

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Senegal Monthly Briefing July 2025

Senegal Summary 22 July 2025

Tensions between prime minister Ousmane Sonko and President Bassirou Diomaye Faye (2024-present) are heightened over the last month, with several media outlets starting to question what Senegal's political future could look like without Sonko in the executive. United States (US)-headquartered credit rating agency S&P Global downgrades Senegal's sovereign credit rating to B- with a negative outlook on 14 July, citing concerns over the country's growing debt burden after revising its estimates that debt reached close to 118% of GDP at the end of 2024, higher than earlier estimates of 104%. Faye travels to the US to meet with his counterpart, Donald Trump (2017-2021; 2025-present), on 9 July as part of a mini Africa summit.

Rumours of tensions between Faye and Sonko

Tensions between prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** and President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** (2024-present) have been heightened over the last month, with several media outlets starting to question what **Senegal's** political future could look like without Sonko in the executive.

Sonko took to social media on 1 July to decry the supreme court's decision to once again uphold his suspended sentence and 220m FCFA (\$392,469) fine for defamation against former minister **Mame Mbaye Niang**.¹ Sonko criticised the justice system, a sector his own party, the ruling **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (Pastef)**, had promised to reform as part of its election campaign. Although Faye established a judicial forum upon his election, the forum has not sent concrete recommendations to the **Assemblée nationale** (national assembly). Opposition leader **Mamoudou Ibra Kane** commented on Faye's statements, noting "*when a decision suits him, he applauds; when it doesn't, he condemns the justice system*".²

Tensions came to a head on 10 July when Sonko gave a live speech on Pastef's social media – at a time when Faye was in the **United States (US)** at the invitation of President **Donald Trump** (2017-2021; 2025-present) (see below). Sonko referred in his speech to comments the media and opposition parties have made about him, calling them unacceptable and adding that he personally went to Faye to discuss the issue, as he can put a stop to it "*if he really wants to*". Sonko added that if he were president, "*these people would not speak like that about me*".³ He appealed to Faye again to resolve the issues, expressing regret that the president was not supporting him.⁴ Sonko also stated that some people in the presidency are working to have him removed:

*"I will not resign. I will not budge an inch. If the President of the Republic no longer wants me, let him dismiss me, and then I will return to the National Assembly."*⁵

The latter part of the statement could be perceived as a threat, as Sonko is still the leader of Pastef, which won 130 seats out of 160 in the legislative election in November 2024 (see *ARC Briefing Senegal Nov 2024*). As such, he is the leader of the parliamentary majority and could vote against bills. Sonko criticised Faye's inaction, noting:

*"If I were where I should be, certain things would never have happened like this. Never! Today, we have power, but it's as if things were better before, in the opposition. This is not normal."*⁶

¹ Jeune Afrique, 4 Jul 2025

² Jeune Afrique, 4 Jul 2025

³ Jeune Afrique, 11 Jul 2025

⁴ Le Monde, 16 Jul 2025

⁵ Jeune Afrique, 11 Jul 2025

⁶ Jeune Afrique, 11 Jul 2025

Faye responded officially to the speech upon his return from the US, simply stating that there was no problem between the two and that Sonko is his friend.⁷ Civil service and public reform minister **Olivier Boucal** noted in a statement that there needs to be a distinction between prime minister and party president, opining that in his 10 July speech, Sonko was speaking as party president and not prime minister.⁸

Sonko was the Pastef candidate for the 2024 presidential election but was prevented from running after the supreme court in January 2024 upheld a six-month suspended sentence against him for defamation (*see ARC Briefing Senegal Jan 2024*). Sonko had designated Faye as his successor as Pastef's presidential candidate. Upon his election as Senegal's president, Faye immediately appointed Sonko to the position of prime minister. Tensions between the two have been expected, as Faye assumed the position Sonko fought for several years to occupy.

Sonko is a firebrand politician who campaigned on a pan-**African** and sovereigntist agenda while Faye was alongside him in his campaigning. However, since coming to power, Faye has been meeker in his approach. Given Sonko's comments about Faye's inaction, it appears that this meeker approach does not match what Sonko had envisioned for the presidency. Faye can ask Sonko to leave his position, but this would risk elevating party tensions – Pastef supporters have already taken to social media to criticise Faye, siding with Sonko.⁹ The tensions in the executive do not bode well for cabinet stability, with some media outlets predicting a 'divorce' between the two.

S&P downgrades Senegal again over debt concerns

US-headquartered credit rating agency **S&P Global** on 14 July downgraded Senegal's sovereign credit rating to B- with a negative outlook, citing concerns over the country's growing debt burden after revising its estimates that Senegal's debt reached close to 118% of GDP at the end of 2024, higher than earlier estimates of 104%. A **Cour des comptes** (court of auditors) report published in February, revealed that Senegal's debt and budget deficit were far greater than initially reported, with debt forecast to be 99.67% of GDP at the end of 2023 (*see ARC Briefing Senegal Feb 2025*). S&P's negative outlook reflects the agency's belief that another downgrade is highly likely in the near to medium term. Senegal's next rating review is scheduled for 16 November.

In its rating action, S&P noted that external financing requirements are now likely to exceed its previous estimates, which could have a knock-on effect on Senegal's negotiations with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** for a new programme. The previous \$1.8 billion programme was suspended once the financial misreporting was revealed.¹⁰ Obtaining a new programme is a key to easing Senegal's liquidity pressures.

The finance ministry confirmed on 15 July in its response to the rating action that it would be rebasing its GDP to improve its debt statistics.¹¹ Rebasing is a statistical procedure whereby a country replaces an old base year with a new and more recent base year to ensure a more accurate reflection of the economy. The **United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission** recommends that countries review or rebase their GDP every five years.¹² The ministry noted the results will be published in the coming months. **United Kingdom (UK)**-headquartered **Barclays** said in a note on 15 July that the rebasing could increase the 2024 nominal GDP figure by 15% to 25% and therefore push the debt-to-GDP ratio towards 100%, or even below 100% of GDP.¹³

However, while the rebasing exercise may decrease the debt-to-GDP ratio, it does not decrease the level of debt, nor impact debt sustainability. Financing needs are likely to remain high; S&P forecasts

⁷ Sene News, 14 Jul 2025

⁸ Sene News, 14 Jul 2025

⁹ Africanews, 21 Jul 2025

¹⁰ Reuters, 15 Jul 2025

¹¹ Reuters, 15 Jul 2025

¹² UNDP, accessed 22 Jul 2025

¹³ Reuters, 16 Jul 2025

that Senegal's gross borrowing requirements will be 25% of GDP in 2025 and remain at this level or higher in 2026. The IMF estimates, as of April 2025, that Senegal's GDP is \$34.73 billion, meaning financing needs could be approximately \$9 billion.

Faye travels to US to meet Trump

Faye travelled with the leaders of **Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia** and **Mauritania** to meet with President Trump in the **White House** on 9 July. During his address to Trump, Faye said he wanted to reassure US investors that Senegal is a politically stable country with a favourable regulatory environment.¹⁴ He highlighted that the US was in the process of conducting a geological survey in Senegal and that with the help of US companies – including **Kosmos Energy** – Senegal had discovered its oil and gas deposits.¹⁵

Faye spoke of Trump's golf hobby, calling him a “*tremendous golf player*” and adding that “*a golfer requires concentration and precision, qualities that also make for a great leader*”.¹⁶ Faye highlighted Senegal's potential tourism opportunities, suggesting that investment in a golf course could be made, with Senegal just six hours by plane from certain US cities, a trip Trump could make to showcase his golf skills.

Trump's administration has not shown much regard for African countries, and his invitation to these five leaders came as a surprise. Trump told the meeting that the countries he invited have “*great land, great minerals and oil deposits*” and he was continuing to shift his focus from “*aid to trade*”, while discussing issues such as security and immigration.¹⁷ However, the latter topic was reportedly the driving force behind the meetings. US media outlet **Wall Street Journal** reported on 9 July that the US had sent the five countries requests to accept deportees whose home countries refuse them or are slow to take them back from the US.¹⁸ While the Senegalese presidency did not comment on the reported arrangement, transactional diplomacy is Trump's style, and he will be seeking something in return for Senegal benefitting from US investment or other opportunities. While in the US, Faye held several other meetings, including with **Boeing**, the IMF, the **World Bank** and the **Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)** to discuss cooperation and opportunities.

Planner

30 Aug – 5 Sep 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** 19th **African Food Systems Forum**

2027 **(Senegal)** **Yakaar-Teranga** gas project set to begin production;

Chronology

21 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Senenews*. **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation** invests 213m CFA francs (\$362,100) to support sustainable fishing in Senegal, focusing on oyster farming and aquaculture;

18 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sika Finance*. Senegal and **Saudia Arabia**-headquartered **ACWA Power** sign a new \$800m agreement to construct what would be **West Africa's** largest renewable energy-powered seawater desalination project;

17 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **Cape Verde's** President **Jose Maria Neves** arrives in Dakar for an official visit, meeting with President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**;

16 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie** (national agency for statistics and demography) reports GDP shrank by 1.2% in the first quarter of

¹⁴ Reuters, 9 Jul 2025

¹⁵ ISS, 18 Jul 2025

¹⁶ Reuters, 9 Jul 2025

¹⁷ ISS, 18 Jul 2025

¹⁸ WSJ, 9 Jul 2025

2025 compared to the fourth quarter of 2024 due to sharp contractions in the primary and secondary sectors;

17 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sene News*. The tax case between the **Direction Générale des Impôts et des Domaines (DGID)** (general directorate of taxes and domains) and **Australia's Woodside Energy** is postponed to 18 September;

16 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sene News*. Local media report a cabinet reshuffle is imminent based on source reports from a meeting between President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** and prime minister **Ousmane Sonko**;

15 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** arrives in **Benin** for a two-day visit aimed at strengthening cooperation;

15 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Reuters*. **United States**-headquartered **S&P Global** downgrades Senegal's credit rating to B- with a negative outlook due to concerns over its debt levels;

14 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **France** confirms it will hand over its last army base to Senegal on 18 July;

14 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. Journalist **Badara Gadiaga** remains in police custody on several charges after five days, including being accused of making comments about prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** deemed insulting;

11 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Times Live*. **United Nations (UN)** and **Netherlands'** foreign ministry confirm they have cancelled an LGBTQ+ themed event in Senegal after the Senegalese government warned of repercussions for the organisers and voiced opposition to the "promotion of the *LGBTQI phenomenon*";

10 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Punch*. Government cancels **United States (US)**-Senegalese singer **Akon's** plans for a \$6 billion futuristic 'Akon City' in **Mbodiène**, opting to rather pursue a state-backed tourism project in the same area at a cost of approximately \$1.2 billion, largely sourced from private investors;

6 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Senenews*. The Senegalese army announces a series of leadership changes across four of its seven military zones as part of regular command rotations;

3 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Senenews*. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** announces a shake-up of public financial institutions, with potential leadership changes expected at eight key bodies including **Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations** (deposits and consignments fund), **Fonds Souverain d'Investissements Stratégiques** (sovereign fund for strategic investments), and **Banque de l'Habitat du Sénégal** (Senegal housing bank);

3 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Jeune Afrique*. Five ministers who served under former president **Macky Sall**, charged with embezzlement or misappropriation of public funds, refer their case to the **United Nations** special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, **Margeret Satterthwaite**;

2 Jul 2025 **Washington DC (United States)** *APA News*. President **Donald Trump** invites **Senegal's** President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** and **Gabon's** President **Brice Oligui Nguema** to attend a mini-summit in Washington;

1 Jul 2025 **Bamako (Mali)** *France24*. A military statement indicates **Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM)** carried out a coordinated attack on several army positions in western Mali, including some near the **Senegalese** and **Mauritanian** border, with the army reporting it killed at least 80 fighters;

1 Jul 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** meets with his **French** counterpart, **Emmanuel Macron**, on the sidelines of the **4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)** to discuss strengthening cooperation;

30 Jun 2025 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Senenews*. Senegal's **United States (US)** dollar-denominated sovereign bonds decline sharply, ranking among the worst-performing in emerging markets amid fears about rising public debt, which reportedly reached 119% of GDP in 2024;

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