

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND ACTIVISTS AT RISK

A Biannual Report on the State of Human Rights Defenders and
Activists in the ECOWAS and the AES

January – June, 2025



This report is a desk study by the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network as part of its mechanism to constantly monitor and observe the state of human rights in the West African sub-region.

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OVERVIEW

Defenders@Risk is a biannual overview of human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk across the West African subregion, compiled by the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) to monitor the civic space specifically in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

It offers insights into major happenings and trends in the civic space, and captures incidents involving human rights defenders (HRDs), activists and other civic actors as well as developments bordering on the freedoms of speech and expression, association and assembly within the countries under review. It equally interrogates political inclusion, political participation and government tolerance of criticism and dissent as fundamental attributes of democracy across the West African subregion.

Methodology

The data is drawn from both the **WADEMOS Civic Space Monitor and Observatory** that monitors state-sponsored repression of political rights and freedoms in West Africa, and reports received from the members of the WADEMOS network across the region. Facts and incidents recorded in each country have been checked and validated by members of the WADEMOS Network in their respective countries.

This report follows a related study [published](#) in 2024 by WADEMOS in collaboration with our partners that assessed the situation of HRDs in West Africa.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This edition documents the trajectory of political rights and civil freedoms in the civic space across the ECOWAS and the AES over the first half of 2025. Its coverage of events in certain countries may extend well into the third quarter of the year. This crucial year in the history of the ECOWAS and the AES, particularly highlighted the relevance of the civic space to democracy, in the wake of the most monumental fallout in the West African subregion in over two decades of recorded democratic backsliding.

With the secession of the AES from ECOWAS, the socio-political and economic integration of the West African subregion faces its most formidable existential crisis and to safeguard the peace and stability of the subregion, governments must acknowledge the need for a deeper introspection and reflection towards the renewal of democratic norms and values. Over the past half year, a diverse array of HRDs have been innocent targets of various forms of attacks by their governments, merely for daring to question government action or prompt the government about its mounting pile of excesses, which has gained more momentum particularly in the AES countries. For instance, WADEMOS and its partners have issued numerous alerts and statements to condemn attacks on activists in these countries and across the region.

In line with the observations in this report, the Freedom in the World¹ index by Freedom House, as well as the Press Freedom Index² by Reporters Without Borders, both show a general decline in civil and political freedoms across the ECOWAS and AES subregions over the past five years. The minimal decline in scores over the past year does not necessarily signal hope in every case, as for a good number of these countries, any significant decline from the prevailing situation would imply descent into chaos and unrest.

In the past half-decade, the most drastic declines have been recorded in the four countries in the subregion currently run by military regimes. Burkina Faso has, for instance, seen its score on the Freedom in the World index [decline](#) from 54/100 in 2021 to 25/100 in

¹ The [Freedom in World Index](#) by Freedom House is an annual global survey that seeks to measure the state of political rights and civil liberties in countries and territories around the world. Political rights in this context cover the degree to which people can participate freely in the political process, vote in free and fair elections, vie for political office and enjoy pluralism and representation in government. Civil liberties in this context include freedoms of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law and personal autonomy, and protection of individual rights and freedoms from state or non-state actors.

² The [World Press Freedom Index](#) is an annual ranking that measures the level of press freedom in countries and territories worldwide based on the ability of journalists and media organizations to operate freely and independently in a given country without political, economic, legal or social pressures and without threats to their safety.

2025. Similar trends have been observed in [Guinea](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#) in the wake of military coups, as the extant military regimes infiltrate and capture all state institutions. Additionally, the latest evaluation from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#)³ categorizes the civic space in 7 out of the 15 countries in the ECOWAS and the AES as repressed, while the civic space in an additional six countries each has been labelled ‘obstructed.’ Only one country, Cabo Verde, has a civic space that is marked as ‘open’ on the CIVICUS monitor. Dissenters and government critics have become exclusive targets of coordinated government resistance to accountability and scrutiny.

ECOWAS/AES Member Country Scores for Freedom of the World (FIW) Index and World Press Freedom (RSF) Index

Table 1: Country Scores for ECOWAS/AES member countries on Freedom of the World Index (FIW) and World Press Freedom Index (RSF)

Year	2021		2022		2023		2024		2025	
Country	FIW	RSF	FIW	RSF	FIW	RSF	FIW	RSF	FIW	RSF
Benin	65	62	59	48	59	52	61	57	60	55
Burkina Faso	54	77	53	73	30	68	27	58	25	52
Cabo Verde	92	80	92	75	92	76	92	73	92	75
Côte d’Ivoire	44	71	49	74	49	69	49	67	49	64
The Gambia	46	69	47	69	48	71	50	66	50	65
Ghana	80	79	82	67	80	66	80	68	80	67
Guinea	38	65	34	60	30	60	30	60	30	53
Guinea-Bissau	44	67	43	59	43	62	43	56	41	51
Liberia	60	67	60	63	60	64	64	65	64	67
Mali	33	67	32	54	29	52	26	51	24	48
Niger	48	72	51	68	51	67	33	60	30	57
Nigeria	44	60	45	47	43	50	44	51	44	47
Senegal	71	75	68	63	68	56	67	55	69	59
Sierra Leone	65	70	65	71	63	63	60	64	59	66
Togo	43	70	42	57	42	63	42	51	41	48

NB: Scores for World Press Freedom Index (RSF) given here have been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

³ The [Civics Monitor](#) tracks and evaluates the state of civic freedoms worldwide, especially, the freedom of association, the freedom of assembly and the freedom of expression.

While the grievances and the rhetoric of HRDs across the ECOWAS and the AES subregions generally center on dissatisfaction with government's delivery of democratic goods and services and the growing restriction of the civic space, HRD activism in countries that are battling the canker of terrorism – including Togo, Benin, Nigeria, [Ivory Coast](#) and the three member states of the AES, namely Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – has been equally vocal about citizen dissatisfaction with government counterterrorism efforts. By voicing these concerns, HRDs across the West African subregion, risk physical assault, illegal arrests or abductions, forced disappearances, illegal detentions and even incarceration. Both in the ECOWAS and the AES, the judicialization of the authoritarian measures used to suppress and intimidate HRDs has not made the charges levelled against them or the sentences they are slapped with any less arbitrary. Even the release of forcibly disappeared and illegally detained HRDs has been equally arbitrary.

The shrinking of the civic space across the subregion should be accorded urgent attention, especially because countries hardly ever stagnate, but rather, over time, either become more democratic or more authoritarian. Unfortunately, current trends hardly demonstrate an inclination to growing tolerance of criticism and dissent and easing restrictions on the civic space. Not unlike the military regimes where unilateral and arbitrary decrees are invoked to enforce the government's will, the recent adoption of repressive legislations such as the new Counterterrorism Act of 2024 in Sierra Leone provides wide-ranging executive powers that can be used to target HRDs and impose more restrictions on the civic space.

Recent examples of the threat posed by such repressive legislation to the civic space include the controversial [terrorism database](#) introduced by the Nigerien junta. A list defined by a very vague criteria, it underlined a [decree](#) by the junta last year which [provisionally revoked](#) Nigerien nationality from nine former senior officers under President Bazoum's regime. Prominent rights activist and government critic, [Moussa Tiangari](#), who criticized the government over the database and the suspension of the nationality of the nine persons, was arrested, detained and subsequently charged with advocating terrorism and criminal association in connection with terrorism.

A more recent example includes the cases of two Beninese journalists who were unceremoniously ripped from exile and bundled back to Benin, one, with the Ivorian state's knowledge, the other, illegally. Known for his investigations into the Beninese authorities, Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè, a [political refugee](#) in Togo since 2021, was [arrested](#) in his hotel room in Abidjan, where he had been invited by the Ivorian authorities on a professional mission. He was deported on a private plane to Cotonou, where he was immediately incarcerated and [arraigned](#) before court to stand trial for commentary critical of the government. Steve Amoussou, a Beninese national who had gone into exile in Togo since 2019, was [abducted](#) in front of his Lomé residence by four individuals and sent back to Benin. [Suspected](#) of owning and running "Frère Hounvi," a social media account that posted viral audio commentaries critical of the Talon administration to its [75,000 subscribers](#), he has been [sentenced](#) to two years in prison and slapped with a 2-million-franc fine for cyberbullying, incitement to rebellion, and spreading false news and insults against a political group. While a greater tolerance for dissent and criticism is needed on the part of the government, there is an equal need for HRDs to be circumspect and accurate with their information. Every precaution must be taken to safeguard the credibility of HRDs and diminish the avenue for reprisals by governments and individuals they criticize or blow the whistle on.

To ensure the safety of HRDs, it is recommended that emergency protection protocols for at-risk HRDs, including temporary relocation programs, should be enhanced across both ECOWAS and the AES. Secure funding as well as technical support should be extended to independent media operating within these jurisdictions to promote their activism. Across the entire West African subregion, there should be a coordinated and sustained push for the restoration of an independent judiciary. International and regional human rights organizations such as the ECOWAS and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) must engage extensively and, to the extent conditions allow, amicably with the military regimes to secure the release of all HRDs in detention or under conscription.

In a country like Sierra Leone, a detailed scrutiny and revision of the 2024 Counterterrorism Act is indispensable. Across the remaining ECOWAS subregion, there

should be an aggressive push for the rule of law and a push against authoritarianism and legislation that can be weaponized to restrict the civic space. More importantly, the ECOWAS and the AU must be seen to be reimposing diplomatic interventions for conduct that compromises democracy. Pro-democracy and rights-based organizations have to deepen solidarity across borders to enhance their role as the guardrails and voice for actors in spaces where they continue to experience marginalization and extreme fragility.

1.1 Summary of findings

A combination of weaponized legislation, surveillance, arbitrary detention, targeted violence against HRDs, and impunity for perpetrators across the ECOWAS and the AES is bolstering widespread self-censorship and weakening civil society resilience.

➤ Use of security and counterterrorism as pretexts to restrict the civic space

The first half of 2025, like prior periods, has seen governments frequently invoking terrorism, security threats, or supposed infringements of national sovereignty to justify government excesses and restrictions on political participation and freedoms of speech, association, and assembly. Evidence of this is found in the deadly counterterrorism operations, mass killings and reprisals conducted in Mali and Burkina Faso and the promulgation of the 2024 Counterterrorism Act in Sierra Leone.

➤ Targeting of journalists and media outlets

Critical media continues to be repressed, suspended, banned, and harassed for media content that public officials or governments find unfavorable. Journalists have had their press cards revoked and continue to face arrests, forced disappearances, torture, or coerced conscription. Media outlets and personalities have been targeted in Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Mali.

➤ Harassment and persecution of human rights defenders

In a bid by authorities to clamp down on criticism and dissent, human rights activists and civil society leaders continue to be abducted, detained without due process, or

prosecuted on politically motivated charges, often in defiance of court orders. Though particularly pronounced in the AES member states, this observation has been equally noted in Benin, Togo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria.

➤ **Suppression of opposition and political participation**

Across the AES and within countries like Togo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and the Ivory Coast, there is increasing evidence of attempts to suppress political opposition. In Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea, political parties have been dissolved or suspended; opposition leaders continue to be harassed, disappeared, or barred from organizing. There has been increasing evidence of this amid the arbitrary oppressive measures by the four military regimes across the ECOWAS and the AES to extend the rule of the transitional governments indefinitely.

➤ **Censorship and information control**

Authorities continue to block protests, suspend social media accounts, and penalize publications critical of the government or its security operations. This has been seen in the case of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea, Benin, Togo and the Gambia.

➤ **Judicial manipulation and intimidation**

While in some cases, courts are sidelined, legal rulings ignored, and judges, lawyers, or opposition-linked defendants face reprisals, in other cases, the courts are co-opted to harass and oppress activists and human rights defenders, undermining judicial independence. Evidence of this has been noted in Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, Benin and with Mali in the case of Etienne Sissoko.

➤ **Criminalization of dissent through vague laws**

Broad cybercrime, defamation, counterterrorism, and “public order” provisions are used to criminalize criticism, satire, or peaceful activism. The 2024 Counterterrorism Act in Sierra Leone and the prosecution of HRDs in Benin and Togo are examples of this.

➤ **Forced exile and cross-border reprisals**

Dissidents in exile are surveilled, abducted, or extradited back to their home countries for prosecution. There has been evidence of this in Burkina Faso and especially Benin, where two journalists living in exile in Togo, have both been dragged back to Benin and charged for commentary critical of the government.

➤ **Protest bans and violent dispersals**

Authorities impose blanket bans on demonstrations, violently break up protests, and use excessive force, leading to injuries, deaths, and mass arrests. This has been prevalent in countries under military regimes: Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as Guinea-Bissau and Benin.

➤ **Public shaming and coercion**

Detainees are coerced into public apologies or forced confessions, often under duress, to discredit dissent and deter others. Evidence of this has been noted in apologies rendered by Sierra Leone's Hawa Hunt and Togo's rapper Aamron. It is alleged that Nigeria's Dr. Ihekwe, who was arrested for criticizing the state governor, was released only after he was compelled [under duress](#) to sign a letter of apology addressed to the state governor, claiming that his allegations against him were lies and pledging to be of good behavior and not falsely attack the Imo Government and the Governor again.

➤ **Impunity for perpetrators**

Security forces and pro-government actors accused of abuses rarely face accountability, reinforcing cycles of repression. In Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau, there has been mounting evidence of this.

2.0 COUNTRY BRIEFS

2.1 Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso the terrorist insurgency remains the major driver of the tensions between government and citizens, outside concerns over the banning of political parties and the stalled transition back to democracy. The allegations of civic space restriction and political repression levelled against the military juntas by civic actors, typically stem from [hostile government response](#) to the public criticisms of government excesses, including the inadequate counterterrorism efforts, extrajudicial killing of perceived civilian sympathizers of terrorists and the notorious conscriptions of opposition figures and government critics.

Amid reports of government-sanctioned massacres of innocent civilians, including the [March 2025 massacre](#) in which the Burkinabè army and pro-government militias killed more than 130 civilians, several journalists have been forcibly disappeared.



Figure 1 Capt. Burkina Faso junta leader, Ibrahim Traoré forcefully took over power in

This follows their condemnation of the extrajudicial killing of innocent civilians, their denunciation of the forced disappearance or conscription of fellow journalists and their calls for the unconditional release of detained, forcibly disappeared or conscripted human rights defenders. On July 17, 2025, the junta [disbanded](#) the country's electoral commission, claiming it was too expensive, and tagging it as a move to reinforce the country's "sovereign control on the electoral process" and "limit foreign influences." It was reported that the interior ministry will [handle all future elections](#).

On August 18, 2025, the transitional government [expelled](#) the top United Nations representative in the country, Carol Flore-Smrecznik, declaring her "[persona non](#)

[grata](#)” following a new UN report on violations against children in the country. The [report](#), which documents the effects of conflict on children in Burkina Faso, highlights trends and patterns of what it says are the six grave violations against Burkinabè children, namely, the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals, the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access. This marks the [second time](#) since the September 2022 coup that the top United Nations representative in the country has been expelled.

On September 1, 2025, as part of a broader reform of the "[Code of Persons and Families](#)," the Transitional Legislative Assembly [passed a law](#) that criminalizes same-sex conduct in the country. Under this new law, which is the first law ever in the country criminalizing same-sex relationships, and was [unanimously adopted](#) by the legislative assembly's 71 members, individuals convicted of same-sex relations face prison sentences of between two and five years, as well as fines.

Idrissa Barry: On Tuesday, March 18, the well-known political activist and journalist Idrissa Barry was [arrested](#) by men claiming to be gendarmes in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, sparking fears he had been forcibly disappeared. His arrest came four days after the opposition political group Servir et Non se Servir (SENS), for which Barry serves as national secretary, issued a [statement](#) denouncing the “deadly attacks” by government forces and allied militias, known as *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland, or VDPs), against civilians around Solenzo, in western Burkina Faso, on March 11.

Guezouma Sanogo, Boukari Ouoba and Luc Pagbelguem: On March 24, 2025, Guezouma Sanogo, head of the Journalists' Association of Burkina Faso (AJB), and also a journalist with Radio Télévision du Burkina (RTB) was [arrested](#) alongside Boukari Ouoba, investigative journalist and vice-president of AJB. They were arrested by individuals claiming to be from the National Intelligence Service and taken to an unknown destination. [Luc Pagbelguem](#), another journalist working for the private channel BF1, was taken away in the afternoon of March 24 by “two agents of the National Security Council” (CNS), according to his media outlet.

The arrest of the three [followed](#) Sanogo's condemnation of the deteriorating quality of press freedom in Burkina Faso at the March 21 [Extraordinary Congress](#) of the AJB, which Pagbelguem had reported on. The condemnation came amid calls for the release of the four journalists and columnists who had been [requisitioned](#) and reported [missing](#) since the beginning of 2024. The military authorities [dissolved](#) the Journalists' Association of Burkina Faso a day following their arrest, claiming the organization had failed to comply



Figure 2 Images of two journalists detained by the junta. Picture credit: RSF

with Law No. 064-2015/CNT of 20 October 2015 regulating associations and consequently, had been legally non-existent at least since 2019. Since then a [video](#) of the three in military uniform in an undisclosed location has [surfaced online](#), reinforcing fears that they had been conscripted into the army, a [similar fate](#) to what had befallen 3 of 4 other journalists in the country since June last year.

Four journalists and columnists, Serge Oulon, Adama Bayala, Kalifara Séré, and Alain Traoré, also known as 'Alain Alain', were abducted in June and July 2024. In October 2024, the authorities, who previously withheld information on their whereabouts, announced that the first three had been conscripted into the army under the general mobilization decree. Presently, the fate of the fourth abductee remains unknown. Following the [release](#) of Kalifara Séré on July 14, 2025, Guezouma Sanogo, Boukari Ouoba, [Phil Roland Zongo](#) and Luc Pagbelguem have all been released and [reunited with their families](#).

Miphal Ousmane Lankoandé and Amadou Sawadogo: On Sunday, March 30, 2025, Miphal Ousmane Lankoandé was abducted in front of his home in the Karpala district of Ouagadougou in the late hours of the morning. The incident [followed](#) his return from Cotonou, Benin, where he participated in the first edition of the School of Activism

organized by the Innovation Foundation for Democracy from March 24 to March 28. He was abducted in front of his wife by armed men claiming to be gendarmes. Despite repeated attempts by lawyers, there is still no information of his whereabouts.

Ten days before the arrest of Ousmane Lankoandé, on Thursday, March 20, 2025, Amadou Sawadogo was summoned to the regional State Security Service in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, over his criticism of the Burkinabe government on Facebook. He was interrogated and forced to reveal the homes of two other activists who are currently in hiding. The next day, Monday, March 21, 2025, after responding to a second summons on the same matter, he was reported missing. To date, the authorities have not provided any information on his location.

Hermann Yameogo: On the afternoon of July 26, 2025, [Hermann Yameogo](#), President of the National Union for Democracy and Development (UNDD) and son of Maurice Yameogo, the first president of Burkina Faso, was taken by armed men in plain clothes who raided his home. They took telephones, all the computers and several documents from his home. This followed his publication of a critical essay on the country's social and political situation that has been trending on social media. In his essay, Yameogo wrote that "an objective, lucid, and courageous analysis of the national situation can only conclude that our country finds itself, for the first time in its contemporary history, suspended over a void." At the old age of 77, Yameogo is feared to have been conscripted into the VDP. His abductors did not allow him to take his medication, though he was ill at the time of his arrest.



Figure 3 Guy Herve Kam, Co-founder, Balai Citoyen

Balai Citoyen: The detention and conscription of HRDs persists despite rulings by the administrative courts in Burkina Faso to the effect that they are illegal. Following his initial arrest on January 24, 2024, prominent lawyer, civil rights activist and co-founder of the civil society collective, Balai Citoyen, Guy Herve Kam, was [recurrently](#) re-arrested,

charged and placed in detention. This was in spite of repeated unsuccessful appeals against the orders for his release, which in each instance, yielded a ruling by the administrative court to the effect that his detention was illegal. After being re-arrested and charged the last time, he remains in detention because this time around, the military judicial authorities have refrained from scheduling his case as they systematically do for all his requests. Fellow Balai Citoyen activists Rasmane Zinaba and Bassirou Badjoe, remain [forcibly disappeared](#) and are suspected to have been conscripted by the Burkinabe army despite a ruling by the administrative court in Burkina Faso which held that their conscription is illegal.

Meanwhile the judiciary in Burkina Faso has been increasingly undermined by the military authorities. Judges [risk conscription](#) by the Burkinabé army for prosecuting individuals aligned with the junta. Recently, six judges who were conscripted [following](#) their prosecution of supporters of the junta, were detained. They have since been released but since then, the message that supporters of the junta are above the law is well understood.

2.2 Mali



Figure 4 Activities of Political parties and civil society organizations have been restricted in Mali. Photo credit: AFP

While freedoms of speech and association have come under serious attack in Mali, innocent civilians remain targeted in brutal and fatal crackdowns by security forces as part of government counterterrorism efforts. Critical and dissenting voices [continue](#) to face government repression. Opposition figures continue to be targeted by government [suppression](#) and intimidation efforts. A six-month [suspension](#) placed on media outlet Joliba TV in November, 2024 recently expired and has been lifted. [Brewing tensions](#) ahead of a [decree](#) by the junta dissolving all political parties in the country, sparked the first [prodemocracy protest](#) in the country in years. On July 8, 2025, the military junta [enacted](#) a revised Transitional Charter that sets the duration of the transitional mandate at five years, renewable without limit, until national pacification is achieved.

Extrajudicial killings: In late April, several dozen decomposing bodies, suspected to be of those arrested in Seabougou on 12 April 2025, [were found](#) scattered on the outskirts of the Kwala military camp by citizens searching for their relatives. On May 16, the chief of staff of the Malian armed forces [announced](#) a gendarmerie investigation into extrajudicial executions of at least 22 men, who were taken into military custody on May 12, 2025, in the town of Diafarabé. Residents who saw the [bodies](#) three days later said the victims were in two shallow mass graves with their throats slit.

UN experts have expressed outrage at the alleged summary executions and enforced disappearances of others. They have warned that these unlawful killings may amount to war crimes, and that the enforced disappearances may constitute crimes against humanity if they are part of widespread or systematic attacks against civilians.



Figure 5 Daouda Dicko was arrested but later released

Daouda Magassa: In the evening on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, Daouda Magassa, a key figure in the movement supporting the return of exiled cleric Imam Mahmoud Dicko, was taken by men in civilian clothes in Bamako, and held by state security. His detention was believed to be part of an effort to [thwart](#) Imam Dicko's planned return to Mali on Friday, February 14. Dicko, a vocal critic of the junta, has been living in exile in Algeria for over a year. His return has been widely anticipated, with

Magassa, leading his supporters in actively mobilizing for his homecoming. Intelligence services were reportedly seeking information about Dicko's return, including details about his sources of funds and network of collaborators.

In early March, Daouda was [released](#), amid fears that his release might signal deeper tensions ahead of the upcoming new national consultations.

Alfousseini Togo: On April 9, Alfousseini Togo, the editor of the weekly *Le Canard de la Venise*, was arrested by Mali's Judicial Unit Against Cybercrime and [detained](#) following his article published a day before, entitled "Malian justice or the evil of the century: the blunder of Minister Mamoudou Kassogué." In it, he criticized the judiciary's lack of independence and [questioned](#) a claim by the Minister of Justice. The Minister had claimed that public confidence in the judiciary had risen from 30% to 72% in 2024, according to a survey on public trust in Mali's judiciary conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Initially summoned on charges relating to the law on cybercrime, the journalist is now being prosecuted for "undermining the credibility of the justice system," "disturbing the peace," and "defamation", according to a colleague.

On May 12, 2025, he was [released on bail](#) of CFA 500, 000. His case was heard on June 12 and judgment was reserved until a verdict on [July 28](#), declared him guilty of defamation, disturbing public order, and "undermining the credibility of the judiciary,"

charges for which he was handed an eight-month suspended prison sentence and fined 500,000 CFA francs (about USD 881) by Mali's National Cybercrime Unit. Since his conviction, Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) has called for the reversal of his conviction, citing the chilling message his conviction sends to all journalists who dare to question official narratives.

Dissolution of political parties: Following its suspension of all political activities last year, the military authorities in Mali, signed into effect a decree dissolving all political parties in Mali, in line with the recommendations of the new national consultations on the Charter of Political Parties with Mali's vital forces in April. Additionally, the decree named junta leader, General Assimi Goïta, as President until 2030.



Figure 6 Colonel Assimi Goïta, Mali's interim junta leader

Ahead of the new national consultations, political parties in Mali launched a strong opposition, questioning the need for new national consultations. Meanwhile, the government had previously initiated national consultations with political parties in December 2024 to review Law

No. 05-047 on the Charter of Political Parties. The initial consultation had already been endorsed by the State and integrated into the Strategic Framework for the Rebuilding of the State. They expressed fears that the new consultations would be used to marginalize or suspend them, as was the case in Burkina Faso and Niger. They questioned the legitimacy of the new national consultations given the prior ANR resolutions, which were recognized as priorities within the institutional framework of the transition.

In response to this gross violation of civil and political rights, political parties registered their opposition to these measures with two protests, the first on May 3 by a coalition of political parties and civil society at the Palais de la Culture in Bamako, and the second on May 4 by young political party leaders at the Maison de la Presse. At least 80 political

parties and 2 civil society organizations drafted a declaration [calling](#) for the junta to return Mali to civilian rule by December 31, 2025, create a timetable for the return to the constitutional order, and release political prisoners. A third protest scheduled for May 9, was called off following a government [press release](#) announcing the suspension of all political activities until further notice.

In the wake of the upheaval over the new national consultations and the dissolution of political parties in the country, there has been a worrying series of arrests targeting opposition figures. On July 8, 2025, a revised Transitional Charter was [enacted](#), which sets the duration of the transitional mandate at five years, renewable without limit, until national pacification is achieved.

Abba Alhassane and El Bachir Thiam: On May 8, Abba Alhassane, 68, secretary general of the opposition party Convergence for the Development of Mali (Convergence pour le développement du Mali, or CODEM) was [arrested](#) at his home in the capital, Bamako, by three armed masked gunmen claiming to be gendarmes. He was [taken away](#) “in a car with black tinted windows and no license plate.” According to party members and local media, on the same day, El Bachir Thiam, a leader of The Change party (Le changement, or YELEMA) was taken by unidentified men who were traveling in a gray Toyota V8 4x4 vehicle with tinted windows and no license plate. They are suspected of being Malian intelligence agents – more specifically from the Agence Nationale de la Sécurité d'Etat (ANSE) – or elements of the Bamako gendarmerie du Camp I – off the streets of Kati town, about 15 kilometers from Bamako. The parties of both leaders were [involved](#) in a large gathering [organized](#) by Mali’s political opposition on May 3 to protest the military junta’s April 30 decision to dissolve all political parties and name the junta’s leader, General Assimi Goïta, as president until 2030.

Colleagues of both men searched for them in police and gendarmerie stations across Bamako and Kati to no avail. Authorities neither provided any information on their whereabouts nor indicated if their cases were being investigated.

On June 5, 2025, Abba Alhassane was [dropped off](#) along a road in Mali’s capital, Bamako, according to Alhousseini Jannatta Alassane, his son, who also indicated that he believed the intelligence services were behind his father’s kidnapping. Till date, no authority has

confirmed their involvement. It is not in the nature of Mali's intelligence services to engage the public on such cases. The whereabouts of El Bachir Thiam, however, remain unknown. Recently experts at the United Nations [have called](#) on authorities in Mali to disclose his fate and whereabouts, four months following his disappearance.

Abdoul Karim Traoré: On May 11, Abdoul Karim Traoré, also known as “Exo,” vice-president of the youth office of the Convergence for the Development of Mali (CODEM), and [member](#) of the Jigya Kura coalition was arrested along with Abdrahamane Diarra, president of the Mouvement des Jeunes de l'URD. Both individuals were arrested without due process and Abdoul Karim Traoré's arrest followed his [denunciation](#) of the abduction and forced disappearance of the secretary-general of his party, Alhassane Abba. While the Abdrahamane Diarra was [released](#) the following day without any official clarification, Traoré, was [feared](#) to have been forcibly disappeared after Mali's security ministry did not respond to a request for comment and his relatives remained unaware of their whereabouts. Following calls for his release by the [Media Foundation West Africa](#) (MFWA) among others, on June 6, family members [confirmed](#) that he had returned home. His release was made without any official statement by his abductors.

The release of Professor Etienne Sissoko:

On March 27, 2025, Malian author, activist, and university professor Etienne Sissoko was [released](#) from prison, after spending a year in arbitrary detention. He was convicted of “harming the reputation of the state,” “defamation,” and “dissemination of false news” for his publication *Propaganda,*



Figure 7 Professor Etienne Sissoko released from jail

Agitation and Harassment – Government Communication During the Transition in Mali. The book, which was published in December 2023, detailed several human rights violations by the military junta. On May 20, 2025, he was [sentenced](#) to two years in prison—with one year suspended—and fined XOF 3 million (approximately \$7,200).

When the court granted him provisional release on October 14, 2024, the Prosecutor [appealed the decision](#) the same day, and he remained in Kéniéroba Prison, 75 km from Bamako — cut off from his family and legal team. Over the duration of his detention, human rights defenders, civil society and human rights organisations across the globe joined in solidarity with Malian HRDs and civil society to demand his release.

2.3 Niger

The terrorist insurgency continues to rip through Niger. The most significant incidents this year include the [assault](#) that took place during afternoon prayers in the southwestern village of Fombita, where 44 people were killed and 13 wounded. The attackers also [set fire](#) to a local market and several homes. A May 25 [attack](#) by the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) on two joint military camps in Eknewane, Tahoua region, which were manned by the Special Intervention Group (GIS) and the National Guard of Niger (GNN), elite troops of the Niger Armed Forces, resulted in 58 deaths. And an ambush of a patrolling unit of the Nigerian army by the Jama‘at Nuṣrat al-Islām wal-Muslimīn (JNIM) group on May 26, killed 45 out of 71 soldiers out of 71.

As these insurgencies continue, the transitional authorities have deepened their crackdown on the civic space and human rights defenders, with an aggressive campaign to silence dissent, dismantle independent civil society, and shrink the public space for human rights work. Peaceful protests have been banned, media outlets shuttered, and journalists harassed or threatened for attempting to report on the situation. In the repressed environment that saw [prison sentences reinstated for defamation by journalists](#), rights activist and government critic, [Moussa Tiangari](#), who was arrested in December last year, remains in detention for criticizing the government over the establishment of a vaguely constituted [terrorism database](#). He has been charged with advocating terrorism and criminal association in connection with terrorism. This [database](#) was later used to [suspend](#) the nationality of the nine former public officials all of whom served under the Bazoum regime.

In furtherance of the broader “[Refondation](#)” process, initiated after the military coup in 2023, the [National Assembly Resolutions](#) have seen the adoption of a new Refoundation Charter, which repeals Ordinance No. 2023-02 of 28 July 2023 and passes for a new constitution. The Refoundation Charter which redefines the country’s institutions and establishes an institutional framework adapted to the “socio-cultural realities” of Niger, has established a [5-year transition](#) period, defined as a 60-month “*refoundation* period” for which General Abdourahamane Tiani has been appointed President of the Republic of the Niger for the duration of the transition. In accordance with this refoundation, [Ordinance No. 2025-06](#) of March 26, 2025, has dissolved all political parties.

Article 39 of the Refoundation Charter, which prohibits the country's defense and security forces from exercising their right to organize, underlies an April 8 decree by the Ministry of Interior [dissolving](#) three unions representing official paramilitary forces involved in the fight against jihadists. In the wake of [accusations](#) of “interference in judicial affairs” levelled against the Nigerien authorities by labor unions in the justice sector, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights announced the [dissolution](#) of four unions in the judicial sector, accusing them of having diverted from their mission of defending the general interest in favor of corporate and personal interests, thus compromising the proper functioning of the public justice service.

The arrest of Hamid Mahmoud, Massaouda Jaharou and Mahaman Sani: The pattern of censorship on security-related matters in the AES has again been exemplified with the arrest and detention of Hamid Mahmoud, Massaouda Jaharou, and Mahaman Sani, three journalists with the privately-owned Sahara FM radio station. They were [arrested](#) on May 7 and questioned over a broadcast about Niger’s deteriorating military cooperation with Russia. After they were released by a judge on May 9 without charge, they were re-arrested by the gendarmerie on the morning of May 10 and further questioned before being transferred to the brigade of the gendarmerie of Niamey.

[Despite calls](#) by human rights defenders and international rights organizations for their release, they remained in detention until June 13, 2025, when Massaouda Jaharou, was [granted provisional release](#) by the Niamey Military Court, allowing her to remain outside prison but requiring her to stay at the disposal of the judiciary, as legal proceedings

continue. Her colleagues Hamid Mahmoud and Mahamane Sani were formally remanded into custody by the military court on the same day. The two journalists are being prosecuted for “undermining national defense” and “conspiracy against state authority” under the Nigerien Penal Code. They are currently being held at Kollo prison, about 30 km from Niamey, after being transferred from the Niamey State Prison.

Moussa Adamou Garba: On June 20, 2025, Moussa Garba, a journalist with Dounia Radio and Television, based in Maradi, the second largest city and economic capital of Niger, was [arrested](#) by the Criminal Investigation Police. His arrest took place after the publication of his article: *"Maradi under tension: 4 young girls disappeared in one week and perhaps more..."* In the article, he raised concerns about a disturbing incident involving four missing girls. Appearing before a judge on 23 June, the journalist was accused of “dissemination of data likely to disturb public order” and subsequently placed under a detention order and transferred to the Maradi Civil Prison. After over two weeks in detention, he was [released](#) on July 4, 2025 with all charges against him dropped.

2.4 Nigeria

While economic hardship remains endemic in the face of [commendable](#) economic reforms, Nigeria continues to grapple with [banditry](#), [intercommunal conflicts](#), deadly land disputes, and a terrorist insurgency that has taken on a new complexity as insurgents [acquire](#) weaponized drones and other sophisticated weapons. In February, the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria (NHRC) [reported](#) a staggering 25% increase in complaints of human rights violations from 169,850 complaints in January to 205,364 in February. A subsequent [report](#) by the organization claimed to have documented 1,485,307 complaints of rights violations between January and June 2025, the highest in the history of the commission. This comes at a moment when the country has [witnessed](#) an astronomical rise in gender-based violence and the withdrawal of Niger from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has [sparked fears](#) of increased terrorist attacks. The withdrawal of the member states of the AES from the ECOWAS has also had an [adverse impact](#) on movement and trade between Nigeria and Niger. A recent spike in

violent [clashes](#) between farmers and nomadic herdsmen is not only [worsening](#) but increasingly taking a [religious](#) dimension.

Meanwhile, growing calls for government interventions in these and several other developments plaguing the country have seen the civic space subjected to severe restrictions. On January 6, the Nigerian Police Force, in a letter to Amnesty International, [demanded](#) an immediate retraction and public apology for a November 2024 [article](#) by Amnesty International, in which they condemn the Nigerian government's violent crackdown on protesters during the #EndBadGovernance protests in August 2024. In response to this move by the police, 67 CSOs in a joint statement, condemned the "intimidation, harassment and threat against Amnesty International in Nigeria" citing the letter to Amnesty International in which Nigerian Police Force threatened legal action in the event that Amnesty International failed to comply with their demands.

In June President Tinubu posthumously [pardoned](#) the "Ogoni Nine," – environmental activists who were executed under the dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. While Tinubu hailed them as national heroes, rights groups condemned the move as insulting, noting that a pardon implies guilt. There were calls instead for their full exoneration and restitution to the affected communities of the Niger Delta.



Dr Fabian Ihekweeme: Former commissioner and vocal critic of Imo State Governor Hope Uzodinma, Dr Fabian Ihekweeme was arrested in December 2024 by the Nigeria Police Force in Abuja following his criticism of the state governor. He [was released](#) from police custody in late January, after falling ill. According to family sources, Dr. Ihekweeme

Figure 8 Dr Fabian Ihekweeme was released after allegedly issuing an apology

suffered maltreatment during his detention, which lasted nearly two months, and after falling ill, he was not given proper treatment.

It is alleged that Dr. Ihekweeme was released after he was compelled to sign a letter of apology addressed to the state governor [under duress](#). The letter claimed that the allegations he levelled against the state governor were lies and that he pledged to be of good behavior and not falsely attack Imo Government and the Governor again.

Olamide Thomas: In early January, #EndSARS activist Abiodun Olamide Thomas, [was detained in December 2024 for allegedly cursing President Bola Tinubu's son, Seyi Tinubu](#), and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kayode Egbetokun. She was released after meeting her [bail conditions](#). She was granted a N10 million bail with one surety by an Abuja Federal High Court. In the middle of December 2024, Olamide Thomas was arrested following criticism of police brutality in Nigeria, which entailed vitriolic targeting of Seyi Tinubu and other [prominent figures in law enforcement](#), including Inspector General of Police Kayode Egbetokun. Her arrest incited a great deal of [public outrage](#) after police denied the activist bail, claiming the [IGP wanted her detained](#).

Eedris Abdulkareem: In early April, Nigerian artist Eedris Abdulkareem [called on fans](#) to stream his song "Tell Your Papa," online, after authorities banned it from the airwaves for lyrics that were critical of President Tinubu's management of the Nigerian economy. This development came two years into President Tinubu's administration, which has seen [major protests](#) over rising inflation and fuel prices.

A memorandum sent to TV and radio stations by Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission described the content as "inappropriate for broadcast." It also claimed the song violated a clause in the country's broadcasting code that prohibits content that is in "breach of public decency."



Figure 9 Eedris Abdulkareem is a Nigerian rapper

The Afrobeats track is addressed to the president's son, Seyi Tinubu, who recently said his father was the greatest leader in Nigeria's history. In the lyrics, Eedris Abdulkareem calls on him to tell his father that "people are dying" from economic hardship and insecurity caused by armed groups in Nigeria.

2.5 Togo

Gross human rights violations continue as tensions mount between the government and the opposition over the controversial new constitution that transitioned the Togolese state from a presidential to a parliamentary democracy. Independent media has been suppressed with [suspensions](#), while journalists have been arrested, detained and prosecuted for publications deemed offensive by the government. Opposition figures and government critics wallow in detention for sentiments and ideas expressed online.

In popular protests that saw security forces kill at least [7 people](#), 10 by [some counts](#), the government has assaulted, arrested and [tortured](#) scores of people including HRDs, opposition members, journalists, and ordinary protesters. The government maintains its crackdown on accusations of poor governance and suppression of opposition to the controversial constitutional reforms that effectively extended Faure Gnassingbé's hold on power.



Figure 8810 Protestors troop to the streets of Lome, Togo to demand regime change

Monsieur Sokpor Sitsopé Honoré: On January 12, 2025, Mr. Sokpor Sitsopé Honoré, who also goes by Affectio or Koffi Agbenoxevi Godwin on Facebook, was [assaulted and abducted](#) by police officers in plainclothes at the “La Pampa” crossroads in Adidogomé.

His assault and abduction was in connection to his critical social media posts, especially a poem titled “[Do your part](#),” in which he urges Togolese citizens to take action to crack “the walls of this austere power and break the chains of injustice.” Despite passionate calls and [protests](#) for his release, he remains in detention [as his trial proceeds](#).

The recent protests in Togo: Widespread and popular anger with the most recent effort by the Gnassingbé dynasty to extend its grip on power and subdue opposition, had been building since the announcement of the [constitutional review](#) in 2024. The success of that review saw Togo transition from a presidential to a parliamentary democracy. In a bid to contain the expected backlash, the government maintained severe restrictions on the civic space. Demonstrations have been rare in Togo since 2022, after they were [banned](#) in the country following a deadly attack at Lomé’s main market. But a flamboyant [\\$34m memorial service](#) that was held for the late Eyadéma, at a time when most Togolese were [struggling to make ends meet](#), combined with the swearing-in in May of Faure Gnassingbé under the new term-unlimited designation of President of the Council of Ministers, aggravated public outrage.

After rapper Aamron was arrested on May 26, following his calls for a protest to mark the president’s forthcoming birthday, people [took to the streets](#) to protest against a government crackdown on dissent and opposition, the cost-of-living crisis and a new constitution was that was designed to enable the current President of the Council of Ministers, Faure Gnassingbé, to maintain an indefinite grip on power. The protests were endorsed by large segments of Togolese society, including artists and [bloggers](#), and protesters braved unlawful arrests, torture, and physical assault to demand change. A week following massive protests on June 5 and June 6, [fifty-six of the protesters](#) detained were released, while others were detained for prosecutorial purposes. Aamron was [released](#) on June 21.

Further [protests](#) re-echoing the protesters’ demands and calling for the release of their detained protesters took place on June 26, 27 and 28, in the wake of [words of solidarity and encouragement](#) from the Togolese diaspora encouragement to the protesters. In Lomé and other towns, including the opposition stronghold of Bè, protesters erected barricades, burned tyres, and chanted slogans like “*Libérez Aamron!*” and “*Togo Libre!*”

In response, security forces [descended](#) on the crowd with tear gas in a heavy-handed crackdown, arresting dozens of demonstrators while military jeeps patrolled the capital. In a [passive gesture](#) that is said to have reflected both the fear of repression and solidarity with the protesters, many businesses and markets shut down. [The arrests and assaults escalated](#) following the protests on June 26, 27 and 28, with at least 3 people were [reported dead](#). Eighteen of the protesters arrested on June 26, 27 and 28 had been [released](#) as of June 30, and 31 were still being held in custody following hearings before the public prosecutor.

Aamron: According to several testimonies and press releases from civil society, between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. on the night of May 26, 2025, around fifty heavily armed security personnel barged into the home of Togolese rapper Aamron (real name Essowè Narcisse Tchalla), in Assiyéyé, a northern suburb of Lomé, and arrested him without a warrant. His arrest followed a social media rant which was typical of his usual [criticism](#) of the Gnassingbe regime. He [called on](#) the citizens of Togo to hand President Gnassingbe a



Figure 11882 Aamron is a popular Togolese rapper

special gift on his birthday by going on a protest. His arrest and detention, which saw no charges levelled against him, incited [outrage](#) that [sparked](#) massive protests on June 5 and 6 and saw the arrest of more than 80 people.

On June 5, a day before the president's birthday, Aamron appeared in a video in which he apologized to the president, [claiming](#) his earlier call was as a result of [severe depression](#) for which he was being treated. He called on the youth to refrain from any actions that could land them in trouble with the law. But the video [did not dissuade](#) the protesters, who [insist](#) Aamron was of sound mind as at the time of his arrest and was [forced](#) into psychiatric internment. His comments in the video were believed to have been made under duress. Following the release of the [vast majority](#) of the protesters arrested during the June 5 and 6 protests, Aamron was [released](#) on June 21.

Dr Ayitevi Firmin Elom Hounou-Adossi: As part of several demonstrations held in Togo on June 6, 2025 – the birthday of President of the Council of Ministers, Faure Gnassingbe

– to protest against the quality of governance and the economic conditions in Togo, members of the National Order of Physicians of Togo (ONMT), staged a demonstration demanding improved conditions of service for health workers across the country. Dr. Hounou-Adossi, who, ahead of the protests, had [been very vocal](#) about the poor conditions of service of health workers across the country, was [arrested](#) during the protest. He was detained, and charged alongside [two other health professionals](#) and several other protesters. Following [further protests](#), health workers denounced his arrest and demanded his release and that of several others. He was [released](#) on June 9, 2025.

2.6 Guinea Bissau

Amid the heightened political wrangling with the opposition and even members of his own cabinet, President Sissoco continues to preside over significant civic space restrictions, including [government threats against protest organizers](#) and rising repression of journalists. The Guinean Human Rights League (LGDH) [reports](#) that more than 120



people were tortured in Guinea Bissau in 2024, including activists, opposition figures and

dissenters. A growing number of citizens have been observed [leaving](#) the country in recent years due to low pay and poor working conditions, coupled with the lack of employment policies for recent graduates.

Ahead of the [general elections](#) scheduled for November 23, 2025, recurrent physical attacks, believed to be politically motivated, have been reported to have been launched against perceived government critics and dissenters. A [ban on protests](#) instituted since January 2024 remains in force and the two most prominent civil society coalitions in the country were recently declared [illegal](#). Their criminalization comes following a [protest](#) that was planned by the two organizations: [Pô di Terra and Frente Popular platforms](#). The protest was to call for democratic reforms ahead of the November 2025 general elections. Police [prevented](#) protesters from gathering and [four activists](#) were arrested and subsequently tortured.

Appointments to Guinea-Bissau's Supreme Court of Justice are critical to the forthcoming general elections in the country. [A series of controversial developments](#) that marred elections to the Supreme Court are believed to be meant to tilt the results in the government's favor. Opposition party leaders and civil society organizations have also accused sitting President Sissoco of using state resources to conduct an election [campaign](#) at a time when political parties are [prohibited from holding events](#) that gather large crowds. This comes in the wake of severe monetary challenges which confront the state and have adversely impacted critical sectors like [health](#) and education.

Meanwhile, a [summary](#) of the UN Human Rights Committee's June 2025 review in Geneva, commended judicial reform laws while raising concerns over FGM, torture allegations by law enforcement, and weak enforcement in practice.

2.7 Guinea

Civic space restrictions continue to escalate in Guinea following the enforced disappearances of prominent opposition activists Mamadou Billo Bah and Oumar Sylla



Figure 12 Oumar Sylla has not been seen since his disappearance

last year. Severe restrictions on media have been accompanied by a vicious clampdown on criticism and dissent. These restrictions have seen several journalists assaulted and arrested during recent protests. In the wake of the [failure](#) of the military junta to hold elections and complete a democratic transition by the end of 2024, tensions with the opposition have been mounting, triggering [protests](#) that have disrupted stability in the resource-rich country. The imprisonment of opposition leader [Aliou Bah](#)

for his criticism of the junta, depicts the repression that opposition figures continue to suffer under the transitional government. Reports by civil society and international rights organizations show a [climate of fear](#) that is marked by arbitrary detentions, harassment, and intimidation of rights defenders.

Abdoul Latif Diallo: On January 27, 2025, investigative news website *Depecheguinee.com*, founded by investigative journalist Abdoul Latif Diallo, was [banned](#) by Guinea's High Authority for Communication (HAC). This followed the website's publication of an opinion piece by a contributor named Samir Moussa, titled "Guinea: Mamadi Doumbouya or the Curse of Power." The HAC described the piece as containing elements of "incitement to insurrection and disruption of public order." Following repeated sanctions levelled against him by the media regulator, Diallo has reportedly fled into exile.

Habib Marouane Camara: Around 8 pm on December 3, 2024, in Conakry, Habib Marouane Camara, a social media influencer and owner and manager of the news website *Le Révélateur 224*, was stopped at Carrefour KPC on his way to a meeting with businessman Kerfalla Camara, according to witnesses. Sources indicate that his vehicle

was intercepted by a police truck and its windshield was smashed. He was [violently](#) assaulted before being taken to an unknown destination. No summons or judicial warrant was presented at the time of his arrest. Since this event, no official information has been provided as to where he is being held or charges have been levelled against him.

As of June, 2025, 94 African journalists and 11 press freedom organizations had joined RSF in [calling on the Guinean authorities](#) to shed light on his fate. While no reasons have been offered for his abduction, Camara is a very outspoken media critic of Guinea's military government. He often questioned the military authorities and, in particular,

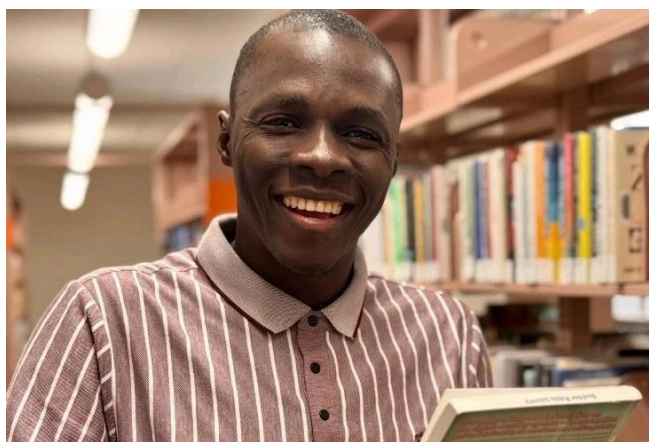


Figure 13 Guinean journalist, Habib Marouane Camara

raised the issue of the enforced disappearances of activists Foniké Menguè and Mamadou Billo Bah in his Facebook posts. Earlier in May 2024, a show on Djoma TV and Djoma FM that was associated with him, was banned from broadcasting. A few days before his abduction, the journalist's lawyers said he had "received threats of imminent kidnapping from a group of unknown individuals."

Abdoul Sacko: At 4 a.m., on February 19, 2025, gunmen [broke into](#) the home of prominent civil society leader, Abdoul Sacko, beat him in front of his family, seized his phone, and took him away in a pick-up truck without license plates. Known for his criticism of the military junta, Sacko is the coordinator of the Guinean Social Forces' Forum (Forum des Forces Sociales de Guinée, or FFSG), a civil society network calling for a return to the country's constitutional order in Guinea. Sacko's abduction raised concerns about an enforced disappearance. On February 20, 2025, Sacko's lawyers [released a statement](#) saying that their client had been found 100 kilometers from Conakry, dotted with severe injuries and signs of torture. He was taken to a local hospital. Given his high profile, Sacko's abduction sent shockwaves across Guinea and abroad. On February 19, the United States embassy in Guinea released a statement urging the government to "swiftly

investigate the incident,” and denouncing the “uptick in detentions targeting journalists and civil society leaders.”

Toumany Camara: On April 28, 2025, the HAC [suspended](#) the news website, www.presseinvestigation.com for three months and withdrew Camara’s press card over that period, barring him from practicing journalism until July 28, 2025. He was suspended after releasing a [publication](#) in which he reported that Ms. Beavogui—former General Manager of Guinea Alumina Corporation (GAC), a company reportedly shut down by Guinean authorities for noncompliance—had been appointed Country Manager of Predictive Discovery, a mining company which is seeking a gold mining permit in the UNESCO-protected Haut Niger National Park.

The article warned of potential compliance risks to the company and the extensive environmental risks if mining is permitted in the park. Camara’s investigation brought to the fore the grave threat to the park’s fragile ecosystem, home to endangered species and the source of the Niger River. As Guinea’s largest nature reserve and a conservation priority for the West African sub-region, the park plays a vital ecological role that could be



Figure 14 Guinean authorities banned Toumany Camara from operating his news website

jeopardized by extractive operations. The HAC concluded that Camara had failed to provide evidence supporting his claims against Ms. Beavogui and had not given her a chance to respond to the allegations. The regulator proceeded with separate sanctions on the journalist and his website on these grounds.

Dr Faya Millimono: On 20 February, Dr Faya Millimono, president of the opposition party Bloc Libéral (BL), told journalists at a press conference which he had in fact called for that day, that he had been forced to cancel the press conference after receiving a death threat that same day. He did not reveal the identity of the perpetrators of the threat, but the serious tone in which he spoke struck a chord with those present. Following the military coup in Guinea in September 2021, Millimono threw his support behind the military

government. However, he became highly critical of the CNRD (Comité National du Rassemblement pour le Développement) regularly expressing his concerns about the progress of the democratic transition and other issues, through press conferences. The MFWA has [called](#) on the Guinean authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of Dr. Faya Millimono and his right to freedom of expression.

2.8 Sierra Leone

Following closely on the trail of the botched presidential elections of 2023 and the upheaval it caused in the country, the controversial [National Counter-Terrorism Act of 2024](#), described by the government as a necessary and robust response to both domestic and global security threats, has drawn criticism for criminalizing journalistic work and dissent with [penalties](#) of up to 30 years in prison. In the wake of these concerns, Sierra Leone has experienced several civic space violations and attacks on human rights defenders, particularly those targeting journalists and online voices. Already, there are emerging reports of worsening press freedom conditions, with increasing use of cybercrime laws to silence dissent. Civil society and the media have documented a pattern of arbitrary arrests, legislative overreach, and physical intimidation creating a climate of fear for activists and civil society.



Figure 15 Hawa Hunt was accused of defaming the President and his wife

Hawa Hunt: Hawa Hunt, a Canadian and Sierra Leonean dual citizen, was [arrested](#) on 22 December, 2024, while starring in House of Stars, a reality TV show. Her arrest was for comments she made on social media about the president of Sierra Leone and the first lady in May 2023. In a 25-minute video, Hunt, a 42-year-old fitness and wellbeing influencer with more than 100,000 followers across Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, criticized Julius and Fatima Maada Bio. Slapping her with two counts of “transmitting insulting messages via a computer system” under the Cybersecurity and

Crime Act 2021, prosecutors claimed the video incited public disorder and damaged the reputation of the president and his wife.

After multiple requests for bail had been [denied](#), she appeared in a [video](#) on 28 December, apologizing to the president and first lady. She said she was being treated well and that the police had handled everything professionally. However, her daughter as well as several human rights activists believed this was a forced confession and that she might have been facing physical abuse while being held in Pademba Road prison in Freetown. Following three months' detention and prosecution, Ms. Hunt was [released](#) and her Canadian and Sierra Leonean passports which had been confiscated as part of legal proceedings, were returned to her.

Melvin Tejan Mansaray: On January 10, 2025, Melvin Tejan Mansaray, was slapped with an indefinite ban from parliament by the Speaker of Sierra Leone's Parliament, Rt. Hon. Segepoh Solomon. The ban, which took immediate effect, was announced on the floor of Parliament by the Speaker himself without due process. Speaker Thomas accused Mansaray of an "insulting conduct," alleging that the journalist called Members of Parliament (MPs) "useless" and accused the Speaker of rigging a parliamentary election without any evidence to substantiate his claims.

He justified the expulsion as a warning to other journalists covering legislative proceedings. He declared, "This is my Chamber. I have the authority to allow you to be here or not." No evidence was provided to back his accusations. Neither were the names of the individuals who he claimed had reported Mansaray's alleged comments to him provided. Following his accusations, the Speaker proceeded to expel Mansaray from the precincts of Parliament and ordered his immediate removal. The actions of the Speaker have been condemned by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and the [Media Foundation for West Africa](#). The African Parliamentary Press Network (APPN) [have all criticized](#) the conduct of the speaker as heavy-handed, troubling and inimical to press freedom.

2.9 Benin

Despite calls for reform, the political and legal environment in Benin remains hostile to press freedom and public dissent. This has been evident in the concerning extradition and trial of two journalists who were seeking asylum in Togo and the suspension of independent media outlets under the Beninese digital code. On March 12, the news website Bénin Web TV was suspended and the managing director's press card, withdrawn. The High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) [accused](#) the media outlet of publishing two articles containing inaccurate information: one concerning alleged errors in the budget request submitted by the HAAC to Parliament, the other, concerning the request for a company car by the institution's president.

This incident is indicative of what has been noted as an increased [suppression](#) of the freedom of expression and protests in the wake of growing anti-French sentiments following recent terrorist attacks. The newspaper ***Le Patriote*** and its website were similarly sanctioned after the publication of an editorial pointing out 'the government's ineffective strategy' during an attack on a military position in the border zone between Burkina Faso and Niger. But *Le Patriote* is only one of the six media outlets to have encountered this fate. On January 21, 2025, the HAAC [suspended](#) two newspapers and four news websites, accusing them of unauthorized publications and not being in good standing. All the suspensions were "until further notice." The newspapers in question **are** ***L'Audace Infos***, whose managing editor, Romuald Alingo, had his press card withdrawn and ***Le Patriote***, whose website was also suspended. The online media outlets included "***Reporter Médias Monde***", "***Crystal News***", "***Les Pharaons***" and the TikTok account "***Madame Actu***". The suspension of Bénin Web TV and *Le Patriote* have since been [lifted](#).

During the 2025 International Workers' Day celebrations in Benin, police [stormed](#) a peaceful workers' assembly organized by the Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Bénin (CSTB), arresting the union's leadership in what has been widely condemned as a brutal and arbitrary crackdown on trade union rights. The arrests triggered immediate condemnation from union federations and civil society organizations across the country. A groundswell of national and international solidarity followed, with unions such as COSI-Benin, CGTB, and UNSTB visiting the detained comrades in custody and issuing

statements of support. Though the arrested unionists were released later that same evening, the CSTB maintains that their arrest was an egregious violation of both national and international labor laws.

Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè: The unfortunate case of journalist and human rights defender Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè who was forcibly extradited from Côte d'Ivoire and detained in Benin, raises serious human rights concerns. As a [political refugee](#) in Togo since 2021, known for his investigations into the Beninese authorities, he had been invited to Abidjan by the Ivorian authorities on a professional mission. He was [arrested](#) in his hotel room, before being deported on a private plane to Cotonou, where he was immediately incarcerated. In the wake of these developments, his extradition has been condemned by many human rights and media organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF). In the wake of his incarceration, it has been suggested that his extradition may have been a gesture of goodwill by the Ivorian government to [mend](#) its fraught relationship with the Beninese government.

Steve Amoussou: The case of Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè bears unsettling similarities to that of Steve Amoussou, who was found guilty by the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET) on June 2, 2025, and [slapped with](#) a two-year sentence and a 2-million-franc fine for cyberbullying, incitement to rebellion, and spreading false news and insults against a political group. This sentence comes after Steve Amoussou, a Beninese national who had gone into exile in Togo since 2019, was [abducted](#) in front of his Lomé residence by four individuals and sent back to Benin. Amoussou, is [suspected](#) of owning and running “Frère Hounvi,” a social media account that posted viral audio commentaries critical of the Talon administration to its [75,000 subscribers](#). He was charged with ‘harassment through electronic means’, ‘initiation and publication of false information through social networks’ and ‘direct provocation to rebellion’. His charges would later be [reclassified](#) to ‘cyberbullying,’ ‘incitement to rebellion’ and ‘spreading false news and insults against a political group.’ While Amoussou denies being behind “Frère Hounvi,” Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) [points out that](#) it should neither be a criminal offence to create or manage a digital

platform, nor punishable for citizens to express critical views about their government and public policies. His lawyers insist his conviction was a [miscarriage of justice](#), absent of any real [evidence](#) of his guilt. However, following Amoussou's abduction, two of the three kidnappers prosecuted by the CRIET in Benin for his abduction were [sentenced](#) to a year's imprisonment each as well as a 5-million-franc fine, while arrest warrants were issued against four individuals in [Togo](#), including [a woman and a student](#), in connection with his abduction.

2.10 Liberia

While freedoms of speech, expression and association are duly regarded, the Liberian civic space has been marred by a lack of progress and episodes of repression. Journalists and defenders of press freedom have encountered harassment and intimidation in the form of unlawful detention and physical assault. Despite the renewal of the executive order establishing it, the [Office of the War and Economic Crimes Court](#) (OWEC) has not yet lived up to the civil war era of accountability it promised. Recent months have seen a palpable determination on the part of citizens to assert their rights and demand an end to unemployment, corruption, poor governance and lack of accountability on the part of the government.

This determination has recurrently materialized in a recent series of protests. However, youthful protesters hitting the streets to demand reforms in health rights, accountability, and governance risked arrests in the wake of heavy policing and other bureaucratic barriers to public assembly. While civil society remains vibrant, HRDs and the civic space exist in a political environment where state actions alternate between symbolic reconciliation gestures and measures that constrain civic freedoms.

Bai Best and David Yates: On January 6, 2025, Daily Observer Managing Director Bai S.G. Best and reporter David A. Yates were [invited](#) to the headquarters of the Liberian National Police (LNP) in relation to a report they published on the death of the Boulevard Palace Hotel's General Manager, Anwar Futloo. The police, who were not enthused with the release of the report, accused the duo of derailing their investigation into the death of

the deceased. They threatened them with arrest and subjected them to hours of detention. Yates was required to fill out a form labeling him as a "person of interest" and to write a statement without legal counsel present. When the duo returned to the LNP headquarters three days later, after being forced to sign a copy of their report and a bond to the effect that they will return when summoned, they were also surprised to learn that Yates' designation on an official questionnaire he had been asked to fill had changed from "person of interest" to "suspect" – without any explanation. It was only after they had been subjected to a tedious hour of questioning that the duo and their legal representatives were allowed to leave. Despite the outrage the story sparked among media professionals, the [Press Union of Liberia](#) (PUL) and civil society advocates, an official complaint lodged with the Inspector General of the LNP is yet to trigger any action.

2.11 Senegal

On April 3, 2025, the Senegalese parliament [approved](#) revisions removing amnesty for specific crimes, including murder, torture and forced disappearance under the 2024 Amnesty Law. Signed into law amid the violent protests that trailed suspicions that then President Macky Sall was angling for a third term, the 2024 Amnesty Law granted amnesty for offences committed by both security forces and protesters during deadly opposition protests in the country.

The Prime Minister Sonko reignited concerns about freedom of speech in the country with the declaration of a [‘zero tolerance’](#) criminal policy for the dissemination of fake news.



Figure 16 Senegal Prime Minister, Osman Sonko

Increasingly, critics point to the [growing repression](#) of press freedom under the Faye-Sonko government and how, increasingly, the government has clamped down on dissent by weaponizing the Press Code and the criminal charge of [‘disseminating false news’](#) against journalists.

Civil society observes that this is in contrast to the [manifesto pledge](#) by Faye that the Senegalese government under him would abolish prison sentences for press offences. There is a sentiment that the government's conduct toward the press is reminiscent of the dark years of the [Macky Sall](#) regime, which weaponized Article 254 of the Criminal Code, [criminalizing](#) the offence of insulting the Head of State.

On June 10, 2025, former Member of Parliament Moustapha Diakhaté was detained at the Criminal Investigation Division (DIC) after being [summoned and questioned](#) for comments made in the press, denouncing what he calls a "monopoly of political space", which he attributes to Ousmane Sonko and the "Sonkolâtres". After being [prosecuted](#) for "offending the Head of State and a person exercising all or part of the powers of the Head of State," he was released, after a court [sentenced](#) him to two months and fifteen days' imprisonment on July 30, 2025, for insulting the Head of State. He was acquitted on the charge of insulting a person exercising one or all of the prerogatives of the President of the Republic.

On July 11, the Minister of African Integration and Foreign Affairs, Yacine Fall, issued a stern warning against a scheduled screening of a film on LGBTQI+ rights, stating that "Senegal accepts no form of propaganda and promotion of the LGBTQI phenomenon," and warning the public that the Senegalese government "reserves the right to take any appropriate action against any organizers of such activities and even against participants, regardless of their origins, status or rank, in accordance with the legal and regulatory provisions in force." In response, the Dutch Embassy and the Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) were forced to [cancel](#) the screening of the LGBTQIA-themed film. This comes amid [growing agitations](#) by [special interest groups](#) advocating for tougher legislation against homosexuality, has parliament again debating whether to stiffen penalties for homosexual activity.

Simon Faye: On April 10, 2025, Simon Pierre Faye, the editor-in-chief of Zik FM associated with SenTV, was [arrested](#) by Senegalese authorities, following a post on Zik FM's official Facebook page, in which he shared an [article](#) from the Afrique Confidentielle website entitled "*Political crisis in Senegal: Ouattara summons Ousmane Sonko to Abidjan.*" His arrest and [detention](#) were part of an investigation into the publication that

was [sanctioned](#) by the public prosecutor a day after SenTV relayed the publication. Following an appearance before the court on [charges](#) of spreading false news, he was placed under judicial supervision and released on bail on April 14, 2025, yet a judicial investigation has now been opened against him. Faye's story [sparked outrage](#) across Senegalese [civil society](#) and human rights organizations who [condemned](#) his arrest as evidence of growing repression of civil freedoms and called for constitutional and legal reforms to better [protect](#) freedom of the press and freedom of expression. On the day of his release, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, in a question and answer session at the National Assembly, declared a '[zero tolerance](#)' criminal policy [regarding excesses on social media](#).

In the wake of this development, Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) has [called on](#) Senegalese authorities to defer issues about media conduct and content to the statutory media regulator, The Conseil National de Régulation de l'Audiovisuel and to also apply the principle of fairness to all in every situation to avoid raising doubts about the motive and intention that informs their actions.

Abdou Nguer and Pape Amadou Ndiaye Diaw: On April 14, 2025, journalist and SEN TV columnist, Abdou Nguer and two of his colleagues, Oumar Ndiaye and Fatima Coulibaly, were [called for](#) questioning by the Colobane Police Division. While Oumar and Fatima were released after hours of interrogation, Abdou Nguer was taken into custody. Nguer's detention was in connection with a post on the Tik Tok account "Abdou Nguer Seul." The post the President of Senegal's Constitutional Council, Mamadou Badio Camara, who succumbed to illness on April 10, 2025 and read, "the people demand an autopsy on the deceased Badio Camara."

Following claims by Abdou that he was neither the author of the said post nor the owner of the account, Pape Amadou Ndiaye Diaw, a [self-professed admirer](#) of the journalist, was identified by the police and admitted to being the actual owner of



Figure 17 Abdou Nguer still remains in police custody

the incriminated TikTok account. On April 17, 2025, after being presented to the investigating judge of the third chamber of the Dakar court, a legal investigation was opened against the two men. Several court appearances later, despite several appeals for a provisional release, Abdou Nguer and Pape Amadou Ndiaye Diaw [remain](#) in police custody.

Bachir Fofana: On June 25, 2025, Senegalese journalist and columnist, Bachir Fofana was [arrested](#) and taken into custody by the Special Division for Cybersecurity. His detention followed an investigation by the public prosecutor into a complaint lodged by the president of the National Assembly, El Malick Ndiaye. Ndiaye accused Fofana of sharing false information regarding a public procurement process for official vehicles intended for members of parliament, a process overseen by the National Assembly. While the National Assembly has not contested the substance of Fofana's claims or denied them, he remains in detention over a naming error. He mistakenly identified the contractor involved in the procurement as [Cheikh Guèye](#), who has an alleged [history of embezzlement](#), instead of [Cheikh Dieng](#), the actual contract awardee. Following protests against his arrest and calls for his release, Fofana was released after a court [sentenced](#) him on July 30, 2025, to a two-month suspended prison sentence and a fine of 200,000 CFA francs.

2.12 The Gambia

A long-awaited review of the country's 1997 Constitution is [still pending](#), after the [2024 Draft Constitution](#), the revision of the [2020 draft constitution](#), was rejected in parliament, following concerns that it weakened checks and balances, removed anti-corruption provisions, and centralized power in the executive. Any further attempt to revise the 1997 Constitution, will now require a new draft constitution to be compiled. In the wake of the growing economic hardship sweeping across the continent, civic activism against corruption has seen an uptick.

Gambians Against Looted Assets: Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA) is a youth movement that prominently brings together a new wave of civic formations countering

corruption and advocating for transparency in the management of state resources. On May 8, 2025, the group embarked on a protest to demand transparency in the sale of state assets [recovered](#) from former leader Yahya Jammeh. This protest came in the wake of massive public [outrage](#) over a [report](#) in the local news, which alleged that [assets](#) forfeited from Yahya Jammeh were being disposed of in secret deals. Police [denied](#) the protest permit under the [Public Order Act 1961](#), and forcibly [arrested](#) 29 protesters and two journalists, including Alieu Ceesay and Sheriff Conteh, who were released [on the same day](#). Following the upheaval, the remaining protesters were [released](#) on May 10, 2025 and the Gambian government [disclosed](#) the facts of the sale of the assets, which have mostly [confirmed](#) the concerns that citizens had concerning the transparency of the sale.

Protests against astronomical hikes in internet tariffs: On August 22, 2025, dozens of young Gambians have gathered outside the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to [protest](#) its decision to impose a D50 per 1GB price floor on mobile data. Spearheaded by a coalition of civil society organizations and social movements, including the Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice (EFSCRJ), Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA), and Team Gom Sa Bopa, the protesters said the price floor has ended competitive pricing and raised data costs by at least 243%. GSM operators had previously offered promotional bundles as low as D13.33 per 1GB.

Twenty-three protesters were arrested, [detained](#) and eventually charged under the [Public Order Act](#), with conducting

themselves without lawful authority in a manner likely to breach the peace by holding a procession in a public place without a license from the Inspector General of Police (IGP). The international community and Gambian civil society [condemned](#) the arrest and detention, calling



Figure 18 Demonstrators demanding a reduction in data cost

for the immediate and unconditional release of the detainees. The detained protesters contested the charge, arguing that their right to protest is guaranteed by the 1997 Constitution. When offered bail in detention, [majority](#) of the protesters [declined](#) it, insisting otherwise, on their unconditional release, seeing as they, as they argued, they were in breach of no law.

In a context not unlike what prevails in much of Africa, where state security is weaponized to suppress freedoms of association and assembly, protesting without a permit is a regular exercise for civil society and social movements in the Gambia, as applications for a license to protest are nearly always rejected. When a magistrate ordered the protesters to be remanded, [violence and unrest](#) ensued between the police and a group of angry youth gathered outside the court premises. The police deployed tear gas to disperse a crowd that was reportedly throwing stones into the court complex, blocking the road, and setting tyres ablaze. On August 25, 2025, 21 members of another group of protesters who obstructed police tasked with transporting the protesters on remand to the Mile 2 Prison, were also [arrested](#) but later on released. calling for the release of the protesters on remand, during a march to the capital Banjul were arrested by the police. On August 27, all 23 protesters were [released](#) on bail, which was set at D50,000 for each protester, with the option of securing it through a Gambian surety, a biometric ID card, or a passport.

2.13 Ghana

Amid growing economic hardship, public disaffection over perceived nepotism and state-sponsored corruption, pertinent governance challenges in Ghana have coincided with serious concerns over human rights and press freedoms over the first half of the year. Recurrent controversies involving the environment and the country's resource wealth have once again been thrust into the limelight, raising questions about the openness of the civic space. With the reintroduction of the infamous Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill (Anti-LGBTQ Bill) in Parliament, there have been violent and verbal attacks on HRDs advocating for LGBTQI+ rights. Escalating economic hardship has triggered protests that were forcefully and fully quelled by state security forces.



Figure 19 Anti-LGBTQ demonstration in Ghana

Akwasi Agyei Annim, Henry Emil Fynn and Jacob Adu-Baah: Three journalists who were filming an illegal mining operation in the [Bremam-Adomanya Forest](#) were threatened and violently attacked, in a bid to seize their equipment and prevent them from filming. The illegal miners destroyed their equipment, confiscated devices, deleted recordings, and detained them for several hours, despite the four-person police escort that [accompanied](#) the journalists. Even with the arrival of police reinforcements, the journalists were only allowed to leave the area on condition that they promise to delete the videos at

the Asankrangwa District Police Station. The incident has been vehemently condemned by several national and international rights groups, including the [Ghana Journalists Association](#) (GJA) and [Reporters without Borders](#) (RSF). Upon arrival at the police station, the illegal miners were arrested. Reports on the incident claim that illegal mining has destroyed over 200 acres of land in the Brehman-Adomanya area.

This incident mirrors the growing attacks on journalists across the country. Five journalists, **Gideon Nana Peprah, Akwasi Oppong, Kofi Adade, Atta Henry and Charles Awuah Mensah**, were [violently assaulted](#) on February 11, 2025, while covering the Council of State elections in the Ashanti region. The five were accosted by thugs who claimed to have seen them filming proceedings and demanded they delete the footage from their phones. The five were brutally assaulted when they refused to hand over the footage and their phones were confiscated. While the confiscated phones have been returned, perpetrators are yet to be charged with any crimes.



Figure 20 JoyNews Reporter, Carlos Calony was assault during a live report

Carlos Carloni: On Wednesday, July 30, 2025, at Spintex in Accra, reporter Carlos Carloni was covering the demolition of a warehouse belonging to Daniel McKorley, a popular businessman affiliated with the main opposition National Patriotic Party (NPP) when he was [physically assaulted](#) by military men who arrived on the scene. The demolition was [believed](#) to be linked to a legal dispute over the ownership of the land between the McDan Group, a conglomerate owned by Mr. McKorley, and the Ghana Airport

Company. Along with a key eyewitness, Calony was manhandled and punched before being forced into a vehicle and sent to the National Security Headquarters. He was detained and questioned for about an hour while his phone was temporarily confiscated and inspected. In a statement by the Minister for Government Communications and spokesperson to the President of Ghana, the government [condemned](#) the assault of the reporter, describing the actions of the military personnel as 'utterly unacceptable,' and

having no place in a democratic society. The President of the country has since ordered an investigation into the matter.

Reintroduction of the Anti-LGBTQ+ Bill in Parliament and Attacks on LGBTQ+ Rights Defenders: In February 2024, Parliament [passed](#) the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, which the immediate former President Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo did not sign into law. The Bill has been [reintroduced](#) in parliament after the Supreme Court of Ghana rejected [two legal bids](#) to get the Bill declared unconstitutional. The promulgation of this bill into law will mean that LGBTQ+ Ghanaians, already facing discrimination and marginalization, could also [be denied](#) access to jobs, healthcare, and housing.

Unsurprisingly, as calls for the bill to pass have been revamped, LGBTQI+ human rights defenders are increasingly being [targeted](#) with physical assault, threats and forced evictions. In Tamale and Wa, [two cities](#) where LGBTQI+ people and HRDs increasingly face hostilities, a journalist led a public campaign naming and shaming queer individuals, resulting in LGBTQI+ individuals being threatened and losing their businesses. Two pro-LGBTQI+ HRDs are currently homeless after one was beaten, fined, and banished, and the other received a death threat. Traditional authorities lead the anti-LGBTQI+ campaigns that have left LGBTQI+ individuals [endangered](#). While acknowledging the severity of the plight of LGBTQI+ persons across the country, civil society groups have [called](#) for accountability from traditional and religious authorities, media houses and the state.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The fate of the ECOWAS and the AES remain inextricably tied to their combined ability to rein in elite excesses, recognize dissent, promote and protect the freedoms of expression and association, and entrench fairness and equality in the institutional, political and social fabric of the countries across the West African subregion. While the quality of democracy and the fate of human rights defenders across the subregion do not suggest immediate outcomes for democratic renaissance and stability, the chances could be greatly enhanced if the relevant institutions would adhere to these recommendations.

3.1 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

It is recommended that CSOs must pursue:

I. Cross-border solidarity & regional coalitions

- Establish networks within country and across borders to share resources, lessons, and knowledge across ECOWAS/AES boundaries to support defenders within their borders, in exile or displaced.
- Document incidences of attacks, abductions, illegal arrests and forced disappearances.
- Amplify cases of human rights violations and abuses as well as positive outcomes in human rights advocacy.

II. Legal advocacy and strategic litigation

- Sustain an unrelenting advocacy for the independence and the integrity of the judiciary.
- Confront and challenge illegal restrictions and unjust prosecutions targeting civil society and human rights defenders.
- Advocate and protest against repressive legislation (assembly, association, counter-terrorism) using local and regional courts to set precedents.

III. Emergency protection and relocation networks

- Establish local and international networks for solidarity and information-sharing in order to stay ahead of emerging risks to human rights defenders across the West African subregion.

- Collaborate with build synergies with local and regional rapid-response systems for human rights defenders across the West African subregion.

IV. Online safety, secure communications and countersurveillance measures

- Train defenders on encrypted messaging, safe online practices, and anonymous reporting tools.

V. Media collaboration and awareness campaigns

- Leverage independent media both locally and internationally to spread information on human rights violations and injustices, and pressure authorities to do the right thing.

3.2 ECOWAS

As a regional body, ECOWAS must:

I. Operationalize a regional rapid-response mechanism for HRD protection

- Institute an ECOWAS Emergency Civic Protection Fund for legal aid, temporary relocation, and emergency medical/psychosocial support.
- Map national focal points and safe houses in stable countries for HRDs fleeing persecution (especially from AES states).

II. Create an ECOWAS Civic Space and Repression Monitoring System (CSRMS)

- Establish a data-driven civic space observatory within the ECOWAS Commission's Political Affairs Directorate to monitor indicators like protest bans, arbitrary arrests, NGO closures, and internet shutdowns.
- Publish quarterly Civic Space Status Reports for all member states and AES countries.
- Enhance cross-border capacity support and agency of human rights institutions in the sub-region.

III. Use political leverage and mediation to protect HRDs in transitional regimes

- Advocate for the inculcation of HRD protection clauses and civic space benchmarks into political transition roadmaps in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.
- Enhance diplomatic and mediation interventions in countries experiencing worst forms of violations and repression.

IV. Fast-track the adoption of a binding ECOWAS Human Rights Defenders Protection Protocol

- Collaborate with the ACHPR, civil society and human rights experts to draft and adopt a legally binding regional instrument that defines, recognizes, and protects HRDs.
- Ensure it provides legal safeguards, emergency support provisions, and clearly mandates member state compliance.

V. Revise and expand the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance

- Enhance and expand protections for civic actors, freedom of expression, assembly, press, and digital rights.
- Include mechanisms to track, report, and respond to violations by member states and transitional regimes.
- Tie electoral integrity assessments and ECOWAS mechanisms to respect for civic space and HRD protection.

VI. Strengthen access to justice through the ECOWAS Court of Justice

- Reinforce the independence and jurisdiction of the ECOWAS Court to hear HRD and civic space violations.
- Consider appointing a Special Rapporteur on Civic Space and HRDs within ECOWAS' legal architecture.

VII. Convene an annual ECOWAS Civic Space and Democracy Dialogue

- Institutionalize a yearly high-level forum involving governments, CSOs, journalists, regional courts, and donors.

- Use the platform to assess progress, review challenges, and promote coordination on protecting civic freedoms across the region.

3.3 ECOWAS Member States:

The member states of ECOWAS must:

I. Legal and institutional reform

- Adopt national frameworks recognizing HRD status, per ACHPR Resolution 376 (LX)
- Repeal or amend restrictive NGO laws, anti-terrorism measures, and assembly regulations
- In the case of Sierra Leone, the National Counterterrorism Act of 2024 must be thoroughly reviewed to address abuse by state authority.

II. Strengthen national accountability and justice

- Investigate and prosecute abuses, including crackdowns on protests and enforced disappearances.
- Ensure the safety of journalists and civil society activists.

III. Participate actively in ECOWAS-level mechanisms

- Develop an ECOWAS Protection Protocol for HRDs and civic space monitors.
- Promote regional press and digital rights standards.

3.4 The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

To address the challenges in the sub-region and across the continent, ACHPR must:

I. Mandate more targeted country visits and reporting

- Prioritize high-risk countries (Niger, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria).
- Document incidents and issue findings with actionable recommendations.

II. Advocate adoption of HRD-specific legislation

- Encourage member states to implement the ACHPR's Resolution 376 to legally recognize and protect defenders.

III. Condemn reprisals and restrictive laws

- Use the Special Rapporteur's platform to oppose arbitrary arrests and bans on civil society.

IV. Support digital safety and coordination tools for HRDs

- Promote civic-tech innovations and secure reporting mechanisms developed in coordination with CSOs

V. Collaborate with ECOWAS on protocols and enforcement

- Support regional adoption of civic space standards and HRD protection measures

3.5 United Nations & International Bodies

The state of human rights defenders and activists has international implications. The UN and other supranational bodies must:

I. Diplomatic advocacy and conditional engagement

- Insist on governments honoring human rights treaties and protecting HRDs, as part of bilateral and multilateral commitments on HRDs

II. Financial & capacity-building support

- Support the training of CSOs in legal action, digital security, crisis response, and organizational resilience

III. Monitoring and rapid reporting platforms

- Ensure UN OHCHR and Special Rapporteurs regularly monitor the ECOWAS and the AES.
- Issue alerts when reprisals occur—e.g., abducted journalists, mass arrests, etc.

IV. Integrate digital rights into human rights strategies

- Combat online repression, disinformation, and surveillance threats facing defenders and civil society

V. Support ECOWAS enforcement mechanisms

- Back the reform of the ECOWAS Court and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to ensure HRD protections are enforceable.
- Provide technical support for protocol drafting and implementation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The evidence reveals deteriorating conditions regarding the exercise of political freedoms and civil liberties in the region. Countries which served as the benchmark in the region on human rights are gradually retreating from the gains and showing growing signs of violations and weaponization of the civic space. Indeed, the first half of 2025 was rife with threats to human rights defenders across ECOWAS and AES member states in the form of arbitrary arrests, surveillance, enforced disappearances, and violent reprisals, particularly in authoritarian and transitional contexts. These hazards transpired in a hostile climate of media restrictions, digital repression, and the weaponization of legal frameworks to silence dissent. Somehow, unfazed by all these, human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society actors remain unwavering in their demand for transparency and accountability from power.

The recommendations presented in this report are intended to offer a clear, actionable roadmap for civil society, national governments, regional economic communities, networks and other international bodies to undo the repression of criticism and dissent and engender an atmosphere cordial to the promotion of human rights. Human rights defenders can only be safe and secure when the institutions mandated to protect the rights and freedoms that affirm humanity to be dignified and sacred, embrace a culture of stability, inclusion, and equality.

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