

Summary

Over 7 million Senegalese voters will on Sunday, March 24, vote for their preferred president out of 19 candidates. President Macky Sall has nominated his former Prime Minister Amadou Ba as the candidate for the incumbent Alliance for the Republic (APR) party. Popular opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who was recently released from jail, has given his backing to Bassirou Diomaye Faye, as he cannot participate. The two are the most likely winners based on 2022 Parliamentary election results. There is a high likelihood of disruptions on Sunday, and a high likelihood of unrest after election results are announced.

Recent events and developments

On Sunday, March 24, the over 7 million strong Senegalese electorate will go to the polls to elect a new president in an election defined by controversy and unrest. The election, originally scheduled for February 24, was postponed by president Macky Sall over alleged conflicts between parliament and the judiciary over disqualified candidates. Large scale protests broke out across Senegal in reaction to the news, leading to at least 5 deaths as police used rubber bullets, tear gas, and live ammunition to disperse protests. Under pressure from the judiciary, Sall overturned the postponement on March 6, setting the new date of the first round of elections for March 24, in addition to releasing opposition leaders. On March 14, former presidential candidate and popular opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was released from prison alongside Bassirou Diomaye Faye, who has been nominated as presidential candidate by Sonko, as he himself is not eligible to participate due to criminal convictions. Their release was met with jubilation in Dakar, but especially in the Southern Casamance region, where Sonko and his African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity party (PASTEF) enjoys considerable support. President Sall's APR party has nominated former prime minister Amadou Ba as their candidate. Faye and Ba, alongside 17 other candidates will contest the election on March 24. If no candidate wins more than 50%, the election will go to a second round, where the two candidates with the most votes in the first round will face off.

Impact assessment

Whilst there have been no reported instances of civil/political unrest since president Sall reinstated the election, it is likely that voting day will see large scale disruptions. It is highly likely that a large number of security forces will be deployed to maintain order at polling stations and in public forums, such as parks, monuments, and outside government buildings. In such a highly contested and tense election, it is likely that voting day will see a few instances of civil unrest and/or fights between groups of people supporting opposing candidates. Such occurrences will most likely be quickly split up by security forces. Police may use tear gas, or rubber bullets in cases of large demonstrations. Once voting is complete on Sunday, each province must release their election results on Tuesday, March 26. The proclamation of the final results by the census commission will take place no later than midnight on Friday, March 29. Whilst it is difficult to anticipate the potential actors behind demonstrations, it is highly likely that opposition supporters will demonstrate if Faye loses, especially if PASTEF alleges election fraud. Equally, there is a likelihood of APR supporters protesting if Ba loses, though likely in lesser numbers. Political demonstrations are likely to be dispersed by security forces as seen after the election was postponed. In Casamance, where PASTEF is most popular, an election defeat could be responded to with violent riots and potentially clashes with security forces. Given the wide range of candidates, it is unlikely that a candidate will win in the first round; the second round's date is yet to be determined.

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 in cases of civil unrest.
- Advise staff to avoid all protests and large gatherings of people.
- Cooperate with authorities and security forces.
- Ensure that travel contingency plans are updated and delivered to all employees in Senegal.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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