



# **Elections in Senegal**

## *The February 26 Presidential Election*

### Frequently Asked Questions

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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# Frequently Asked Questions

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*Disclosure:*  
*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Senegalese elections authorities as of February 21, 2012, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## Who will the Senegalese elect on February 26?

On February 26, 2012, the Senegalese people will cast their votes to elect the next president of the Republic of Senegal.

## Who is eligible to vote?

There is universal suffrage in Senegal. This means that all Senegalese nationals of age 18 and above have the right to vote in the upcoming presidential elections.

## How are these elections structured?

The president is elected by an absolute majority vote through a two-round system.

In the first round of voting, all candidates compete against one another. If no one candidate is able to get more than 50 percent of total votes cast, a second round of voting will take place. In the second round, the two candidates with the highest percentages of votes obtained in the first round will face each other. These two candidates, formally announced by the Constitutional Council, will compete against each other and the one with the most votes will be come into office for a seven-year term.

## Who are the candidates for the presidential election?

Fourteen candidates will be competing in the election. Current frontrunners are:

- Abdoulaye Wade, Incumbent President  
Party/Coalition: *Parti Démocratique Sénégalais (PDS) / Forces Alliées 2012*
- Idrissa Seck  
Party/Coalition: *Rewmi / Idy 4 President*
- Macky Sall  
Party/Coalition: *Alliance pour la République (APR) / Macky 2012*
- Tanor Dieng  
Party/Coalition: *Parti Socialiste (PS) / Benno ak Tanor*
- Moustapha Niasee  
Party/Coalition: *Alliance des Forces de Progrès (APS) / Benno Siggil Senegal*
- Amsatou Sow Sidibe  
Party/Coalition: *Parti pour la Démocratie et la Citoyenneté (PDC)*
- Ibrahima Fall  
Party/Coalition: *Taxaw Temm ak Ibrahima Fall*

## **What is the opposition against incumbent President Wade's candidacy?**

The leading opposition movement, the M23 – comprised of main opposition parties and civil society organizations – strongly opposes the Constitutional Council's decision to allow President Wade to run for another term.

Since the decision was announced, there have been an increasing number of protests organized by the opposition movement with the hope that mass mobilization will persuade President Wade to withdraw from the race. The leaders of the M23 insist that the presidential election cannot take place as long as Wade is a candidate.

Because the Senegalese Constitution establishes a two-term limit for the president of the Republic, the Opposition believes that the Court's decision to allow a third term in office is a constitutional coup d'état. Despite their fear that the upcoming elections will not be free and fair, they are unwilling to call a boycott, as that would ensure President Wade's victory.

However, according to President Wade and his political party, his intention to run for a third term does not violate the Senegalese Constitution. When Wade originally came into office in 2000, the constitution did not establish term limits for the presidency. A year later, in 2001, the constitution was amended to include a two-term limit on presidents.

Although Wade approved this change at the time, he is now asserting that his first term in power should not be counted towards the maximum of two terms, as he came into office before the new regulations. The debate is whether the new term limit is to be interpreted to include all presidents or all future presidents.

## **What is the role of the Senegalese judiciary in the electoral process?**

Senegal has a history of electoral democracy that has been cited as an example for the rest of West Africa. Past elections have been viewed as fair and free of intervention from institutions such as courts or councils.

The Senegalese Constitution calls for a judiciary branch that is independent from executive and legislative branches of government. However, the opposition movement and other analysts have voiced concern that the Constitutional Council's decision to allow President Wade to run demonstrates a lack of independence on the part of the judiciary.

Further, President Wade awarded significant pay raises to members of the Constitutional Council a few weeks before their ruling on the final candidates for the election. Unfortunately, few trust the Constitutional Council will be able to act impartially during the presidential elections. The Constitutional Council is responsible for announcing final results and adjudicating electoral disputes.

The opposition movement believes that the judiciary branch is too close to President Wade, creating a lack of trust and fear that the elections may not be credible.

## **How long is the campaign period?**

All presidential candidates are allowed to start campaigning 21 days before the first round of voting takes place, which means campaigning started on February 6. If a second round of voting becomes necessary, candidates may start their follow-up campaign as soon as the announcement with the finalized list of candidates is made. On the day of the election, any activity that could be considered “electoral propaganda” is disallowed.

## **What other elections are coming up?**

After the results of the February 26 (first round) election are announced, it will be determined whether a second round is necessary. If a second round is required then it will take place on the third Sunday after the announcement of final results (probably March 25, 2012).

Additionally, there is a Legislative Election planned for June 17, 2012, where the Senegalese will elect new members for the General Assembly. Senatorial elections are scheduled for September, where 35 Senators will be elected by an electoral college consisting of locally elected officials – the other 65 are appointed by the president.

Local government elections are scheduled to take place in 2014.