Demanding More: Demonstrations Ahead of Senegal’s 2019 Elections

In this infographic, ACLED Research Analyst Hilary Matfess examines patterns of protest and riot activity in the run-up to Senegal's elections.
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Public demonstrations are a prominent characteristic of Senegal’s political landscape, comprising more than 85% of all ACLED recorded events in the country throughout 2018 and 2019 thus far. Though most of these demonstrations are not met with force by the government, this pattern appears to shift around presidential elections. A surge in riot activity and government dispersion of demonstrations in mid-January 2019 suggests a return to government quelling of public demonstrations that accompanied the run up to the 2012 elections. Ahead of the 2019 presidential elections on February 24th demonstrations against specific government policies have spread throughout the country.

Banning of Opposition Candidates Met with Demonstrations

The mid-January 2019 uptick in demonstrations was in response to the banning of two of the most prominent opposition candidates, Khalifa Sall and Karim Wade (the son of former President Wade), from running for President in the election. The week of the announcement saw a significant increase in both riot activity and government dispersion of public demonstrations. This pattern suggested a potential return to the government's strategy ahead of the 2012 elections, when nearly 55% of demonstrations were dispersed (see map below).

Unrest related to the ban has continued and is linked to protests about electoral freedom more generally; nine of the 15 demonstrations in 2019 thus far have referenced the ban or other electoral irregularities. Though the ban is frequently referenced, public demonstrations have also vented grievances about government performance. 20% of the demonstrations in 2019 have been critiques of government policies and service provision.

Pattern of Demonstrations Has Shifted Since the Last Presidential Election

Not only has the substance of public demonstrations changed since 2012, when there were protests and riots related to President Abdoulaye Wade’s controversial bid for a third term, but the geographic scope of the demonstrations has changed as well. Though Dakar remains a hotspot for demonstrations, in 2019 thus far, demonstrations have taken place in eight locations across the country, as compared to just three over the same period ahead of 2012 elections.

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