part by a new, 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 that swept across North Africa and the Middle East beginning in early 2011.

Corruption remains a serious problem. Wade sparked considerable controversy in August 2010 when he asserted his right to royalties on a \$27

million monument constructed in Dakar in celebration of Senegal's 50th year of independence; the monument itself is viewed by many as an abuse of public funds, especially as public services and living standards continue to erode. In response to chronic power outages and public criticism, Wade called for an audit of the state-run electricity company in October 2010. Blackouts remained problematic throughout 2011. Senegal was ranked 112 out of 183 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2011 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; however, self-censorship is said to be rising. 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. In February 2011, Transparency International and its Senegalese chapter, Forum Civil, expressed concern over the ongoing "prosecution for criminal defamation and harassment" of Abdou Latif Coulibaly, an investigative journalist and critic of Wade, for his reporting on government corruption. In November 2010, Coulibaly had been found guilty of defamation against a special adviser to Wade and given a two-month suspended sentence. In April 2011, he again was convicted of defamation in a separate case related to his stories about alleged fraudulent government dealings, and given a three-month suspended sentence. In October 2011, opposition activist Malick Noël Seck—who was aligned with the PS—was sentenced to two years in prison for issuing a death threat, assault, and contempt of court, after sending a letter to the Constitutional Council in which he criticized the body for its silence on the controversy over Wade's candidacy. 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; 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. There were sporadic demonstrations throughout 2011 in Dakar and other towns against Wade's bid for a third term; citizens also protested against lengthy power cuts and an increase in basic living expenses. In the June 23 protest, two rights activists, Alioune Tine and Oumar Diallo, were assaulted, and identified their attackers as young PDS supporters. In July and September, the government attempted to cancel protests against Wade's 2012 candidacy, but the demonstrations went ahead as planned.

Human rights groups and other NGOs had previously operated freely in Senegal, but the rising political tensions in 2011 resulted in some efforts by the government to curb their work. Wade's office in October said it would bar Senegalese rights group the African Encounter for the Defense of Human Rights, headed by Tine, from acting as a monitor in the February 2012 presidential election because it had become a leading member of M23. 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 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 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. Women hold 34 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly, and 40 of 100 seats in the

Senate. 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 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report, approximately 50,000 child beggars lived under these circumstances. In September 2010, seven Koranic teachers were arrested and convicted of using children to beg, marking the first application of a 2005 law banning organized child begging. A conference held in Dakar in January 2011 sought to address the problem by educating the population about the issue via Islamic texts and religious leaders.

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