



Freedom in the World - Senegal (2010)

Capital:
Dakar

Population:
12,534,000

Political Rights Score: 3 *
Civil Liberties Score: 3 *
Status: Partly Free

[Overview](#)

President Abdoulaye Wade continued to consolidate power in 2009, announcing his intention to stand for a third term as president in 2012 and creating the appointed position of vice president, apparently for his son. However, the political dominance of Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party and its broader Sopi (Change) coalition was threatened after the opposition scored victories in municipal elections that were finally held in March after years of delay.

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

Abdoulaye Wade's victory in the 2000 presidential poll—his fifth attempt—ended four decades of rule by the PS. Wade, the leader of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), defeated Diouf in a runoff that 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, among other changes. A coalition led by the PDS won 89 of 120 National Assembly seats in that year's legislative elections, with the PS taking only 10 seats. Wade secured a second term in the 2007 presidential election, which featured 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, and a record low turnout of 35 percent.

Since taking office in 2000, Wade had disappointed observers by working to increase the power of the presidency and demonstrating a willingness to persecute those who threatened his authority. For example, 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 more than 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, and his 2009 decision to create the unelected position of vice president, believed to be intended for Wade's son, which will be filled for the first time in 2012.

Meanwhile, leading politicians had faced corruption allegations when they began to challenge Wade's dominance within the PDS. Idrissa Seck was dismissed as prime minister in 2004 based on accusations of embezzlement and threatening national security, and former National Assembly president Macky Sall was pushed out of office in 2008 when Wade shortened the term for his post from five years to one. Wade subsequently had Sall questioned by police about potential money laundering in January 2009. While all charges against Seck were finally dropped in May 2009 and he began working to reclaim his place in the ruling party, Sall formally resigned from the PDS in 2008, costing him both his seat in the parliament and his position as mayor of Fatick.

Wade also repeatedly postponed municipal elections. Originally scheduled for May 2007, they were first delayed until May 2008 and then pushed back to March 2009. When they were finally held that month, in conditions deemed free and fair, 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 that he intended to run for reelection in 2012. While the opposition argued that the bid for a third term was yet another example of Wade's authoritarian tendencies, other observers characterized the announcement as a ploy designed to stave off rivals within the ruling party until he could position Karim Wade as his successor.

The separatist conflict in the Casamance region remained unresolved in 2009. The peace process had wavered since the 2007 death of Augustine Diamacoune Senghor, head of the separatist Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), which left the group's leadership in disarray. While the region was quiet during the first half of 2009, sporadic violence started up again in May when separatists attacked a military convoy near the border with The Gambia. By September, regular clashes between the rebels and the army had resumed, including military air strikes against MFDC bases.

While Senegal's lucrative trade deal with France, under which it receives \$163 million in aid each year, is due to expire in 2010, France increased its aid to \$202 million in 2009 after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) offered its qualified approval of Senegal's financial performance. Also during the year, the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation announced that it had approved a five-year, \$540 million grant to Senegal to help reduce poverty.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Senegal is an electoral democracy. The National Observatory of Elections has performed credibly in overseeing 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. According to President Abdoulaye Wade, who is currently serving his second term, that amendment also made it possible for him to seek a new term in 2012, although the opposition rejects this interpretation.

The president appoints the prime minister. In April 2009, Wade shuffled his cabinet and appointed a new prime minister, Souleymane Ndene Ndiaye, who had previously served as the president's spokesman. Wade has repeatedly replaced the prime minister in recent years, reducing the importance of the office.

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. Many of the smaller parties revolve around individual personalities rather than firm party structures or policy platforms. The PDS currently controls most national political offices, but the opposition performed well in the 2009 municipal elections.

Corruption remains a serious problem. While the government pledged in 2009 to improve transparency and the management of public expenditures, it was revealed that officials had attempted to give \$200,000 in cash as a "gift" to a departing IMF representative. The representative had the money returned as soon as it was discovered, and the affair was seen as an attempt to smear him after he voiced criticism of government policies. Separately, an investigative journalist released a book accusing the agency responsible for organizing a 2008 summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference of serious mismanagement; the agency was overseen by Karim Wade, the president's son. Senegal was ranked 99 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 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 2009, two journalists received three-month jail sentences for defaming a member of parliament, but two others were exonerated and pardoned after being convicted of defaming Wade. There are approximately 20 independent radio stations and many independent print outlets, but the government owns the only national television station, which provides favorable

coverage. 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. In one incident in 2009, police entered a university campus and damaged property while looking for students who had rioted earlier over unpaid grants.

Freedoms of association and assembly are guaranteed. While the number of street protests and demonstrations has been on the rise in recent years, the government has taken action to repress some of them. This occasionally degenerates into violent clashes between protesters and riot police, as with 2008 demonstrations over rising food prices. There were few such incidents in 2009, though police used tear gas to disperse a demonstration protesting the corruption allegations against former PDS politician Macky Sall.

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 February 2009, a teachers' union went on strike over late salary payments and severe overcrowding in student accommodations, and in May unions threatened to strike following the government's announcement that it intended to sell a majority stake in the country's telecommunications company, Sonatel, to France Telecom. This threat, coupled with fervent objections from the opposition and local business owners, led the government to rescind its plans.

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 not honored, especially in rural areas, and women enjoy fewer opportunities than men for education and formal employment. A 2007 law required all political parties to introduce gender parity to their candidate lists, but the measure did not take effect in time for that year's legislative elections, and there are currently just 34 women in the 150-seat National Assembly. Only two sexual harassment cases have been brought in the courts since 1995, and men remain the legal heads of households. Many elements of Sharia (Islamic law) and local customary law, particularly those regarding inheritance and marital relations, discriminate against women.

Child trafficking is a problem in Senegal. A 2007 study conducted by UNICEF, the International Labour Organization, and the World Bank found that boys had been taken in by religious teachers' promises to educate them, but had been physically abused and forced to beg instead; 6,480 such boys were found in Dakar alone.

** 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. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*