



Senegal

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↑↑

Capital: Dakar

Type of Government: Republic under multiparty rule

Chief of State: President Abdoulaye Wade

(since 1 April 2000)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Cheikh Tidiane Gadio

Population: 10,284,929

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 154

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Senegal has a **good** record of support for democracy abroad. It has aspired to be a model of democratic political stability in Africa and as such has been vocal in its support of democracy in international fora and often intervened in international conflicts to promote peace and democratic principles.

Since independence from France in 1960, Senegal has maintained an international reputation as a relatively stable country, despite its uneven process of political liberalization. However, it has often held back its support of democracy abroad when it has perceived involvement as contrary to its own national interest or over-arching foreign policy goals. It has taken care to maintain strong ties with France and the United States, as well as to support democracy and stability within Africa -- whenever these goals have not come into conflict with other foreign and security policy interests.

During the past ten years, Senegal has faced its own challenges to democracy. Like many other African countries, Senegal was moving slowly from one party rule to a multi-party system of government. Along the way, several of its elections were declared flawed by outside political observers. Senegal, therefore, did not have the moral authority to intervene effectively in cases of electoral irregularities in other countries. Nevertheless, President Diouf (1981-2000) oversaw the consolidation of democratic practice in Senegal, and under his leadership Senegal gradually underwent progressive political liberalization, culminating in an historic change of government with the election of opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade as President in March 2000.¹ Since then, Senegal has built on its democratic credentials and enhanced its moral authority to promote democracy abroad.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

One of Senegal's primary foreign policy objectives is to maintain its close relationships with Western powers, particularly the United States and France. This policy has enabled it to enjoy political support and high levels of foreign aid from the West.² In turn, this has led to relative political and economic stability, which has enabled it to assume a high degree of leadership in the sub-region and among francophone countries in West Africa. It has been a priority for Senegal's leaders to guard the country's international image, maintain its geopolitical significance to Western powers and preserve its leadership position within the region. Another key foreign policy objective is to maintain domestic and regional security, particularly with regards to the separatist movement in the Casamance region.

Senegal's international reputation has allowed it greater influence on the international scene than its demographic and economic weight might otherwise merit.³ Its leaders are often called upon to mediate in international disputes, especially where Western countries are at odds with other African states. Senegal belongs to several international and regional multilateral organizations, through which it maintains a high profile as an advocate for political moderation and democratic values. The country has been a mediator in many inter-African conflicts including the Western Sahara, Liberia and Madagascar, and has made important



contributions to the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It has also played a pioneering role in setting up regional economic bodies in West Africa, and has been one of the initiators of La Francophonie, an association of French-speaking nations that seeks to promote democratic values among its member states. It has played an active role at the UN and UNESCO and was elected to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1997.

Senegal's approach to achieving its foreign policy objectives has been both regional and more broadly international. In pursuing its objectives, Senegal has relied on a broad range of tools and activities. It has worked to project a positive international image, implemented domestic policy and institutional reforms, utilized traditional tools of diplomacy, assisted in mediating regional disputes, and participated in election-monitoring and peace-keeping activities. By undertaking economic and political reforms, it has been able to maintain its special relationship with the West and its international stature as a leader in West Africa. Through its participation in international organizations such as the UN and ECOMOG, it has assisted with election monitoring and peacekeeping missions.

Senegal has pursued friendly diplomatic relations with neighboring states in its efforts to maintain domestic and regional security and its assistance has been sought in easing tensions in several areas within the region. Senegal successfully negotiated an easing of border tensions with neighboring Mauritania. As a result of the volatile situation in the Casamance region of the country, where separatists have taken up arms against the government, Senegal has worked especially hard to support and maintain close relations with governments in Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Senegal has intervened militarily in Guinea-Bissau to fortify an elected government threatened with a military takeover.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Senegal has condemned the overthrow of democratically-elected governments when doing so has coincided with its own national security and political interests. It also has a solid record of joining international diplomatic efforts to resolve such crises through mediation.

The 1999 overthrow of President Konan Bedie of Cote d'Ivoire was a shock for the region,

and for the francophone countries in particular. Senegal's then-President Diouf appealed for a swift return to 'constitutional order.' For many years, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire had been seen as francophone West Africa's two most stable states. The parallels in their circumstances went further. Both Bedie and Diouf faced elections in the coming year, and both had been accused of electoral manipulation in the past. It was in Diouf's interest, therefore, to condemn the coup in Cote d'Ivoire to help deter a similar fate for his own government. Indeed, the coup in Cote d'Ivoire may have accelerated Senegal's transition to greater democracy by encouraging Diouf to hold freer and fairer elections.

Senegal's policy toward coups in neighboring Guinea-Bissau has been influenced largely by its proximity to the unstable region of Casamance. For many years, Senegal protested that Guinea-Bissau was providing arms to the Casamance separatists in support of their fight against the Senegalese government. In 1998, Guinea-Bissau President Joao Vieira accused his army commander, General Mane, of allowing weapons to be smuggled to rebels in Senegal, and dismissed him. This triggered a mutiny in the army that led to a civil war in Guinea-Bissau. Senegal intervened militarily to prop up Vieira's government. After another coup, followed by two rounds of transparent presidential elections, Senegalese President Wade appealed for international aid for its struggling neighbor.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

During the Diouf era, Senegal had its own record of allegations of manipulation of electoral processes, and therefore did not have the moral standing to criticize other governments such as Zambia, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. However, after the free and fair elections that brought President Wade into power, the government has been more willing to respond to such situations.

A clear opportunity arose with the 2002 elections in Zimbabwe. The presidents of Senegal and Ghana categorically condemned the manipulation of the elections in Zimbabwe, while the presidents of Nigeria and South Africa were perceived to be more sympathetic to President Mugabe. President Wade said he did not "consider the norms of the election democratic." The Zimbabwe case has become a litmus test for Senegal's Western allies, and Senegal was keen to show solidarity with the West, especially since there



was so little at stake, given the distance and relative insignificance of Zimbabwe to Senegalese domestic political interests. As a government which had long been in opposition, and which finally had come to power as a result of free and fair elections, Senegal was more inclined to go to some length to defend that principle.

Senegal played an important role in mediating the crisis in Madagascar following disputed elections in December 2001. The incumbent Didier Ratsiraka had sought refuge in France, while challenger Marc Ravalomanana had taken over the presidency. The peace-making role played by President Wade may have contributed to averting a civil war in that country.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Senegal's record of support for democracy internationally has been good. It has been a model of political stability for the region and has often intervened in international conflicts to promote peace and democratic ideals. However, there have been instances where the government has put short-term political considerations and the national interest ahead of the promotion of democracy.

Senegal has a solid voting record on pro-democracy resolutions in international fora. This is because Senegal has sought to maintain its prestige and international image as a promoter of democracy, and thereby earn the continued favor of Western donor governments. Senegal's capacity to support the democracy agenda in the international arena is considerable. Senegal is an active and valued member of many multinational organizations including the United Nations, La Francophonie, ECOWAS and the OAU/AU. Working in these fora, Senegal has been a leading voice for moderation and support of democracy. Senegal took a strong position in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, and in October 2001 hosted an African anti-terrorism summit, which established an African Pact against Terrorism. Senegal is also an active participant in UN peacekeeping operations, and was the only African country to participate in the Gulf War against Iraq. Senegal's President Wade is currently the chairman of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and UEMOA (the West African Monetary and Economic Union).

A recent African initiative, in which President Wade is playing a leading role, is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). It

aims to promote African development through investments and assistance from richer countries, in return for commitments on democracy and good governance. Progress toward specific benchmarks would be evaluated through a 'peer review' mechanism described by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo as "a way for the enlightened leaders of Africa to put pressure on the old school to change their ways."

Senegal was elected to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1997. In 2000, Senegal hosted a conference on war crimes that was jointly chaired by then-President, Diouf and the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Emma Bonino. This conference was part of the preparation for establishing the International Criminal Tribunal that was inaugurated in 2002.

However, when it came to assisting efforts to prosecute former Chadian dictator Hissene Habré, Senegal failed to meet its international obligations to protect human rights. Habré, who is reputed to have amassed a fortune from the Chadian treasury before fleeing the country, came to live in exile in Senegal, where he had considerable influence. Thus, when he was indicted two years ago on charges of torture and crimes against humanity, the Senegalese courts ruled that he could not be tried there. Human rights groups insisted, however, that Senegal had jurisdiction to try Habré as it is a party to all the relevant international treaties on human rights abuse and torture. Moreover, a Human Rights Watch report criticized President Wade for transferring one judge and promoting another in an effort to interfere with the verdict on Senegal's jurisdiction to try the case. Ultimately, following intense criticism, Wade first ordered Habré to leave Senegal, and then agreed to extradite him to a country that would be able and willing to try him -- but only after a personal appeal by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Senegal has maintained relations with dictatorships in a number of countries. In these cases, Senegal has again allowed its strategic national interests, or domestic political concerns, to supersede its commitment to the promotion of democracy. For example, Nigeria's economic domination of the region, resulting from its oil wealth, has made it difficult for smaller countries in the region, including Senegal, to condemn military governments there. In addition, when regional rebellions and civil wars have threatened to destabilize other countries in the



West African region, Nigeria has footed much of the bill for peacekeeping by the West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. Senegal has thus remained mute in the face of severe abuse of human rights in Nigeria under Abacha.

Senegal also strives to maintain good relations with Mauritania, her neighbor to the North, led by President Maaouiya Ould Taya, a military dictator-turned civilian president who has governed since 1984. President Taya's repressive regime limits freedom of expression and is accused of many other human rights abuses. Senegal's relations with Mauritania have long been very strained. Relations deteriorated sharply in 1989 following the killing of hundreds of Senegalese residents in Mauritania and the expulsion of several thousands more. A border war erupted the following year and diplomatic

relations were suspended until 1992. More recently, tensions over water rights between the two countries have been eased through diplomacy. In order to avoid another eruption of the conflict (and, perhaps, also to prevent the Mauritanian government from supporting the Casamance separatists), President Wade sees the maintenance of friendly relations with Mauritania as a top foreign relations priority. He has therefore refrained from criticizing President Taya's oppressive policies and even paid a visit there in May 2002. During that visit, opposition groups delivered an open letter accusing Ould Taya of presiding over a political dictatorship, silencing his critics and censoring the media. Yet, President Wade declined to criticize his host and emphasized instead the need for closer ties between Senegal and Mauritania.

¹Fatton Jr., Robert. Predatory Rule: State and Civil Society in Africa. Lynne Rienner, 1992.

² Diamond, Larry, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds. Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy. Lynne Rienner, 1995, p. 523. According to Coulon, Senegal receives about three times the average for sub-Saharan Africa.

³ Ibid.