

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Senegal Monthly Briefing June 2023

Senegal Summary 20 June 2023

*The Dakar high court criminal chamber acquits opposition **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF)** leader **Ousmane Sonko** in absentia on 1 June of the charges of rape and issuing death threats against plaintiff **Adji Sarr**. However, the court sentences Sonko to two years in prison for corrupting the youth. The decision leads to an eruption of violence and demonstrations in Senegal. Against the background of rising tensions and demonstrations, President **Macky Sall** (2012-present) officially launches his national dialogue initiative on 31 May. The political commission launched on 19 June will discuss the candidacy of Sall and other leaders including Sonko. Finance minister **Mamadou Moustapha Ba** presides over the 39th **Conseil national de crédit (CNC)** (national credit council) session on 8 June, forecasting that Senegal's oil and gas industry will contribute at least \$81m in revenue in the 2024 budget. United States-headquartered credit rating agency **S&P Global Ratings** affirms Senegal's long and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit rate at 'B+/B' with a stable outlook on 2 June, citing positive economic growth from the oil and gas sector.*

Protests erupt following Sonko trial

The Dakar high court criminal chamber acquitted opposition **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTEF)** leader **Ousmane Sonko**, in absentia, of the charges of rape and issuing death threats against plaintiff **Adji Sarr** on 1 June.¹ However, the court sentenced Sonko to two years in prison for corrupting the youth and ordered Sonko to pay a 600,000 FCFA (\$1,000) fine and 20m FCFA (\$33,344) in compensation to Sarr, who was seeking 1.5 billion FCFA (\$2.5m) and a ten-year prison sentence for Sonko.² The decision led to an eruption of violence across Senegal, as the two-year sentence will disqualify Sonko from running in the February 2024 presidential election.

Interior minister **Antoine Felix Diome** announced on 1 June that the government would temporarily suspend the use of certain “digital applications through which calls to violence and hatred are made”.³ Internet monitor group **NetBlocks** confirmed on 1 June that there were restrictions on several social media platforms in Senegal, including **Facebook**, **WhatsApp** and **Twitter**.⁴ This tactic, commonly used by governments to try to quell demonstrations and stop the spread of information on demonstrations, is increasingly being viewed as a violation of the right to access information and an attack on democracy. **France**-headquartered media organisation **Reporters Without Borders** called the act a flagrant violation of the freedom to inform and the public's rights to access information.⁵

The shutdown of social media created further tensions, with violence and looting continuing until 3 June. By 6 June, at least 16 deaths had been reported, 350 people injured and 500 arrested. Incidents of looting, vandalism and damage to buildings and businesses were also reported, with some owners of small businesses saying it will take several months for them to re-open.⁶ **Conseil national du patronat (Cnp)** (national council of employees) confirmed on 14 June that at least 100 gas stations were vandalised, and 31 bank branches looted, affecting operations until at least the end of the month and leaving several hundred people without work.⁷

¹ APA News, 1 Jun 2023

² APA News, 1 Jun 2023

³ Anadolu Agency, 2 Jun 2023

⁴ Anadolu Agency, 2 Jun 2023

⁵ Anadolu Agency, 2 Jun 2023

⁶ Le Quotidien, 17 Jun 2023

⁷ Le Quotidien, 17 Jun 2023

Dakar authorities published a decree on 9 June banning all demonstrations between 9 and 15 June.⁸ This decision came as **Forces Vives de la Nation (F24)** announced planned demonstrations against a potential third presidential run by President **Macky Sall** (2012-present) on 11 June. The group abandoned these plans citing concerns over protestors' safety.

International nongovernmental organisation (NGO) **Amnesty International** first called for an end to police violence and the restoration of social media on 2 June. The NGO also condemned the government's cutting of the signal for private television channel **Walfadjiri TV**.⁹ The NGO's director for its **West and Central Africa** office called on authorities to release protest group **Y'en a Marre** coordinator **Aliou Sané** and **Front for a Popular and Pan-African Anti-Imperialist Revolution (FRAPP)** members **Moustapha Diop** and **Bentaleb Sow**, who were allegedly arrested arbitrarily.¹⁰

Amnesty International reported on 8 June that at least 23 people had been killed during demonstrations on 1 and 2 June, including three children, and called on authorities to open an investigation into their deaths.¹¹ The report also called for investigations into the alleged presence of armed men dressed in plain clothes who helped to quell the demonstrations alongside security forces, implying that the security forces had either armed citizens or sent in plain-clothed officers, whom protestors would have been unable to identify as law enforcement. This would be a violation of the **African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)** guidelines, which state that any forces deployed in the context of a demonstration must wear visible markings. The organisation also denounced the use of excessive force and the attacks on freedoms of expression and information related to the suspension of social media and the internet.¹²

On 13 June, the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** called for an independent investigation into the deaths of at least 16 demonstrators between 1 and 3 June.¹³ The OHCHR's statement called the use of firearms on protestors a "*dark precedent*" and expressed concern over the authorities not following through on Senegal's long-standing respect for democracy and democratic ideals.¹⁴

Sonko remains out of police custody at time of writing, and has remained in his home since 28 May, often under the watch of security forces. Justice minister **Ismaila Madior Fall** stated on 15 June that judicial delays were part of the reason Sonko had not yet been arrested; however, given the tense political and social climate, the government has likely been waiting for further calm before officially arresting the popular opposition leader.¹⁵ Opposition coalition **Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW)**, of which PASTEF forms part, called for demonstrations on 16 June against the "*sequestering*" of Sonko in his home.¹⁶ The coalition also called on foreign partners to support requests for international investigations into the demonstrations. Despite YAW's calls, the demonstrations did not take place on 17 and 18 June, as supporters are likely still reeling from the aftermath of the previous demonstrations.

June's events have showcased cracks in Senegal's democracy. While the latest call for demonstrations was unsuccessful, unrest is likely to flare up again within such a tense political and social environment. Senegal's reputation as a beacon of democracy in **West Africa** has been bruised among international partners, largely due to security forces' handling of the demonstrations. While the investigations are pending, the likely outcome is that security forces used excessive force, which could draw condemnation from international partners and organisations.

⁸ Anadolu Agency, 10 Jun 2023

⁹ Amnesty International, 2 Jun 2023

¹⁰ Amnesty International, 2 Jun 2023

¹¹ Le Quotidien, 7 Jun 2023

¹² Le Quotidien, 7 Jun 2023

¹³ United Nations, 13 Jun 2023

¹⁴ United Nations, 13 Jun 2023

¹⁵ Africa News, 16 Jun 2023

¹⁶ RFI, 17 Jun 2023

... while Sall launches political dialogue

Against the background of rising tensions and demonstrations rocking Senegal, President Sall officially launched his national dialogue initiative on 31 May, calling on socio-political actors keen on peace, stability and national cohesion to join.¹⁷ Ministers, religious actors, political parties and members of civil society have arrived to participate in the process, which is set to end by 25 June. At least nine commissions have been set up during the dialogue process, with the political commission due to begin on 19 June. The political commission will discuss the participation of candidates in the upcoming presidential election – the most anticipated topic, as Sall’s candidacy will be discussed.¹⁸ The candidacy of Sonko, former Dakar mayor **Khalifa Sall** and **Karim Wade** will also be discussed. All three of these opponents have court convictions and may therefore be unable to run in the elections, but the election commission is yet to comment on this. Sonko’s disqualification could see demonstrations erupt once again, placing further pressure on an already tense environment.

Finance minister hails predicted oil and gas incomes

Finance minister **Mamadou Moustapha Ba** presided over the 39th **Conseil national de crédit (CNC)** (national credit council) session on 8 June, forecasting that the oil and gas industry will contribute at least \$81m in revenue in the 2024 budget. Following his positive announcement, Ba confirmed that Senegal’s new **Document de programmation budgétaire et économique pluriannuelle (DPBEP 2024-2026)** (budgetary and economic programme 2024-2026) will be presented to the national assembly on 30 June for debate.¹⁹

Senegal is scheduled to begin exploitation of the **Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** offshore gas field later this year, while the **Sangomar** offshore oil field is under construction. **Australia’s Woodside Energy**, which operates Sangomar, announced on 7 June that it has begun marketing the oil and gas expected to be produced at the end of 2023. While production is more likely to take place in 2024, it is expected to yield 100,000 barrels per day, which is reportedly similar to the crude oil that **Oman** and **Russia** produce.²⁰ Senegal’s gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow to 10.5% in 2024 as oil production continues to grow. Senegal will reportedly not plug its own power deficit, but instead will export oil to the **European Union** and **Asia**, as countries continue to diversify their power imports away from Russia.²¹

United States-headquartered credit rating agency **S&P Global Ratings** affirmed Senegal’s long and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit rate at ‘B+/B’ with a stable outlook on 2 June, stating that the start of oil and gas production will boost economic growth.²² S&P noted that while short-term external pressure remains high and the current account deficit is set to remain above 12% of GDP in 2023, driven by higher global commodity prices, currency depreciation and spending on oil and gas projects, the anticipated revenues and ongoing **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** programme will help reduce external and fiscal imbalances by 2026.²³

¹⁷ Africanews, 31 May 2023

¹⁸ RFI, 19 Jun 2023

¹⁹ Le360 Afrique, 9 Jun 2023

²⁰ Le Soleil, 8 Jun 2023

²¹ Le Soleil, 8 Jun 2023; Energy Capital and Power, 8 Jun 2023

²² S&P Global, 2 Jun 2023

²³ S&P Global, 2 Jun 2023

Planner

2023 **(Senegal) Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** offshore gas field production of natural gas is set to begin;

Q4 2023/ Q1 2024 **(Senegal) Sangomar** offshore oil field production set to begin;

25 Feb 2024 **(Senegal)** Presidential elections;

Chronology

18 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Jecos*. Customs authorities announce the seizure of counterfeit drugs and medicines worth 340m FCFA (\$566,862) between the end of the May and start of June;

16 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. President **Macky Sall** and five other **African** heads of state arrive in **Ukraine** to begin a mediation mission aimed at ending the conflict between Ukraine and **Russia**;

16 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Soleil*. Public prosecutor's office begins hearings related to the mismanagement of **Covid-19** funds identified in a court of auditors' report;

12 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. Foreign affairs minister **Morissanda Kouyaté** confirms that at least 79 **Guinean** citizens will be expelled from Senegal for partaking in recent demonstrations;

12 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Jecos*. Energy and petroleum ministry says that the electrification rate reached 80.5% in 2021, affirming that the government will reach its goal of universal access by 2025;

12 Jun 2023 **Touba (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. **Mouride** brotherhood caliph Serigne **Mountakha Mbacké** bans all political activity in the religious city of Touba, and says anyone who wishes to vote in 2024 will have to travel to another city to do so;

9 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sika Finance*. Government, the labour ministry and trade unions agree on a wage increase of between 5% and 10% for the private sector, to come into effect from 1 July;

8 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. **Assemblée nationale** adopts a draft on the **Environmental Code**, last revised in 2001, ahead of the planned oil and gas exploitation in 2023/2024;

6 Jun 2023 **Paris (France)** *Agence Ecofin*. **Agence française de développement (AFD)** (French development agency) releases its digital freedoms report noting that digital freedoms in French-speaking **African** countries are "in difficulty";

5 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *RFI*. Opposition presidential candidate **Idrissa Seck** calls on President **Macky Sall** to clarify whether he will run for a third term or not, blaming the recent violence in Senegal on Sall's failure to make his intentions clear;

3 Jun 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Agence Ecofin*. **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** condemns the violence that has broken out in Senegal following the sentencing of opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko**;

28 May 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *The Manila Times*. A cyberattack purportedly claimed by the **Anonymous** hacking group takes down dozens of government websites in Senegal, where tensions are simmering nine months before the presidential election;

26 May 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **Islamic Development Bank (IDB)** releases \$859m FCFA (\$1.4m) in interest-free loans for the benefit of 175 women-led projects;

24 May 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Jecos*. **African Development Bank (AfDB)** forecast Senegal's economic growth to reach 5% in 2023, lower than initial forecasts of 10%, due to delays in oil production;

23 May 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. Former prime minister **Aminata Touré** denounces President **Macky Sall**'s decision to consult **French** lawyer **Guillaume Drago** on whether he can legally run for a third presidential term in the 2024 elections, with Drago maintaining that the 2016 constitutional review allows Sall to run for a third term legally;



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