



Senegal — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/27/1895 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: Senegal has been under French influence since the 17th century. Senegal became part of French West Africa in 1895 and a French colony in 1920 (Lansford 2021: 1434).¹ The French colonial administration governed Senegal through appointed officials. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1945.² LIED confirms that universal suffrage was introduced in 1945. Since 1871 France allowed a seat for Senegal in the National Assembly. In 1914 the Blaise Diagne first African deputy was elected. This privilege lasted until Senegal gained independence. Despite the fact that elections were held and LIED classifies legislative and multiparty elections as present since 1946 we should consider the colonial time as direct rule colonial regime as no local legislative elections were held.³ Territorial assembly elections were held in Senegal on 03/31/1957. The result was a landslide victory for the Senegalese Popular Bloc (BPS). For the colonial time, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present until 1945 and are ambiguous afterwards. LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Senegal before 1904. From 1904 to 1958, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

11/25/1958 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: After the 1958 referendum, Senegal became an autonomous republic within the French Community on this date.⁴ During this period, the country was governed by its Territorial Assembly, which had been in place since 1957 and was tasked with making key legislative decisions. Some party pluralism existed, with parties such as the African Regroupment Party (PRA) and the Senegalese Progressive Union (UPS) allowed to form and operate. Full independence was not granted until 1960 (Alalade 1981: 43).⁵ However, political liberties were absent (LIED) but V-Dem's PCLI scored an ambiguous presence. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. Léopold Sédar Senghor, a leading figure in Senegalese politics, was a dominant presence during this time.

01/17/1959 End Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Mali, Non-Electoral Transitional Regime]: In January 1959, it merged with the neighboring French Sudan (currently known as Mali) to establish the Federation of Mali. The federation gained full independence within the French Community on 06/20/1960 (Lansford 2021: 1434). For 1959, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. In 1959, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified as ambiguous regarding the state of political liberties, indicating an intermediate state between present and absent.

08/20/1960 End Part of Other Country [of Mali, Electoral Autocracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: Following independence from the Mali Federation, the BDS (later known as BPS, UPS, PS) dominated the political landscape and secured victory in pre-independence elections, while it absorbed most other parties into its fold. During this regime period, no competitive elections were held, according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI

scores ambiguous cleanliness. Following V-Dem's EF&FI somewhat free and fair conditions were given. The harassment of remaining opposition factions commenced shortly after independence, leading to the outlawing of one opposition party in 1960 and the arrest of several opposition leaders. Special tribunals were established in October 1960 to adjudicate political offenses. A power struggle between Senghor and his prime minister from December 1962 to January 1963 culminated in the arrest and subsequent lengthy imprisonment of Prime Minister Dia, consolidating Senghor's personal control over the ruling party (Foltz 1964: 16-63, Klein 1987: 326, LeVine 2004: 204, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 91). On 12/19/1962, the parliament approved President Léopold Senghor as the new head of government, merging the positions of president and prime minister.⁶ Following the dispute Senghor established an authoritarian presidential regime where all rival political parties were suppressed.⁷ For this time, political liberties remained absent according to LIED and ambiguous following V-Dem's PCLI. In 1961, according to Polity5, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. In this period the regime was a borderline case between an electoral hybrid regime and an electoral autocracy. For 1960-1962, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

03/03/1963 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start One-Party Autocracy: A new draft constitution, which eliminated the position of prime minister and established a presidential system, was approved by 99 percent of the voters in a national referendum held on 03/03/1963. Legislative elections were held on 12/01/1963, the Senegalese Progressive Union won all of the seats in the National Assembly. President Senghor was re-elected on December 12/01/1963.⁸ The 1963 constitution that created a majoritarian electoral system ensured de facto one-party rule. The Senegalese Progressive Union was the de facto only legally permitted party from 1963 until 1975.⁹ In accordance with LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1963-1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1970-1975, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. Per FH, from 1972 to 1974, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. As classified by FH in 1975, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous until 1968 and as somewhat present afterwards regarding the state of political liberties.

03/19/1976 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: Following the experience of a one-party system, Senegal restored political pluralism but limited the number of authorized political parties to three, each representing a specific political current. However, this initial shift towards a competitive landscape was criticized as ineffective, and most significantly as „a departure of form, but not of substance from the earlier authoritarian regime“ (Fatton 1986: 283). Nonetheless, democratization continued, president Léopold Sédar Senghor resigning and allowing for a peaceful transfer of power (yet without a popular mandate) in 1981 to Abdou Diouf, followed by the introduction of a multi-party system without restrictions in 05/06/1981 (Fatton 1986). This piece of legislation amended the third article of the Constitution which limited the number of political parties. With the introduction of an unrestricted multi-party system, every Senegalese citizen is free to create his or her own political party.¹⁰ The governments of Senegal and Gambia signed an agreement to form a confederation on December 12/12/1981, and the Confederation of Senegal and Gambia was formally established on February 2/1/1982. Legislative elections were held on 2/27/1983, and the PSS (Parti Socialiste du Senegal - former Senegalese Progressive Union) won 111 out of 120 seats in the National Assembly. The PDS (Parti Democratique Senegalais) won eight seats in the National Assembly. President Diouf was re-elected with 83.5 percent of the vote on 2/27/1983.¹¹ The election was marred by irregularities and the opposition suffered chronically from a lack of resources and organization; the elections therefore cannot be considered to have been held on an even competitive landscape (Fatton 1986: 288). LIED affirms that no

competitive elections were held during this time. From 1976 to 1977 not really cleanliness is scored. Between 1978 to 1992 the cleanliness is considered as ambiguous. Since 1993 V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat cleanliness. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates somewhat free and fair elections until 1977. For the following five years ambiguous electoral conditions are scored. Between 1983 and 1987 the elections were somewhat free and fair. Ambiguous outcomes were scored again until 1992. Since 1993 V-Dem's EF&FI underlines freedom and fairness for the country's election. According to LIED no political liberties were present during this time. V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were somewhat present until 1989 and present since 1990. As classified by FH in 1976, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. According to FH, in 1977, the country is partly free with a score of 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Per FH, in 1978, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. Per FH's scoring from 1979 to 1983, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 from 1984 to 1992 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. Per FH's evaluation from 1993 to 1995, the country scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. As per FH, from 1996 to 1999, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1976-2000, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. The confederation was dissolved by Senegal on 09/30/1989 after the Gambia refused to move closer toward union.¹²

02/27/2000 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, Abdoulaye Wade defeated incumbent Abdou Diouf in a regularly scheduled election. This was the first time that elections in Senegal resulted in the defeat of the incumbent Socialist Party (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 56). On 03/19/2000, the opposition prevailed in the second round of a just presidential election, resulting in the displacement of the dominant-party regime (Vengroff 2001: 129-62).¹³ The period between 2000 and 2019 in Senegal was characterized by a mix of political evolution and challenges. Following Abdoulaye Wade's historic electoral victory in 2000, Senegal entered a phase of political change, seeking to strengthen democratic institutions and expand political freedoms. Under President Wade's leadership, reforms were initiated to enhance civil liberties and diversify the political landscape. This included promoting press freedom and bolstering civil society. Per FH, in 2000 and 2001, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. According to FH, from 2002 to 2007, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. As classified by FH from 2008 to 2011, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. As per FH's classification in 2012, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Per FH, from 2013 to 2017, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. As per FH's classification in 2018, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. According to FH, a score of 5 to 7 from 2019 to 2024 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. Moreover, regarding the political liberties, are present until 2016 according to LIED. Since 2017 they changed back to absent outcomes. However, V-Dem's PCLI declares them as fully present for the entire time. Between 2000 and 2006, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. Since 2007, according to the Polity5 indicator, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For 2000, 2001 and for 2020-2023, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For 2002-2019, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. Additionally, efforts were made to diversify the economy and curb corruption. However, Senegal also faced challenges during this time, including economic inequality, social unrest, and political instability. Despite strides towards democracy, some institutions remained vulnerable to political influence and corruption.

Moreover, ethnic and regional tensions persisted in certain parts of the country, leading to occasional unrest. Despite these challenges, Senegal continued its path towards democracy and solidified its position as one of the most stable and democratic nations in West Africa. The period between 2000 and 2019 was characterized by a steady pursuit of political reform and institutional strengthening, coupled with efforts to drive economic growth and social development. International observers declared the election on 09/24/2019 as credible, despite the exclusion of two prominent opposition politicians, Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade, who could have posed serious challenges to President Sall. In January 2019, just weeks before the election, the Constitutional Council ruled that both were ineligible to run in the presidential election due to their previous convictions in separate, politically contentious corruption cases.¹⁴ In 2022 multiple challenges to democracy occurred. Opposition parties were restricted and partly banned, a measure that resulted in mass protests on 06/03, resulting in around 200 arrests and three individuals killed. Freedom of speech and press were under fire by the government as well, with certain oppositional news networks briefly banned and multiple journalists arrested.¹⁵ Therefore, Senegal is classified as an electoral democracy. Senegal is a presidential democracy with a unicameral legislature, where the president is elected through direct universal suffrage.¹⁶ The three branches of government are generally independent; however, corruption remains an ongoing challenge.¹⁷ In 02/2024 the acting president of Senegal, Macky Sall, cancelled an upcoming election shortly before voting was scheduled, claiming that disputes between the legislative and judicial branches had to be settled first.¹⁸ This cancellation was deemed unlawful and overturned by the supreme court of Senegal after weeks of deadly protests. The presidential election took place on 03/24/2024, leading to a victory of opposition politician Bassirou Diomaye Faye. The transfer of power happened peacefully.¹⁹ Since 2000 LIED classifies the elections as competitive. V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat clean elections since 2002. The overall election conditions were free and fair until 2006, before they changed to somewhat freedom and fairness for five years. Since 2012 the elections are free and fair again (V-Dem EF&FI).

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Bendel 1999b)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_West_Africa

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Senegal

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegal>

⁶ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/senegal-1960-present/>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A9opold_S%C3%A9dar_Senghor

⁸ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/senegal-1960-present/>

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegal>

¹⁰ <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/the-party-system-and-conditions-of-candidacy/senegal/>

¹¹ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/senegal-1960-present/>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegambia_Confederation

¹³ <http://africanelections.tripod.com/sn.html>

¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/senegal/freedom-world/2022>

¹⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/senegal/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Senegal/Government-and-society>

¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/senegal/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/03/world/africa/senegal-president-cancels-election.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68636327>

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