

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Senegal Summary 20 February 2024

President Macky Sall (2012-present) announces on 3 February that the scheduled 25 February election will be postponed to an unknown date, plunging Senegal into democratic uncertainty. However, the constitutional council revokes his decision on 15 February, without setting a date for the election, extending the uncertainty. France-headquartered International Energy Agency (IEA) publishes its first-ever review of Senegal's energy policies on 25 January, endorsing them as supporting sustainable development in the country.

Sall postpones election, sparking unrest...

President **Macky Sall** (2012-present) announced on 3 February that the scheduled 25 February presidential election would be postponed until an unknown date. Sall said the decision was driven by a need to initiate national dialogue and create an environment where free, transparent and inclusive elections could take place, as there were disputes over the candidate list and alleged corruption within the **Conseil constitutionnel** (constitutional council) that vetted the candidates.¹ Earlier that day, the **Assemblée Nationale** (national assembly), of which three-quarters is the ruling **Alliance pour la République (APR)** and **Parti démocratique sénégalais (PDS)**, approved a bill postponing the elections by at least six months. The bill was initially proposed by the PDS. Parliament met on 6 February to vote on the delay, with 105 of 165 members of parliament (MPs) voting in favour. The bill set the new election date as late as 15 December.²

The PDS on 24 January also put forward a resolution for the creation of a parliamentary committee of inquiry on the electoral process, specifically to consider the vetting process the constitutional council used when considering presidential candidates.³ On 31 January, the national assembly voted and approved the resolution.

The election delay and the establishment of the parliamentary committee are seemingly being driven by the exclusion from the presidential election of PDS candidate **Karim Wade**, son of former president **Abdoulaye Wade** (2000-2012). Wade was excluded over his dual **French-Senegalese** nationality. While Wade gave up his French nationality on 18 January, the constitutional council considered that he had renounced his French nationality too late. Wade was excluded from running in the 2019 presidential election after he was found guilty of corruption (see *ARC Briefing Senegal Jan 2019*). However, during national dialogue in June 2023, it was negotiated that Wade could run in future presidential elections.⁴ The PDS supported the APR in approving the bill delaying the election and establishing the parliamentary commission. A source close to Sall told French publication **Le Monde** that the APR was “surprised” that Wade was disqualified from running, and that Sall feared giving the impression of breaking his word to the religious leaders that helped facilitate the June national dialogue.⁵ Shortly after the 20 January publication of the final list of approved presidential candidates, Wade’s party questioned the legitimacy of the vetting process, alleging that two judges on the constitutional council had conflicts of interest.

Postponing the election has tainted Senegal’s democratic status. Sall’s term ends on 2 April and approval of a six-month postponement poses the risk of a constitutional crisis. Former **Dakar** mayor

¹ Le Monde, 5 Feb 2024

² Al Jazeera, 6 Feb 2024

³ Jeune Afrique, 31 Jan 2024

⁴ Le Monde, 5 Feb 2024

⁵ Le Monde, 5 Feb 2024

and presidential candidate **Khalifa Sall** called the election delay a “*coup d’etat that doesn’t speak its name*”.⁶ The decision drew criticism from various camps, including international partners such as the **United States**, which called the postponement “*illegitimate*”.⁷ The move has extended Sall’s term in power, and although only by a few months, it nevertheless undermines the country’s democracy.

The decision has also created a crisis of confidence in the ruling party, which was already facing issues in promoting Sall’s successor, prime minister **Amadou Ba**. Ba is not a widely popular candidate and his appointment as the party’s presidential candidate caused discord in the APR, leading to certain figures leaving cabinet and the party. Tourism minister **Mamae Mbaye Niang** announced on 21 December that he would not support Ba’s candidacy as he did not believe Ba would win the election.⁸ A **West Africa**-based source, currently in Senegal, told **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)**:

“Ba will have a hard time even making it to a second round as he lacks any charisma.”⁹

These issues have left the **Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY)** coalition looking weak and divided ahead of the election, another factor that is likely a driver behind the postponement. While the BBY could use the delay to get its house in order and present a unified front, the political fallout from the delay is likely to outweigh any benefit to the BBY.

Sall’s announcement prompted deadly protests, with citizens taking to the streets on 4 February backed by calls from opposition leaders who rejected the delay.¹⁰ On 4 February, police arrested former prime minister **Aminata Touré** and presidential candidate **Anta Babacar Ngom**. The government also cut off the **Walf** television channel, which was broadcasting the protest live. Protests continued and on 9 February, authorities confirmed that a student was killed in **Saint Louis** during a protest, bringing the death toll to three.¹¹ By 13 February, the government had chosen to suspend mobile internet services and ban a march planned by the **Aar Sunu Election** (let’s protect our election) coalition. On the same day, France joined several other organisations, including the **United Nations**, in calling for Senegal to ensure there was a “*proportionate*” response to protests.¹²

... but constitutional council overturns decision

Adding to the already tense environment, the constitutional council on 15 February overturned Sall’s decision, stating that the law postponing the election is unconstitutional. The council’s decision was welcomed; however, it did not set a new date for the election, just noting that given the delay it would not be possible to organise an election for 25 February and encouraged authorities to organise the vote “*as soon as possible*”.¹³ Secretary general **Seydou Guèye** has warned that it is unlikely that an election will be organised before Sall’s term ends on 2 April.

The decision coincided with another strategic move – the release of approximately 130 opposition and civil society figures who had been detained.¹⁴ Another 90 were scheduled to be released on 16 February. **Gagne Demba Gueye**, one of those released, noted:

“They simply told us to get out. We’re seen as bargaining chips — our release is a trade-off for the stability of the country.”¹⁵

⁶ Le Monde, 7 Feb 2024

⁷ France24, 7 Feb 2024

⁸ Jeune Afrique, 25 Jan 2024

⁹ West Africa-based analyst currently in Senegal, 20 Feb 2024

¹⁰ AP News, 5 Feb 2024

¹¹ AFP, 10 Feb 2024

¹² Le Monde, 13 Feb 2024

¹³ Le Monde, 16 Feb 2024

¹⁴ DW, 16 Feb 2024

¹⁵ AFP, 15 Feb 2024

However, Gueye added that his release would not stop him from resuming his protests against the government.

The presidency released a statement following the decision of the constitutional council, noting that Sall intends to implement it and will immediately launch the necessary consultations to ensure the organisation of the elections. While the response is positive, the country remains in limbo and at the time of writing, no date has been set for elections. This means that if no election takes place before 2 April, Senegal will not have a legitimate leader. A source told ARC Briefing:

“There is one complicating factor which has to be taken into account which is the upcoming month of Ramadan which starts on 11 March. This has created the general feeling that if they want to hold a legitimate election, it has to happen in the next two weeks or so.”¹⁶

Wade’s reinstatement as a candidate is also uncertain. However, if he is reinstated there will be a push to also reinstate opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko** and denying this would risk further unrest.

IEA completes energy policy analysis

The France-headquartered **International Energy Agency (IEA)** published its first-ever review of Senegal’s energy policies on 25 January during a year when the country is expected to become an oil and gas producer. The IEA noted that Senegal’s energy policies are supportive of its broader **Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE)** (emerging Senegal plan), which aims to promote sustainable development and economic growth in the country.¹⁷ The government is currently laying out the strategy for the next five years under the PSE.

The IEA added that under the PSE, the government had adopted reforms aimed at attracting foreign investment in the energy sector and bolstering participation from the private sector. The IEA noted that Senegal’s institutional stability has helped the success of the reforms and increased investment flows.

The IEA commended Senegal’s energy transition, noting that in 2022, approximately 75% of the population had access to electricity and nearly 30% access to clean cooking fuels and equipment. The country has adopted renewable energy projects that have seen it often produce more electricity from these sources than coal. The IEA expressed its opinion that Senegal becoming an oil and gas producer will help lower electricity prices and reduce fuel imports, freeing up funds to be used in other areas such as the PSE.

While Senegal is poised to benefit greatly from its oil and gas potential, there are concerns that there will be a minimal trickle-down effect as seen in other oil and gas-rich countries, such as **Equatorial Guinea** and **Gabon**. The IEA’s endorsement of Senegal’s policies helps to bolster confidence that this will not be the case.

¹⁶ West Africa-based analyst currently in Senegal, 20 Feb 2024

¹⁷ IEA, 25 Jan 2024

Planner

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;

2024 **(Senegal)** Presidential elections;

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

Chronology

19 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) RFI**. Fifteen of the 20 presidential candidates who were approved to run in the presidential election call for a new vote to be held no later than 2 April;

19 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. Presidential candidate **Rose Wardini** withdraws her candidacy over her reported dual nationality, which she did not initially declare;

18 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. **African Development Bank (AfDB)** forecasts that Senegal's economy will grow by 8.2% in 2024, the second-strongest in **Africa** behind **Niger**, which it has forecast will grow 11.2%;

14 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. President **Macky Sall** speaks with **United States** secretary of state **Anthony Blinken**, assuring him that he will organise a transparent election and remains committed to Senegal's democracy;

14 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Jecos**. Private sector organisations express concern over the political situation in the country and the impact it will have on investments;

12 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) RFI**. **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** head, **Nigeria's** President **Bola Tinubu**, delays a visit to Senegal where he was meant to meet with President **Macky Sall** over the country's prevailing political crisis;

12 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. **Italy's** foreign trade agency confirms it has set up an office in Dakar;

10 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. State-owned **Petrosen** reports that the Floating Production, Storage and Unloading Unit (Fps) for the **Sangomar** oil field has arrived;

8 Feb 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Upstream**. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **BP** and **Australia's** **Woodside Energy** say they are monitoring the political situation in Senegal closely following the election delay announcement;

31 Jan 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Bloomberg**. Lawmakers launch an investigation into the validation process of contenders for February's presidential election after the independence of two judges at the **Constitutional Council** was thrown into doubt;

23 Jan 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) RFI**. **United States**-headquartered **Human Rights Watch** expresses concern over lack of press freedom, repression of the opposition and arbitrary detention perpetrated by the authorities ahead of the February elections;

22 Jan 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien**. Oil, mines and energy minister **Antoine Diome** meets with **Mauritanian** counterpart **Nani Ould Chrougha** to discuss the progress of the **Grand Tortue Ahmeyim** project, noting that it is 91% complete;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

Africa Risk Consulting (ARC) is a pan-African consulting company that provides timely, relevant information and advice that enables its clients to take informed investment decisions and to safeguard their reputations.

ARC's core consulting services include integrity due diligence and corporate investigations, political advisory and country assessments, opportunity monitoring and reputation risk management. Most relevant to private equity firms is ARC's integrity due diligence and corporate investigations capability. Specifically, ARC offers pre-deal integrity checks to highlight red flags before negotiations start; full detailed multi-jurisdictional reputation due diligence; and supplier and senior hire vetting and repeat due diligence for compliance programmes. ARC is unique in that it offers a 10-day delivery for a routine integrity due diligence. ARC also offers a suite of corporate investigations services from immediate investigation, evidence gathering, e-discovery, forensic accounting and whistleblower support on one end to crisis media management and regular monitoring on the other.

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