

Summary

Political unrest in Senegal has further escalated with the commencement of the trial against opposition leader Ousmane Sonko on May 16. Protests have led to the confrontation between Sonko's supporters and Senegalese security forces, causing at least 4 deaths and damaging government officials' residences. A possible guilty verdict on June 1 could mean large-scale demonstrations and violence, especially in Dakar and Ziguinchor. In addition, due to the current polarization, political unrest is likely to continue in the upcoming months.

Recent events and developments

On May 16, the start of the trial for rape against key opposition leader Ousmane Sonko aggravated months of political unrest and polarization. Supporters of Sonko's *Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité* (Pastef) have demonstrated against the trial across the country, arguing that the trial is held for political reasons. Demonstrations mainly took place in Dakar and Ziguinchor, where Sonko lives. In Ziguinchor, protests centred around Sonko's residence, located near the airport. Most demonstrations have turned violent, registering three casualties: one demonstrator was stabbed by security forces in Dakar, and a policeman and a protester died in the violence in Ziguinchor.

In a Pastef demonstration on May 23, the house of Minister of Transport Doudou Ka was vandalized. On May 24, Sonko called on supporters to march to Dakar to protest a possible guilty verdict. The date set for this decision is June 1. On May 28, Sonko was forcibly returned to Dakar by security forces, ending the march. At least one participant was killed in one of many clashes between demonstrators and police.

Impact assessment

A guilty verdict – which both supporters and opponents of Sonko expect to be the most likely scenario – could mean a 10-year prison sentence, making Sonko ineligible to run for the presidency. He and his supporters have claimed that the trial is part of a larger scheme to disallow him from running in next year's election. This scenario is likely to incite mass protests, which can turn violent with little notice in areas where security forces and Pastef supporters clash. This can occur especially in the capital Dakar and Ziguinchor. In Dakar, rallies can be mostly expected along the VDN road, the Ngor district near the airport, and the Plateau district. In addition, the residences of government officials are potential targets of attacks. Previous incidents show that public properties may get vandalized. In Ziguinchor, clashes will likely continue near Sonko's residence. Traffic disruptions can also occur. Passers-by may be affected as clashes between demonstrators and security forces can involve tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition. In the scenario of a not-guilty verdict, unrest could still persist due to the current political polarization.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure all employees travelling to Senegal undertake a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Advise staff to abstain from disclosing their personal views on the political situation, both in person and via social media.
- Advise staff to avoid all politically related rallies and demonstrations.
- Continuously monitor local news and liaise with local partners to stay up to date with any developments in the region of operations.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

christiaan@forthglobal.com

We provide a wide range of services to prepare your organization and employees for situations like these. More information on our website: www.forthglobal.com

[DISCLAIMER](#)