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International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Election FAQs: Senegal

Local Elections

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Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Election Snapshot	1
When is Election Day?	1
Why are these Elections Important	1
What is the electoral system?	2
What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?	3
Who is eligible to run as a candidate?	3
Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?	3
What is the election management body? What are its powers?	3
Who can vote in these elections?	4
How many registered voters are there?	4
What provisions are in place that support the equal rights of women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups?	4
Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?	4
Where are vote counting and tabulation held?	5
How will election disputes be adjudicated?	5
Resources	6
About IFES in Senegal.....	6
Disclosure	6

Election Snapshot

- Election Day: Jan. 23, 2022
- Registered voters: 6,613,962
- Polling stations: 15,066, allocated across 6,639 polling centers
- Three elections on the same day to elect members of 43 departmental councils, 553 municipal councils and five city councils

When is Election Day?

Local elections in Senegal will be held on Sunday, Jan. 23, 2022, in 15,066 polling stations throughout the national territory. Polls will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. However, administrative authorities can decide to extend the time of voting to enable voters to cast their ballots.

These local elections have been postponed multiple times since they were originally scheduled in June 2019. The official campaign period began on Jan. 8, 2022 and concludes on Jan. 21. The day before the vote is a “silent” day, during which no campaigning is allowed.

Why are these elections important?

Local elections in Senegal have long held importance both in terms of local access to resources and to gauge the national political outlook ahead of legislative and presidential elections.

Originally slated to occur in June 2019, the local elections have been delayed three times. The first delay was due to the originally scheduled date in June coinciding with annual rains and the beginning of the farming season.¹ The second delay, from December 2019 to a date no later than March 2021, was to allow for a National Dialogue among political factions that President Macky Sall launched in May 2019 to diffuse tension in the country.² The third and final delay, to January 2022, allowed for the continuation of the National Dialogue.³

The local elections will see several high-profile municipal seats contested, including those for the mayoralties of Dakar, which is home to one-quarter of the country’s population, and other major cities. Candidates and political coalitions that perform well in the local elections are seen as having an advantage in future polls,⁴ be they the legislative elections scheduled for later in 2022 or the next presidential election in 2024. As such, the Senegalese public and political entities alike will keenly observe the conduct and results of the local elections.

The elections will also be the first local polls held since the implementation of a new legal framework. Among the reforms is the introduction of the direct election of mayors and heads of

¹ “Senegal: Local elections postponed,” Economist Intelligence Unit (August 9, 2019), available at <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1728316756&Country=Senegal&topic=Politics&subtopic=5>

² “Sénégal : les élections locales se tiendront en mars 2021 ‘au plus tard,’” Jeune Afrique (November 6, 2019), available at <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/852407/politique/senegal-apres-deux-reports-les-elections-locales-se-teindront-dici-mars-2021/>

³ “Senegal again postpones local elections,” The Guardian (March 25, 2021), available at <https://guardian.ng/news/world/senegal-again-postpones-local-elections/>

⁴ “Local elections pose test for Wade’s party,” France24 (March 22, 2009), available at <https://www.france24.com/en/20090322-local-elections-pose-test-wade%E2%80%99-party->

department councils as heads of the party lists. These are also the first local elections to incorporate a citizen-sponsorship system that requires independent candidates to obtain nomination signatures from between 1 percent and 2 percent of eligible local voters, depending on the type of election. While the sponsorship system was originally to be required for all candidates, political dialogue led to agreement that the provision would be required only for independent candidates, but not for political parties. These elections will determine how the electoral reforms impact the operations of local polls.⁵

Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?

Registered voters throughout the national territory are called to vote for different levels of local administration. Citizens will elect 2,560 members of 43 departmental councils, 553 municipal councils and five city councils. In the cities of Dakar, Pikine and Guédiawaye, departmental elections will not be held, as the city council will also act as the department council. In Thiès and Rufisque, voters will vote during the same time period for all three bodies, using different ballots and ballot boxes.

All elected officials in these elections will serve terms of five years.

What is the electoral system?

Senegal is made up of 14 regions, which are each subdivided into departments; departments are further divided into municipal communes. The Election Code establishes that both departmental and commune-level municipal councils are elected under two parallel electoral systems: 45 percent under a majoritarian system and 55 percent under a proportional, closed-list system.

The number of members to be elected to each council depends on the population, as defined by decree. These numbers are based on statistical population data provided by the National Statistics and Demography Agency (*Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie*).

For departmental and municipal councils' elections, all members are elected through direct suffrage.

Notably, the list that receives the highest number of votes takes all seats attributed through the majoritarian system (45 percent), and the head of this list will become the mayor or head of the department.

For the seats attributed via the proportional system, the distribution of seats will be determined by an electoral quotient. The quotient is calculated by dividing the number of valid votes by the number of departmental or municipal council members to be elected via the proportional system.

⁵ <https://afrique.le360.ma/senegal/politique/2020/08/26/31632-senegal-elections-en-2021-lopposition-obtient-la-suppression-du-parrainage-des-candidatures>

For the city council, the system is different because elected seats are attributed only via the proportional system (55 percent of all seats). The other 45 percent of city council members will be designated afterwards by the elected members after they are seated.

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

The primary documents constituting the legal framework that governs Senegal's elections are the Constitution, the Electoral Code (last amended in 2021), the General Code of Local Authorities (*Code Général des Collectivités Locales*)⁶ and several other decrees that determine, for example, the date of the elections or the number of seats in each council.

Who is eligible to run as a candidate?

A citizen must be a registered voter to run as a candidate. All voters living in a department or a municipality can run in these elections through a closed-list system. All legally recognized political parties and political groupings can submit a list application. Independent candidates can also run if grouped in a list. The condition to submit a list of independent candidates is linked to a citizen-sponsorship system, as defined in Article 243 of the Electoral Code. Candidates cannot run in more than one department at the same time, or under both the majoritarian and the proportional systems.

Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

The Gender Parity Law (2010) established the equal representation of men and women in elected positions. For departmental elections, Article 232 of Electoral Code states that each list of candidates should respect parity between women and men. Moreover, the vertical rank-order rule (zebra system) for the distribution of female and male candidates is applied: female and male candidates appear in alternating order throughout the list. The same provision is stated in Article R86 as it relates to special provisions for departmental and municipal council elections.

While the Gender Parity Law does not reserve seats for women, the law increases women's chances of being elected.

What is the election management body? What are its powers?

Senegal has a dual architecture for election management and oversight. The election management body is the Ministry of Interior, which organizes national and local elections and referenda through the Directorate-General for Elections (*Direction Générale des Élections — DGE*). The DGE includes two directorates, the Directorate for Electoral Operations (*Direction des Opérations Electorales*) and the Directorate for Training and Communications (*Direction de la Formation et de la Communication*), along with several service units, such as those for information technology and for finance and human resources services.

Moreover, the Electoral Code defines the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (*Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome — CENA*) as a permanent and autonomous body

⁶ Loi n° 2013-10 du 28 décembre 2013 portant Code général des Collectivités locales.

responsible for monitoring Senegal's elections. The CENA is composed of 12 neutral and independent members appointed by presidential decree after consultation with various institutions. They hold six-year terms, and one-third of the membership is renewed every three years. The CENA has additional representatives at all levels, and they are present in every polling station on voting days.

Who can vote in these elections?

Registered voters throughout the national territory are called to vote in these elections, with the exception of citizens having the status of "military and paramilitary," as stated in Article 27.2 of the Electoral Code. Out-of-country voting is not allowed for local elections.

Each Senegalese citizen who wishes to vote in the local elections must have a voter identification card. In the new administrative subdivisions of Keur Massar and Rufisque, voters will need newly issued voter identification cards for the upcoming elections.

How many registered voters are there?

There were 6,613,962 eligible voters in Senegal for the elections as of Nov. 15, 2021.

What provisions are in place that support the rights of persons with disabilities?

The Electoral Code addresses accessibility for voters with disabilities, and local government authorities take measures to ensure compliance with this part of the code. Article 80 of the code allows any voter with disabilities to request the assistance of a voter of her or his choice or a polling staff member to cast a ballot. Moreover, if disabled voters are unable to access their regular polling stations, they can vote at the most accessible polling station available in their voting location (Article 69 of the Election Code). This new article of the electoral code is a significant reform to make the elections more accessible to people with disabilities.

Who can observe during Election Day? How can they get accreditation?

According to Section 4 (Article L.25) of the Electoral Code, any organization or body, within or outside the country, interested in the electoral process may apply to observe an election. The code states that a special commission charged with managing accreditation is created for each election. The commission has the power to issue accreditations for national observers up to three months before the elections. This provision allows long-term observation.

The Collective of Civil Society Organizations for Elections (*Collectif des Organisations de la Société Civile pour les Élections* — COSCE), an association of civil society organizations in Senegal, will field 46 long-term observers, 236 short-term observers and 15 members of an analytical team for the local elections.

Where are vote counting and tabulation held?

Article 83 of the Electoral Code states that poll workers will count votes in polling stations. Generally, the votes are counted in the presence of both national and international election observers. Following the counting of votes, results are announced in each polling station, and each candidate's representative receives a certified copy of the results in the presence of national and international election observers. Once all the results are gathered from each polling station, the results are sent to the Departmental Committee for the Counting of Votes (*Commissions Départementales des Recensement des Votes* — CDRV) in charge, which counts all votes received by each list in each polling station in the department. The CDRV also defines the electoral quotient for each district. The law states that the CDRV should proclaim results at the latest on the Friday after the elections (in this case, by Jan. 28, 2022).

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

The Courts of Appeals (*Cours d'appel*) are the judicial bodies responsible for adjudicating election disputes for local elections. Any voter, candidate or list of candidates, or any administrative authorities may challenge electoral results by issuing a claim to the Court of Appeals that has jurisdiction in the area. The request should be presented to the court within eight days after the election for a departmental election, or within five days after the election for a municipal election.

The second judicial instance responsible for the adjudication of electoral disputes is the Supreme Court.

Resources

- [Electoral Code](#)
- [Website of the *Direction Générale des Élections*](#)
- [Electoral Process Assessment Report \(2021\)](#)
- [Senegal Election Guide](#)

About IFES in Senegal

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Elections Support Program in Senegal aims to help civil society organizations facilitate dialogue, monitor elections and conduct civic and voter education, and to support election management bodies to reinforce specific aspects of election administration to promote a fair and credible democratic process.

As part of the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), IFES is working to build the capacity, inclusiveness and independence of Senegal's electoral institutions, namely the General Directorate for Elections (*Direction Générale des Élections*), under the Ministry of Interior, and the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (*Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome*).

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Ministry of Interior and the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (*Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome*) as of Jan. 11, 2022, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.

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