

Summary

On February 3, Senegal's presidential election scheduled for February 25 was postponed by president Macky Sall, allegedly due to a dispute between parliament and the courts. Since the announcement, large demonstrations have taken place in Dakar, Ziguinchor, and St. Louis. 3 civilians have died in clashes with police who use tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse crowds. Authorities have suspended mobile internet services for periods of time and could do so again ahead of planned protests. On February 16, the postponement was ruled as unconstitutional, though no new date is set.

Recent events and developments

On February 3, Senegalese president Macky Sall announced the delay of presidential elections scheduled for February 25 until December 15, allegedly due to a dispute between parliament and the Constitutional court over the rejection of candidates. Previously, Sall's longtime rival Ousmane Sonko was barred from running in the election, and imprisoned under charges of "immoral behaviour" in July 2023, resulting in large protests and the deaths of 30. After Sall announced the delay of the election, thousands of Senegalese took to the streets of Dakar on February 4, blocking roads, burning tires, and throwing stones in the Plateau neighbourhood of Dakar. Security forces fired tear gas, and live ammunition to disperse the crowds. However, protests continued to grow, and on February 9, large demonstrations took place in Senegal's largest cities. 3 citizens were killed in Dakar, Ziguinchor, and St-Louis as police forces employed live ammunition. As of now, 266 people have been arrested, and 25 journalists have been attacked, harassed, tear gassed or detained by security forces. To mitigate protests, authorities have on occasion suspended mobile internet services. On 16 February, the election's postponement was decreed as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council and annulled. The council has further said that it is impossible to hold the election on February 25, but that it would be held as soon as possible. Some minor opposition figures were also released in a move seen as appeasing the opposition and demonstrators.

Impact assessment

The postponement of the presidential election has served to further inflame the already existing resentment that many residents have toward the government. Considering the Constitutional Council's ruling, residents will pay close attention to the government's coming actions, and especially the setting of a new election date. Demonstrations are likely to continue until a new election date is determined, and due to the continued imprisonment of Ousmane Sonko and other opposition members, as supporters demand that they are freed and allowed to participate. These new developments could further lead to clashes between supporters of the different political parties, as seen in the 2019 Presidential elections. Equally, it is probable that security forces will quell large protests with the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, which could result in more deaths. Depending on the coming actions of Sall's government and the judiciary, demonstrations can be expected to continue in larger cities like Dakar, St. Louis and Ziguinchor around public squares, main roads, and government institutions. Authorities have suspended mobile internet services, and it is likely that they may do so again if protests are planned. For now, the decisions of Macky Sall's government should be monitored closely, especially with regards to if the Council's decision is appealed. An appeal is likely to be met with additional demonstrations. The release of minor opposition figures could have appeased protestors. On the other hand, if major opposition figures remain imprisoned, the likelihood of protests remains high.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff traveling to Senegal to undertake a several days long HEAT training prior to travel.
- Monitor local news and media to remain updated on developing events. Internet access could be suspended for extended periods of time.
- Advise staff to avoid all protests and large gatherings of people, given the potential for the outbreak of violence between demonstrators and security forces, and the possibility of indiscriminate detentions.
- Ensure that travel contingency plans are updated and delivered to all employees in Senegal.

Customized advice

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