

## **Policy Brief: Parliamentary elections in Senegal**



### **Introduction**

Senegal is heading towards legislative and presidential elections that will take place on 17 November 2024 across the entire territory. As coalitions, parties, and movements sharpen their speeches and strategies, the stakes are high: to ensure diverse and democratic representation within the National Assembly.

Following his election on 24 March, the President of the Republic appointed Ousmane Sonko as Prime Minister, who, according to Article 55 of the Constitution, must present his general policy statement to the National Assembly. However, last June, he refused to do so, arguing that the internal regulations of the Assembly needed to be updated to include all provisions related to the Prime Minister (Macky Sall had abolished the position before reintroducing it with Amadou Ba, but the parliamentary regulations had not been updated accordingly).

In light of these events, during his first interview, the President stated that he had contacted the President of the National Assembly to amend the internal regulations. Ultimately, discussions and negotiations between the various parliamentary groups resulted in a consensus allowing for the update of the National Assembly's internal regulations. Subsequently, the organic law amending the internal regulations was adopted in a plenary session of the National Assembly on 16 August.

Since then, many developments have occurred. The President recalled the parliamentarians for a session to vote on other constitutional reform texts, one of which was rejected by the deputies. Regarding dissolution, the President of the Republic has the right to do so under Article 87 of the Constitution, which allows him to dissolve the Assembly after two years of the legislature. Bassirou Diomaye Faye had approached the Constitutional Council, which gave him a favourable opinion to dissolve the National Assembly from 12 September, which he did yesterday by setting the date for the next legislative elections for 17 November 2024.

The political fact is that the President did not have free rein as the opposition coalition Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) of former President Macky Sall held a majority in the lower house, and during an extraordinary session, the leader of this group threatened Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko and his government with a motion of censure should he appear in the Assembly to present his general policy statement.

With this dissolution, the regime of Bassirou Diomaye Faye seeks to secure a comfortable majority to enable Ousmane Sonko's government to implement its project with a majority in the National Assembly.

It should be noted that the President of the Republic has the option to delegate certain powers to the Prime Minister or other members of the Government by decree, with the exception of those provided for in Articles 42, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 72, 73, 87, 89, and 90. He may also authorise the Prime Minister to make decisions by decree.

## **1- Politico-social context**

The elections will take place in a tense socio-economic context, and despite the call for a peaceful election issued the day before the start of the electoral campaign on 24 October by President Bassirou Diomaye Faye, the campaign for the legislative elections on 17 November has been marked by numerous acts of violence.

However, it must be noted that the message has not been heard. From the very first days of the campaign, tensions intensified, and violence erupted. The atmosphere began to deteriorate with the attack on activists from the Pastef coalition (the ruling coalition) in Dakar and the burning of the headquarters of Taxawu Sénégal, the party of Khalifa Sall, the former mayor of Dakar, during the first week of the campaign. A week later, the convoy of the Pastef coalition was attacked in Kounghoul (central Senegal), resulting in the open fracture of one of the coalition's leaders.

In the week of 11 November, coinciding with the final week of the campaign, Pastef activists were attacked this time in Saint Louis (northern Senegal) using "knives, sabres, and tear gas grenades." According to the leader of the ruling coalition and head of the list, Ousmane Sonko, supporters of the rival coalition Sàmm Sa Kàddu, which backs Barthélémy Dias, the current mayor of Dakar, are behind these attacks.

Following this violence, the Prime Minister, who is also the leader of the Pastef coalition, encouraged his supporters to prevent the rival coalition, Sàmm Sa Kàddu, from campaigning. He then urged them to "avenge" the injured from their camp before calling for calm in a statement in Dakar.

Ultimately, Ousmane Sonko expressed his dismay at the lack of legal condemnations for the incidents that marred the legislative campaign.

## **2- Coalitions and leaders**

On 7 October, the General Directorate of Elections (DGE) published a list of forty-one (41) coalitions competing in these legislative elections. However, four (4) coalitions stand out. Here is an overview of the various forces contesting these elections.

Firstly, it should be noted that the 41 lists demonstrate a plurality and diversity within the Senegalese political landscape. Several societal projects are vying to represent citizens in the National Assembly.

The Pastef coalition, led by Ousmane Sonko, is the main force in these elections. The Prime Minister has turned these elections into a platform to dissect the public policy framework "Senegal Vision 20250," launched by his government on 14 October last year. The coalition aims to secure a majority in the National Assembly to begin the work for which Bassirou Diomaye Faye was elected with 54% of the votes on 24 March.

Alongside Pastef, we have the Coalition Sann Sa Kaadu, composed of several prominent political figures, including the current Mayor of Dakar, Barthélemy Dias, and two unsuccessful presidential candidates, namely Pape Djibril Fall and Anta Babacar Ngom, who are considered rising stars in Senegalese politics. We must not forget the businessman and head of Bougane Guèye Dany, who has recently taken on the role of a fierce opponent of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's regime.

The coalition Jamm Ak Njariñ is led by Amadou Ba, an unsuccessful presidential candidate. The former Prime Minister, who left the Alliance for the Republic (APR), the party of former President Macky Sall, seeks to establish political legitimacy with these legislative elections, having never won an election in Senegal.

The other major coalition, Takku Wallu Sénégal (TWS), is formed by the APR and the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS). TWS, with Macky Sall as its head of list, enjoys a strong electoral presence across the country. It is worth noting that there is an inter-coalition of the opposition in several departments of Senegal and the diaspora.

In addition to these main forces, there are coalitions that can be termed as a third way, such as Senegal Kesse, led by Thierno Alassane Sall, a former minister under Macky Sall, and the Coalition Sopi Sénégal, which is a split from the PDS established by early companions of former President Abdoulaye Wade.

### 3- Electoral Process

Firstly, let us recall that for these early elections, the Constitutional Council has set aside the provisions related to sponsorship. However, the Senegalese electoral process, governed by existing laws and frameworks (the constitution and the Electoral Code), has undergone several modifications following various elections.

The most recent reform was adopted in the National Assembly on Saturday, 5 August 2023, with 124 votes in favour, 1 against, and no abstentions. This reform states that "no one may refuse registration on the electoral rolls to individuals who, having been declared ineligible due to a conviction, benefit from rehabilitation or are subject to a measure of amnesty or pardon."

This amendment to Article L28 of the Electoral Code was one of the main achievements of the national dialogue initiated at the end of May by President Macky Sall, and it has benefited power aspirants Karim Wade and Khalifa, who had legal issues in their past.

The reliability and access to the electoral register have always been contentious issues on the eve of elections in Senegal. They have been at the heart of the opposition's demands since 2012. In Senegal, the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (Cena), the body responsible for overseeing the electoral process, must ensure that the register is provided 15 days before the vote to all candidates and candidate lists in accordance with Article L48 of the Electoral Code.

Recently, candidates who were rejected for sponsorship for the presidential election in February 2024, along with others admitted to the second round, have cried foul over the misappropriation of their sponsorships and have lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Council for clarification of the control process.

Among their demands is a call for reform at the level of the bodies responsible for organising elections. In this regard, the opposition has consistently expressed the desire to see a separation between the Ministry of the Interior and the body responsible for organisation through the Directorate General of Elections (DGE).

The administrative standoff between Ousmane Sonko's camp and the Ministry of the Interior is a perfect illustration of this. Indeed, the DGE refused to issue Mr Sonko the

official forms that would allow him to collect his sponsorships after an administrative judge had already annulled his removal from the electoral rolls by the Ministry of the Interior in August 2023 on 12 October 2023.

Nevertheless, on 31 October, Cena requested that the Directorate General of Elections (DGE), which falls under the Ministry of the Interior, reinstate Mr Sonko on the lists and provide him with the sponsorship files. The DGE had responded with a rejection.

#### **4- Who can vote in Senegal ?**

Senegal has a two-round majoritarian electoral system. To win in the first round, a candidate must receive the majority of the votes cast, as seen in the re-elections of outgoing presidents Abdoulaye Wade (2007) and Macky Sall (2012).

The conditions for voting in Senegal are governed by established criteria. All Senegalese nationals aged 18 and enjoying their civil and political rights are eligible to vote. An ordinary or exceptional revision of the electoral rolls, overseen by a presidential decree, is organised in the lead-up to an election.

However, the duration for this process is increasingly short. The last revision took place over 24 days, from 6 April to 2 May 2023, in a context where there are approximately two million potential voters to register. The 2023 revision faced numerous difficulties reported by the national press and on social media, with several hours of waiting and sometimes multiple trips required before one could register on the electoral rolls.

In addition to these difficulties, the online portal that allows individuals to verify their presence on the electoral register and check their electoral status to ensure it matches their voter card is no longer functional.

As a result, the revision of the electoral rolls does not accurately reflect the reality of the voting population, as the potential electorate is around 9 million citizens in 2023. Therefore, the issue does not lie in increasing the number of registered voters on the electoral roll but rather in the current electorate, which comprises 7,036,466 registered individuals.

To vote, the registered voter, equipped with the ECOWAS biometric identity card, can cast their vote at the designated polling centre. Voting is generally conducted from 08:00 to 18:00.

## **6- Parliamentary situation**

The National Assembly is the unicameral institution exercising legislative power in Senegal. It is composed of 165 deputies elected through a mixed system. The last Senegalese legislative elections took place on 31 July 2022 to renew the 165 members of the National Assembly for a five-year term.

During the last elections, the coalition coalition of President Macky Sall came first but experienced a setback, losing its absolute majority of seats that it had held since 2012. They dropped from 125 to 83 deputies. The largest opposition coalition, consisting of Yewwi Askan Wi and Wallu Sénégal, obtained 82 parliamentary seats. This marks a first in the legislative history of Senegal. That may lead us to lose power a few months later.

## **7- Role of the Media**

As each election approaches, to ensure equality among candidates in the use of airtime, the State has established the National Council for Audiovisual Regulation (CNRA) as a controlling body. The airtime and scheduling of broadcasts, as well as the modalities for their implementation, are set by decree, following advice from the CNRA.

At the level of public broadcasting, specifically the Senegalese Radio and Television (RTS), candidates are treated equitably, having the same amount of airtime. Regarding private media, the Electoral Code stipulates that it must adhere to the rules of fairness and balance among candidates.

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