

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Senegal Summary 19 March 2024

Following a period of political uncertainty and concerns over democratic backsliding, the government announces on 6 March that President Macky Sall (2012-present) has set 24 March as the date on which the delayed presidential election will take place. The announcement comes after a two-day national dialogue which also saw the passing of a general amnesty bill. The bill benefits opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and his selected candidate for the election, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, as they are released from prison on 14 March. Alongside the announcement of a new election date, Sall on 7 March dissolves the government to allow presidential candidate, prime minister Amadou Ba, to campaign.

Sall announces new election date after national dialogue

Following a period of political uncertainty and concerns over democratic backsliding, the government announced on 6 March that President **Macky Sall** (2012-present) had set 24 March as the date the delayed presidential election would be held. The **Conseil constitutionnel** (constitutional council) approved the date on the same day, allowing the 19 initially approved candidates to begin a shortened campaign period.¹

Sall's decision to postpone the election on 3 February set off a political crisis in **Senegal**, a democratic leader in the unstable **West Africa** region (see *ARC Briefing Senegal Feb 2024*). The constitutional council on 15 February revoked his decision but did not set a date for the election itself, leaving the decision with Sall. In response, Sall launched a two-day national dialogue on 26 February. While several civil, political and religious leaders attended, the presidential candidates refused to participate.

The dialogue ended with Sall affirming that he will step down at the end of his mandate on 2 April and the panel recommending an election date of 2 June.² The panel also recommended that the constitutional council review the decisions to block candidates, including opposition leader **Karim Wade** from running in the election. Sall also proposed a general amnesty law, which he said was aimed at calming the political and social climate.³ The bill would pardon political protestors arrested since 2021. Sall submitted the suggestions to the constitutional council for its opinion on 4 March. The constitutional council rejected the suggestion of 2 June, adding that the election should take place before Sall's mandate ends, and suggested 31 March, but ultimately approved 24 March as the election date.⁴ The constitutional council also said the election should include the 19 candidates it had already approved, going against the suggestion that it review the candidates.

The constitutional council made no clear comment on the amnesty bill, however, national assembly then passed the bill on 7 March, with 94 votes in favour and 49 against. The bill grants amnesty for all offences or crimes, whether tried or not, committed between 1 February 2021 and 25 February 2024, and relating to demonstrations or having political motivations.⁵

The amnesty bill has been greeted with mixed reviews. **United States (US)**-headquartered **Human Rights Watch** warned on 5 March that it "opens the door to impunity for serious crimes", specifically referring to the use of deadly force by security forces during demonstrations that have left 40 people

¹ France24, 7 Mar 2024

² Al Jazeera, 28 Feb 2024

³ Al Jazeera, 28 Feb 2024

⁴ France24, 6 Mar 2024

⁵ France24, 7 Mar 2024

dead since March 2021.⁶ However, opposition and civil society groups also estimate that 1,000 opposition members were arrested between March 2021 and January 2024, many of whom will be pardoned under the bill.

The election is set to be a tight one and Sall did his ruling **Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY)** coalition no favours by postponing it. This is Senegal's first election where an incumbent is not in the running and no clear front-runner has emerged in a field of 19 candidates, many of whom are political veterans in Senegal.⁷ The election is also taking place as Senegal is on the verge of becoming an oil and gas producer later this year, with citizens concerned about how this will benefit the population. Senegal has seen a serious migration crisis that is being driven by the high cost of living and a lack of jobs, leaving Senegal's young population choosing to attempt to travel to **Europe** by boat.⁸

According to Senegal's election system, if any candidate fails to secure over 50% of the vote in the first round of voting, a runoff takes place between the top two candidates. In the 24 March election, the two candidates with the most votes are likely to be prime minister **Amadou Ba**, whom Sall picked to succeed him as BBY candidate, and opposition leader **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**, who is running in place of popular opposition **Parti des Africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (Pastef)** leader **Ousmane Sonko**. Although Ba might have clinched the win before Sall decided to postpone the elections, the subsequent political crisis has eroded BBY supporters' trust in the ruling party, and may harm its candidate more than help him.

... as Sonko goes free

In a major win for the opposition, Sonko and his selected substitute candidate for the presidential election, Diomaye Faye, were released from prison on 14 March., just ten days before the election. The two were released as beneficiaries of the recently passed amnesty bill (see above). Sonko's release will help to ease tensions ahead of the election, lowering the chances of incidents of violence or unrest, a strategic move by Sall to avoid further criticism for his postponement of the election and resulting negativity impacting his party and chosen successor.

Sonko, who came third in the 2019 presidential election, remains ineligible to run in this election, following his exclusion from the electoral lists which the constitutional council affirmed when it vetted candidates in January. However, Sonko in December appointed Diomaye Faye as his replacement. Diomaye Faye's release has thrust him into serious contention, especially among the youth vote, despite his detention until 14 March casting doubt on the success of his candidacy.⁹

The coalition backing Diomaye Faye is campaigning on a more populist agenda, targeting unemployed youth by pledging to increase job opportunities, creating a new national currency and renegotiating oil and gas contracts to increase government revenues that can trickle down to Senegal's population.¹⁰ In contrast, if Ba wins, his term will be an extension of Sall's policies. Although these have been successful in attracting foreign direct investment, this has not benefitted the average citizen who is instead facing increasing financial hardship.

Government dissolved to allow Ba to campaign

Alongside the announcement of a new election date, Sall on 7 March dissolved the government to allow Ba to campaign. Interior minister **Sidiki Kaba** replaced Ba as prime minister. Ba had previously maintained that he could remain prime minister and campaign; however, the recent political uncertainty prompted by his predecessor has led to Ba needing to focus on campaigning.¹¹ There have been doubts over the ruling BBY coalition's support for Ba, support that he would have been counting

⁶ Al Jazeera, 7 Mar 2024

⁷ Reuters, 11 Mar 2024

⁸ Reuters, 13 Mar 2024

⁹ The Africa Report, 15 Mar 2024

¹⁰ Reuters, 18 Mar 2024

¹¹ Jeune Afrique, 14 Mar 2024

on to help his election campaign. Former minister of microfinance and social solidarity economy **Zahra Iyane Thiam** remarked,

"It is true that this campaign is atypical in that we have the impression of seeing a candidate who is not really supported by his own camp."¹²

The **Secrétariat Exécutif National (SEN)** (national executive secretariat) of the ruling **Alliance pour la République (APR)** has also sought to try to address unease around Ba's candidacy. On 13 March, it released a press statement calling on activist leaders and supporters to resume their political and electoral work in a "*united spirit*" around Ba.¹³ However, the SEN added that it recognises that Ba's selection as a presidential candidate remains "*contested by a significant section of the leadership and many party activists*".¹⁴ These negative optics from the ruling party have added to the challenges facing Ba in his election campaign.

Planner

24 Mar 2024 **(Senegal)** Presidential elections;

Q3 2024 **(Senegal)** **Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** offshore gas field production of natural gas is set to begin;

2024 **(Senegal)** **Sangomar** offshore oil field production set to begin;

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

Chronology

18 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. **Japan** grants Senegal 171.8m FCFA (\$284,157) to help the first year implementation of a project aimed at improving agricultural productivity;

15 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Jeune Afrique*. Supreme court rejects two motions filed by **Karim Wade** and several other opposition candidates seeking to postpone the 24 March election;

11 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Monde*. Tourism operators say business has significantly declined since the announcement of the election postponement which prompted concerns of political unrest;

9 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *RFI*. Presidential candidates launch their shortened campaign periods ahead of the 24 March election;

8 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. Prime minister **Sidiki Kaba** announces a new government comprising 34 ministers following the dissolution of government on 6 March;

8 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **African Union (AU)** confirms that it will send an election observer mission to Senegal;

7 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Bloomberg*. Senegal's **Eurobonds** advance after President **Macky Sall**'s announcement that the election will take place on 24 March;

7 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. **United States**, via the **Development Finance Corporation (DFC)**, allocates \$81m to the construction of a hotel complex on the site of **Hôtel des Almadies**;

6 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *EU Observer*. **European Commission** says it is in talks with the Senegalese government follow reports that a **European Union (EU)** trained security force, meant to tackle cross border crime, was used to crack down on peaceful protestors;

¹² Jeune Afrique, 14 Mar 2024

¹³ Jeune Afrique, 14 Mar 2024

¹⁴ Jeune Afrique, 14 Mar 2024

6 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *AfDB*. **African Development Bank (AfDB)** donates \$20m to Senegal to strengthen food security and increase incomes of small producers;

6 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. President **Macky Sall** dissolves government to allow prime minister **Amadou Ba** to campaign ahead of the presidential election;

4 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. The final report of the national dialogue held on 26 and 27 February on the election delay is presented to President **Macky Sall**, recommending that the election be organised on 2 June;

4 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)** reports the extractive industry generated 242 billion FCFA (\$400.28m) in revenue in 2022;

2 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *RFI*. Several hundred opposition supporters gather to demand elections be held before 2 April, when President **Macky Sall**'s term ends;

1 Mar 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Agence Ecofin*. Oil ministry confirms Senegal has become an observer member of the **Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF)**;

29 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Africanews*. Cabinet passes an amnesty law for incidents related to political protests dating back to 2021 proposed by President **Macky Sall** during national dialogue;

26 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sika Finance*. Tourism stakeholders report that the political tensions surrounding the election postponement are negatively impacting tourism;

26 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA news*. President **Macky Sall** begins national dialogue aimed at establishing a new election date;

25 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Africanews*. Civil society organisations vote in a mock election in protest of the postponed presidential election;

24 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Financial Times*. President **Macky Sall** says he will step down at the end of his term on 2 April but has not announced a date for the delayed election yet;



About Africa Risk Consulting:

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