
AMBREY INSIGHT BRIEF – SENEGAL ELECTION

08/02/2024

Incident

On 05 February 2024, protestors disrupted traffic and clashed with police in Dakar, Senegal, and the N4 highway, the Trans Gambia highway was blocked during the night by improvised barricades and burning tyres. Authorities fired tear gas and blank rounds during the protests. The protests were triggered by the incumbent president, Macky Sall, postponing the upcoming General Elections that had been planned for 25 February 2024. Opposition leaders called the action an 'institutional coup.' Several opposition leaders were detained.

On 06 February 2024, parliament voted in favour of delaying the presidential elections until 15 December 2024., three opposition lawmakers were arrested following the vote. The result of the vote triggered further protests. To suppress the protests government restricted internet access across the country by switching off mobile data, however, wired internet connections and WiFi remained operational. There were also rolling power outages in some parts of the country, where the government switched off electricity for periods of 5-15 minutes. On 06 February there were at least 8 recorded incidents of such power outages. Electricity supply to Dakar reportedly remained constant.

Context

In January 2024, the Constitutional Council validated 20 electoral candidates while rejecting two prominent opposition leaders. The leader of the Senegalese Democratic Party, Karim Wade, questioned the integrity of the judges and called for a re-evaluation of his candidacy application. On his initiative, the National Assembly approved the creation of a commission of inquiry into the conditions for validating candidates, and members from the ruling party supported the proposal. On 03 February 2024, President Sall announced that the election was indefinitely postponed and that he would "engage in an open national dialogue, to create the conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election."

Analysis

Ambrey assessed that the action of President Macky Sall likely occurred due to the wave of coups and undemocratic actions occurring across the West African region over the previous 12 months. There is no precedent within Senegal for elections to be delayed in such a manner, however, there is a history of presidents attempting to stay in power longer than constitutionally decreed.

Furthermore, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) urged Senegal to return to its election timetable, but this has been ignored. This exemplifies the further erosion of influence and credibility of the institution following the lack of credible action over Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Implications

Ambrey assessed that in the short term protests are likely to continue and have the potential to increase in violence, from both protesters and security forces. The maritime workers union in Senegal (Association of Traders and Industrialists of Senegal) issued a statement decrying the actions of the President but has not threatened any strike action as of yet. The union last conducted industrial action in September 2023, over pay and working conditions. Ambrey has not observed any significant interruption to port operations in Dakar. Ambrey assessed that it is unlikely unless there is a significant escalation in the civil unrest and violence that there will be any significant interruptions to port operations. However, Ambrey advises against any crew transfers ashore, and to regularly check on the operational status of the port with appropriate agents.

It is assessed that this also has wider implications across West Africa, this is the fifth nation (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon) where political instability and anti-democratic actions have taken place, and it has exemplified the falling credibility and impotence of ECOWAS. It is therefore assessed that there will likely be further democratic instability in the West African region through 2024, specifically in nations where incumbent presidents and leaders have served considerable consecutive terms, have ascended via controversial election results, or have significantly suppressed political opposition.