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Senegal

Senegal has remained relatively stable but poor since it gained independence from France in 1960. It is an electoral democracy and one of the few countries in West Africa never to have experienced a military coup d'état. A low-level conflict in the southern region of Casamance has impeded development, but violence in that area has decreased in recent years. Senegal's leaders are influential in Francophone African diplomatic circles, and its military is active in global peacekeeping. The population is mostly Muslim. While ethnic and sectarian divisions exist, they play less of a role in politics than in many other West African countries.

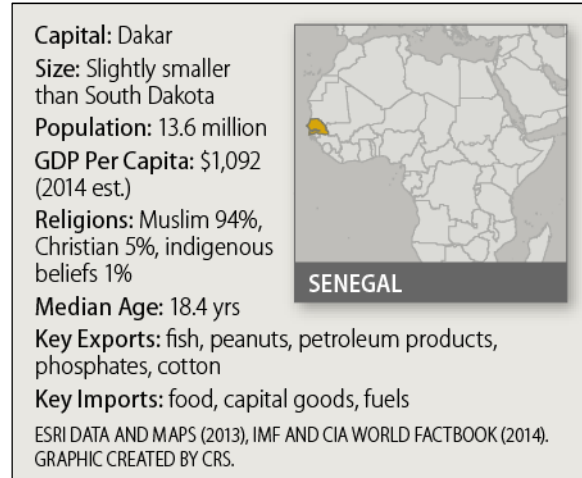
Donor assistance, reforms, and new infrastructure have facilitated economic growth in recent years, but poverty remains widespread. Wealth creation has also been uneven and concentrated in the capital, Dakar. Food insecurity is a persistent problem, and nutrition shortfalls contribute to high child and maternal mortality rates.

President Macky Sall was elected in 2012, defeating incumbent Abdoulaye Wade, who had been president since 2000. In the lead-up to the vote, Wade's controversial attempt to run for what would have been a third term provoked protests and rioting. Sall's electoral victory and Wade's peaceful concession quelled concerns regarding Senegal's political stability. Political tensions have since risen again in connection with the prosecution of Wade's son, Karim, for alleged large-scale corruption during Wade's presidency (see below).

Successive U.S. Administrations have portrayed Senegal as a democratic leader in Africa, a focus country for U.S. global development initiatives, and a partner in efforts to counter transnational security threats in the sub-region. President Sall was among four African heads of state who met with President Obama at the White House in March 2013. President Obama visited Senegal in June 2013. In Dakar, he stated that "we were inspired by the citizens of Senegal" during the 2012 elections that brought Sall to office. He also commended Sall for "the ambitious reforms that you're pursuing to strengthen democratic governance."

Congress has shaped U.S. policy toward Senegal through its appropriation of foreign assistance and its oversight activities. The U.S. embassy in Dakar is the third largest in Africa, and the United States is among Senegal's top donors. U.S. bilateral aid totaled \$118 million in FY2014, and Senegal is the beneficiary of a five-year, \$540 million U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact that came into force in 2010 (see "U.S. Assistance" below). In 2014, Senegal served as a logistical hub for the U.S. response to the West Africa Ebola outbreak.

Figure 1. Senegal at a Glance



Politics

Senegal is a multiparty democracy with a political system that endows the presidency with broad authorities. It boasts a relatively free media environment and an active and independent civil society. Senegalese youth activists have advised protest movements in other African countries, including Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

President Sall has prioritized administrative reforms, anti-corruption efforts, and peace talks in Casamance. He has promised (as Wade initially did) to serve no more than two terms in office, per constitutional term limits. He has also pledged to reduce the presidential term from seven to five years, possibly via a referendum. (Wade re-extended the term to seven years during his second term after first shortening it to five.) Despite his initial popularity, Sall has struggled to satisfy public expectations of rapid economic growth and job creation. Some of his economic austerity measures may have contributed to near-term hardships.

Legislative elections in 2012 delivered a large majority to Sall's coalition, "United in Hope." However, its internal cohesion has come under growing strain. Many key coalition figures are viewed as potential rivals, having backed Sall in 2012 solely in order to defeat Wade. Sall's party, the Alliance for the Republic, saw large losses in 2014 local elections, including in key constituencies such as Dakar, which some observers interpreted as a sign that Sall's political clout may be declining.

A key element of Sall's anti-corruption agenda is the trial of Karim Wade, who held a number of ministerial portfolios prior to 2012. In March 2015, he was convicted of illicit enrichment and sentenced to six years in prison and a hefty

fine. He is expected to appeal. Former President Wade has portrayed the trial as politically motivated and questioned its legality. He has also organized protests in Dakar. Some opposition supporters were arrested in connection with recent protests, prompting Wade to accuse the government of repressing the opposition's civil liberties. Wade's actions may be aimed at forcing the government to abandon the Karim prosecution and at undermining Sall's legitimacy ahead of the next elections (presently expected in 2019).

The Economy

Although Dakar is a large and economically vibrant city, Senegal is a predominantly agrarian country with few natural resources and limited arable land. Key sources of foreign exchange include exports of fish, peanuts, and phosphates; tourism; and remittances from Senegalese workers abroad. Socioeconomic discontent has contributed to a high rate of emigration and has sparked occasional demonstrations and rioting in urban areas.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that Senegal's economy grew by 4.5% in 2014 and projects growth will reach 4.6% in 2015. Unemployment and poverty remain widespread, however. Obstacles to private sector development include bureaucratic red tape, rigid labor laws, chronic electricity shortages, insufficient judicial independence and efficiency, and opaque land titling procedures. The IMF has called for measures to improve the business environment and "a deep reform of the state," adding that government expenditures continue to jeopardize "fiscal sustainability." Observers have praised the Sall government's ambitious reforms plan, "Emerging Senegal," while noting potentially challenging conditions for implementation. In March 2015, the government halted a plan for Dakar to issue a U.S.-backed municipal bond, citing concerns over the city's indebtedness; political tensions between the city government and the Sall administration may have been another factor.

Security Issues

Terrorism. Senegal has yet to suffer a terrorist attack, but the country is vulnerable to extremist infiltration and recruitment. Senegal hosts potential soft targets: its beaches and cultural sites draw Western tourists, and Dakar is a regional hub for diplomats, U.N. offices, and international humanitarian groups. Commercial airlines also fly directly between Dakar and the United States. Violent Islamist extremist networks, including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its splinter factions, have carried out attacks across North and West Africa, and they occupied parts of neighboring Mali in 2012. French-led military operations have killed or captured some AQIM commanders in Mali and reportedly disrupted their logistical networks. However, these groups have not been eradicated. AQIM and its offshoots have threatened to attack countries, such as Senegal, that have troops in the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Mali; several Senegalese soldiers have been killed in Mali in extremist attacks.

Organized Crime. Senegal is a transit point for global narcotics trafficking, notably for cocaine en route to Europe from South America. The drug trade may leverage networks that are used to smuggle duty-free cigarettes, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, small arms, and migrants. Although Senegal's law enforcement agencies are considered more effective than those of many other West African countries, their resources and capacity are often insufficient to address transnational criminal activity.

Internal Conflict. A low-level separatist conflict has waxed and waned in the southern region of Casamance for over 30 years. The area is ethnically and religiously distinct and geographically cut off from much of Senegal by the Gambia, a separate country. Despite a 2004 peace accord, violence spiked in 2009 as the rebel movement splintered. Combatants have also reportedly engaged in banditry and trafficking, including of arms, narcotics, and timber. Since 2012, the Community of Sant'Egidio, a Rome-based lay organization of Catholics, has mediated new talks, with some U.S. financial and diplomatic support. These produced a cease-fire and humanitarian agreements in 2014. While the violence remains locally contained, it has caused population displacements and hurt the economy in Casamance, a former tourism destination.

U.S. Assistance

Senegal is a focus country for several U.S. global aid initiatives, including Feed the Future and the President's Malaria Initiative. Bilateral appropriations for U.S. economic and security assistance totaled \$118 million in FY2014, with programs aimed at improving health, basic education, agricultural development, economic growth, environmental conditions, democratic governance, and military professionalism. (Estimated FY2015 allocations are not yet available.) The Administration is requesting that Congress appropriate \$102 million for bilateral aid to Senegal in FY2016. Additional funding is provided through the MCC—which is supporting several large transportation, irrigation, and water management infrastructure projects—and through U.S. regional and global programs. The United States has also provided funding for a Senegal-based special court that is expected to try former Chadian dictator Hissène Habré for crimes against humanity.

U.S. security assistance includes training, equipment, and logistical support for Senegalese peacekeepers, provided largely through the State Department's Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program. Senegal is likely to receive more advanced military equipment as a focus country for the U.S. African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership, which the White House launched in August 2014. Senegal also participates in U.S. regional counterterrorism programs, including the State Department-led, multi-year Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership, which works with 11 North and West African states. The Defense Department has conducted joint and multinational exercises in Senegal and has provided additional counternarcotics and maritime security assistance.

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