

Senegal blocks TikTok in widening clampdown on dissent

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Senegalese authorities on Wednesday blocked access to social media app TikTok, widening a clampdown on dissent days after they dissolved the main opposition party and detained its leader.



Source: www.unsplash.com

A power struggle between Pastef party leader Ousmane Sonko and President Macky Sall has led to violent demonstrations at times, most recently on Monday, and damaged Senegal's reputation as the most stable democracy in West Africa.

There has been a wave of military coups in the region during the last three years, including Niger a week ago.

Senegal dissolved Pastef and restricted access to internet services on Monday, citing threats to the stability of the country. Its communications minister used a similar justification to block TikTok.

"The TikTok application is the social network favoured by people with bad intentions to spread hateful and subversive messages," Moussa Bocar Thiam said in a statement on Wednesday.

Dakar resident Abdou Dione said the state should not suspend TikTok based solely on negative aspects.

"It's an application where you can also learn a lot, and not just see vulgar things," Dione said.



Young street vendors are using applications like WhatsApp as part of their online sales, Papis Gaye said.

"So taking the decision to cut off the internet means prohibiting us from selling," Gaye said.

"I'd have to try the VPN, just to be able to connect, but it's a pain. In the end, you're tired and discouraged."

Another Dakar resident, Makhtar Ndiaga Sarr, said he failed to buy shoes on Tuesday because the internet was not working and his brother could not send him the money for the purchase.

Accusations of inciting violence

Sonko was charged on Saturday with plotting an insurrection and other offences, and taken into custody.

Opposition supporters, who have held protests throughout the year, accuse Sall of levelling charges in order to disqualify Sonko from a presidential election due next year.

The government denies this and blames Sonko and Pastef for stoking violence.

On Monday night two people were killed in opposition protests in the southern city of Ziguinchor, where Sonko is mayor, and two people burned to death on Tuesday when attackers hurled petrol bombs into a passenger bus.

Riots broke out across Senegal in June, killing at least 16 people, after Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for immoral behaviour towards people younger than 21. He has yet to start serving that term.

Sonko, who denies wrongdoing, had urged his followers to take to the streets at the time.

A month ago Sall ended widespread speculation by saying he would not seek a third term as president next year, which critics had said would be illegal. His party has yet to put forward its preferred candidate for the election.