

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING

OUTLOOK

2025



Credit: WANEP NEWS (A Map of West Africa showing the geographic location of reported incidents 2024)



WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

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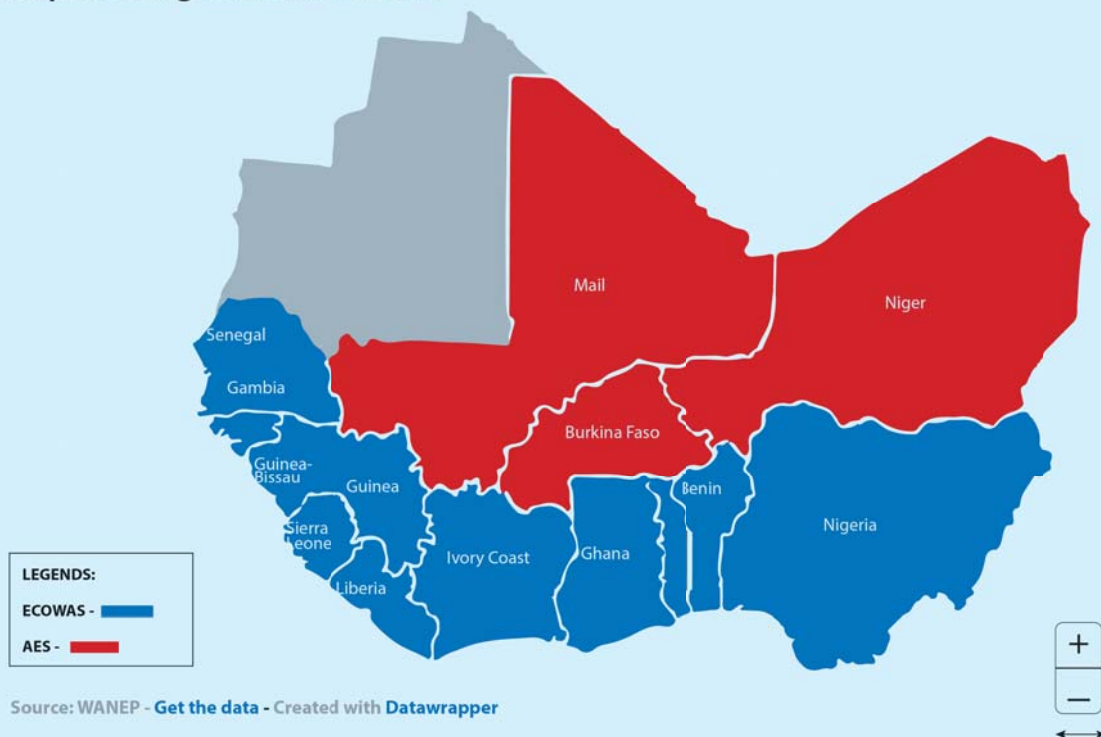
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1.0 Introduction

Despite growing political and socio-economic challenges, the West Africa region recorded notable milestones in the governance, peace and security landscape in 2024. Senegal held its presidential and legislative elections in March and November 2024, respectively, while Ghana successfully conducted its elections in December 2024. The subsequent political transitions following the elections in the two countries were generally peaceful. In Senegal, Diomaye Faye of the opposition Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (PASTEF) party won the presidential election on 24 March 2024, after incumbent President Macky Sall completed his constitutionally mandated two-term limit.¹ Similarly, in Ghana, former President John Dramani Mahama of the opposition National Democratic

Congress (NDC) emerged victorious in the 7 December 2024 election, following the conclusion of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's two-term tenure.² These elections are significant milestones in consolidating democracy in both countries, considered beacons of democracy in West Africa, not only because opposition parties secured victories but also because they present the best examples of resilient democracies at a time when the region is facing challenges of waning trust in the democracy agenda by its citizens. In Togo and Cape Verde, legislative and regional elections were held in April and December 2024, respectively, providing an opportunity to promote political representation, strengthen local governance, and ensure inclusive civil participation in governance processes.

Map showing ECOWAS and AES



Despite these gains, inter-party tensions and post-election violence were recorded in Senegal and Ghana, which were linked to discontent over the rising cost of living and governance deficit. In Guinea-Bissau, the dissolution of the National Assembly in December 2023 by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló has sparked a political crisis. He accused lawmakers and some members of his government of weak response to the incidence

of attempted coups and violence. The President also postponed the legislative election initially scheduled for 24 November 2024, citing logistical and financial constraints.³ While these constraints are critical, the underlying issues are deeply rooted in the lingering constitutional crisis and political fragmentation plaguing the country's governance landscape.

¹ AlJazeera (2024). Senegal's ruling PASTEF party secures a large majority in parliament. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/21/senegals-ruling-pastef-party-secures-large-majority-in-parliament> (Accessed 23 December 2024).

² Joyonline (2024). EC declares election 2024 winner. Available at: www.myjoyonline.org (Accessed 23 December 2024).

³ BTI Transformation Index (2024). Guinea Bissau-Country Report 2024. Available at: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GNB> (Accessed 26 December 2024).

The transitional processes in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have been marred by the exclusion of key stakeholders, leading to reduced legitimacy and limited national consensus on the way forward. Additionally, persistent uncertainties surrounding governance frameworks, electoral timelines, and security conditions have further complicated these transitions. As a result, the military regimes in these countries have failed to adhere to the deadlines initially agreed upon with ECOWAS mediators, prolonging the instability and delaying a return to constitutional rule. On 25 May 2024, Burkina Faso's Captain Ibrahim Traoré announced a five-year extension to the transition period, effective 2 July 2024.⁴ In Mali, the presidential election of 4 February 2024 was postponed indefinitely by the military government following the adoption of amendments to the constitution as voted during the referendum conducted on 18 June 2024, with a low voter turnout of 39.4 per cent out of 8.4 million registered voters.⁵ Although the referendum represents a significant step toward restoring constitutional rule in Mali, concerns about the limited participation of key stakeholders, including opposition parties and civil society organisations, in the electoral process and the growing insecurity contributed to the low voter turnout.⁶ The transitional processes in Guinea and Niger were also characterised by a lack of concrete steps towards restoring civilian rule. The 2024 Amnesty International Report further emphasises the growing use of decrees to suppress dissenting views and the arbitrary arrests of political opponents in military regimes. According to the report, about 47 people died in clashes with security agencies during protests against the military government of Guinea between June 2022 and March 2024⁷. The report also accuses the military governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger of cracking down on political dissents.⁸

The January 2024 decision of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso to withdraw from ECOWAS to establish the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has introduced significant complexities with implications for regional stability and ECOWAS' democracy agenda. While the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and

Government approved the withdrawal, it offered a six-month transitional period (29 January - 29 July 2025) for potential readmission if the states reconsider their decision.⁹

The region remains challenged with violent extremism, organised crime and communal violence, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria and Niger. The expanded threats of extremism to the littoral states of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Ghana compound the peace and security stability of the region. Recent armed attacks near Burkina Faso's borders with northern Ghana, Benin, and Togo highlight extremist groups' growing strength and expansion into coastal states. From January to December 2024, 1,802 security incidents were reported in the northern regions of the four coastal countries, including the increasing use of improvised explosive devices.¹⁰ This contrasts with 450 incidents reported in the previous two years across coastal West Africa.¹¹ The frequent cross-border and internal displacement of populations has increased pressure on weak social services such as health, nutrition and education and impeded access to limited vital resources, including food, drinking water, and housing. Furthermore, there has been heightened tension among communities, while in some areas, it has led to prejudice and violence against minorities.¹²

The interface of global geopolitical conflicts and economic insecurity raises the stakes of the competitive influence by the global North, Russia, China and Middle East influence in the region. The effect of the Russia-Ukraine and Middle East crises constitute additional complexities given the political alignments of the Sahel countries to Russia. As the influence of French and Western countries continues to wane among the local population in these countries, speculations suggest that Iran could capitalise on this regional shift to expand its military and economic presence in the Sahel.¹³ These geopolitical realignments challenge ECOWAS' regional strategies and effectiveness, and have the potential to reshape its governance and security policies and framework.

⁴ Burkina Faso junta extends its transition term by 5 years. <https://apnews.com/article/burkina-faso-military-junta-transition-election-coup-aa6f41f810c4d173748564b9c1f1acec> (Accessed 26 December 2024).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Freedom House (2025). Freedom in the World 2025: The Uplifting Battle to Safeguard Rights. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2025/uphill-battle-to-safeguard-rights> (Accessed on February 2025).

⁷ Amnesty International Report (2024). The Human Rights Wins 2024. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/> (Accessed 26 December 2024).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ West African Bloc Approves Historic Exit (BBC News). https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp31lly4jweo?at_campaign_type=owned&at_campaign=Social_Flow&at_ptr_name=twitter&at_link_origin=BBCAfrica&at_link_id=185AD0C4-BBA5-11EF-BBE5-C64E3A7A2F9C&at_format=link&at_link_type=web_link&at_medium=social&at_bbc_team=editorial&s=09 (Accessed 26 December 2024).

Climate change and slow-onset disasters impact natural resources, including water, land, food, fisheries, and biodiversity in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions. Health security threats comprising Mpox, Yellow Fever, Lassa Fever, Cholera, Meningitis, and Measles, were recorded in Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali in 2024.

2024 also presented reports of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), particularly against women and children, in countries such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Armed conflicts and complex humanitarian crises, especially in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin countries (LCBC), further endangered the security of women and girls, constraining their access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support and economic livelihoods.

The Annual Peace and Security Outlook highlights the governance and human security challenges that confronted the region in 2024 and projects the risks of vulnerabilities and threats that could inform specific intervention strategies in 2025.

2. 0 Democracy and Governance

Senegal's democratic governance faced a critical test when former President Macky Sall postponed the 3 February 2024 presidential election during the campaign period. The intervention of the Constitutional Council on 15 February 2024 ensured that the election was conducted to avert a constitutional crisis. Bassirou Diomaye Faye of the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) was elected as President with 54 per cent of the valid votes cast.¹⁴ The outcome of the election and the peaceful political transition demonstrated the resilience of Senegalese democracy, positioning the country as an example of democracy. In the November 2024 legislative elections, PASTEF won 130 of the 165 parliamentary seats, securing a majority to control the National Assembly.¹⁵ Despite this successful transition,

violent incidents were recorded in the lead-up to the presidential elections that led to the death of more than 15 people in Dakar and other cities across the country.¹⁶

In Ghana, the December 7 2024, presidential elections marked a historic moment as former President John Dramani Mahama of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) secured a majority vote of 56.55 per cent to be elected for a second tenure in office.¹⁷ The concession by the former Vice President and New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate, Mahamudu Bawumia, in line with his commitment to the signed political party Peace Pact, was a positive marker for democratic growth and consolidation in the country. Another landmark of the election in Ghana was the swearing-in of the country's first female Vice President, Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, indicating progress in gender-inclusive leadership at the highest level. These historic moments were marred by pre and post-election violence, as reported by the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) and Election Situation Room ESR data. Six deaths and 137 election-related violence were recorded, representing a 31 per cent decrease from the 198 incidents reported in the 2020 election cycle. This could be attributed to preventive actions by state agencies, civil society organisations, and other relevant institutions that have learned lessons from past antecedents. However, the incidents and fatalities underscore the need for strengthening responses to address vulnerabilities and threats that continue to manifest within Ghana's democratic landscape.

Legal reforms and legislative elections held in Cape Verde and Togo in the review period were equally significant. On 24 January 2024, Cape Verde's Parliament unanimously passed a new Nationality Law on citizenship¹⁸, allowing individuals to acquire citizenship after residing in the country for at least five years or by making significant investments, regardless of residency. This reform has been lauded as progressive in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and promote development in the country. In the local elections held in

¹⁰ Data from WANEP NEWS (January to December 2024). www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/01/2025).

¹¹ Eizenga, D., and Gnanguénon, A. (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism. Africa Security Brief No. 43. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. July 22, 2024. Available at: <https://africacenter.org> (Accessed 20 December 2024).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Another Crescent: Iran's Brewing Influence in the Sahel Region. Available at: <https://thegeopolitics.com/another-crescent-irans-brewing-influence-in-the-sahel-region/>. Accessed on 07/02/2025

¹⁴ Senegal opposition candidate Faye won 54 percent in presidential vote. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/27/senegal-oppositions-faye-won-over-54-of-vote-full-provisional-results>

¹⁵ Senegal's Constitutional Council Confirms Ruling Party's win in Parliamentary Elections. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/senegal-s-constitutional-council-confirms-ruling-party-s-win-in-parliamentary-elections/3406963> (Accessed 12/01/2025).

¹⁶ WANEP situation tracking reports on Senegal pre-during-after the election (Accessed 12/01/2025).

¹⁷ Joyonline (2024). EC declares election 2024 winner. Available at: www.myjoyonline.org (Accessed 23 December 2024).

¹⁸ Cape Verde Parliament unanimously approves amendment to law granting citizenship to members of the diaspora. Available at: <https://ck-obchodnikomora.cz/en/cape-verde-parliament-unanimously-approves-amendment-to-law-granting-citizenship-to-members-of-the-diaspora/> (Accessed 23 December 2024).

December 2024, the opposition African Party for Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV) defeated the ruling Movement for Democracy (MpD). Reports indicate that the election was marred by voter identity card buying and other irregularities, contributing to widespread public distrust. While 351,935 voters were registered, 176,756, representing 49.78 per cent, cast their votes.¹⁹ The low voter turnout was attributed to public discontent over economic hardship and lingering electoral irregularities.

In Togo, in the National Assembly elections of 29 April 2024, the ruling Union for the Republic (UNIR) secured 108 of the 113 contested seats.²⁰ This was followed by constitutional reforms initiated by President Faure Gnassingbé that transitioned the country from a presidential to a parliamentary governance system.²¹ Despite these changes, the reform has been criticised in that it bypassed Article 59(2) of the 1992 Constitution, which requires a referendum for changes to presidential elections. The new constitution, ratified in May 2024, eliminates direct presidential elections, giving the National Assembly authority to select the President of the Council of Ministers (PCM). The PCM will have a six-year term compared to the five-year term in the presidential system. Opposition parties have objected to the new reforms as it undermines democratic norms and disenfranchises voters. President Gnassingbé is expected to remain in office until 2031, extending his nearly 20-year reign. The consolidation of power by the UNIR has been considered a potential conflict driver that will deepen existing political tensions and public distrust.

In Benin, following a Constitutional Court ruling on 4 January 2024, highlighting inconsistencies in the electoral processes, the National Assembly adopted a revised code on 5 March 2024. Key changes include increasing the sponsorship threshold for presidential candidates from 10 to 15 per cent of Parliamentarians or Mayors in at least three-fifths of electoral districts. Additionally, political parties must now secure 20 per cent of the national vote - up from 10 per cent - to gain parliamentary or municipal seats.²² While intended to streamline the electoral process, these changes

have sparked concerns among opposition parties and civil society groups about reduced inclusivity and representation, potentially limiting smaller parties and new entrants. It could deepen political polarisation, erode public trust, and diminish voter engagement ahead of the 2026 elections.

As part of the implementation of the Truth, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (TRRC) report of The Gambia, notable progress has been made in transitional justice and constitutional reform processes. The Government and ECOWAS have launched a Joint Technical Committee to establish a hybrid court to prosecute gross human rights violations committed under former President Yahya Jammeh. On 22 April 2024, the National Assembly passed two bills to create a Special Prosecutor's Office and a Special Accountability Mechanism, advancing accountability efforts. The constitutional review process has also progressed. In May 2024, the Cabinet reviewed proposed amendments to the 2020 draft constitution after consultations with political parties and stakeholders. However, uncertainty looms over the proposed constitutional referendum timeline by the State, initially scheduled to be held by the end of 2024. Further delay in the review of the constitution could affect public trust in the legal reform process and broader governance.

In Liberia, the Government has prioritised anti-corruption and justice reforms to strengthen accountability and the rule of law. On 6 March 2024, a task force was established to recover state assets, signalling a strong stance against corruption. Amid citizens' demand for accountability, President Joseph Boakai signed an Executive Order on 2 May 2024, backed by a joint parliamentary resolution, to establish a Special War Crime Court for Liberia.²³ It is anticipated that the Court would investigate gross human rights violations committed during and after the civil conflict of 1989 to 2004.²⁴ These developments represent a critical opportunity for Liberia to strengthen governance, justice and the rule of law. However, in a post-conflict context, the processes require sensitivity to broaden public interest for transformative impact in 2025.

¹⁹ Parlamento: Oposição critica significativa taxa de abstenção nas eleições autárquicas e pede revisão da legislação. Available at: <https://www.balai.cv/noticias/parlamento-oposicao-critica-significativa-taxa-de-abstencao-nas-eleicoes-autarquicas-e-pede-revisao-da-legislacao/> (Accessed 23 December 2024).

²⁰ Togo's Ruling Party Dominates Legislative Elections, Winning 108 of 113 Seats. Available at: <https://www.togofirst.com/en/politics/0605-13976-togos-ruling-party-dominates-legislative-elections-winning-108-of-113-seats> (Accessed 23 December 2024).

²¹ Constitutional Reforms in Togo: Implications and Forecast. https://intelligensis.com/constitutional-revisions-in-togo-implications-and-forecast/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 23 December 2024).

²² Ibid.

²³ Liberian president signs order to create war crimes court. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/liberian-president-signs-order-create-war-crimes-court-2024-05-02/> (Accessed 10/01/2025).

²⁴ Ibid.

Following Sierra Leone's multi-tier elections of 24 June 2023, and the ensuing political tensions, a dialogue process facilitated by the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC), ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the Commonwealth culminated in a unity agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the major opposition party of the All People's Congress (APC). This initiative facilitated dialogue and led to an Independent Cross-Party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Review. The committee, comprising political parties, civil society organisations, the media, and international actors, submitted an 80-point recommendation for electoral reforms to President Julius Maada Bio in July 2024. Despite these efforts, Sierra Leone remains fragile, with ongoing threats such as political intimidation, violent attacks and an attempted coup in November 2024. These challenges could deepen political grievances and undermine inter-party commitment to dialogue and national unity.

As Cote d'Ivoire commences preparation for its next presidential election in 2025, President Alassane Ouattara has expressed interest in contesting for a fourth term.²⁵ In September 2024, the ruling party informally endorsed his candidacy, pending an official conclusion of his nomination. Ouattara's decision to contest could intensify political tensions and violence over term limits. It could also undermine public trust in Cote d'Ivoire's democratic processes. It can exacerbate protests along regional and ethnic lines. Compounding these challenges is the collapse of the alliance between the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) and the ruling RHDP party, a pivotal event that could reshape the political landscape. This breakdown has worsened intra-party disputes in FPI, compromised reconciliation efforts, and destabilised political alliances. The Independent Electoral Commission's 2024 voter registration exercise recorded an additional 4.5 million voters, broadening participation. However, the socio-political landscape remains fraught with challenges, including rising public disenchantment with the political process and distrust over the integrity of the electoral process. Perception of entrenched gender inequality and deep-seated

political, regional, and ethnic tensions present significant risks to the country's aspirations for transparent and peaceful elections in October 2025.

In Guinea-Bissau, a critical point of contention is the persistent disputes between the legislative and executive arms of government over the president's authority to dissolve the National Assembly, as enshrined in the National Constitution. In December 2023, President Embalo dissolved the National Assembly for the second time since he came to power in 2020, raising the prospect of political turmoil.²⁶ In addition to dissolving the legislature, the President accused the lawmakers and some members of his government of passivity in the face of violence and attempted coup. This led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Nuno Nabiam as Special Adviser to the President on 21 February 2024, citing presidential interference in democratic institutions. Another consequence is the inability to renew the mandate of the Executive Secretariat members of the National Electoral Commission, whose appointment expired in April 2022 and requires confirmation of the dissolved National Assembly. The judiciary was also affected by the resignation of the President of the Supreme Court, José Pedro Sambu, and six Supreme Court Judges were suspended.²⁷ The dysfunction in the judiciary has hindered its essential role in certifying candidates, resolving electoral disputes, and safeguarding democratic processes. These developments highlight the country's political crisis and undermining efforts to strengthen democratic governance. Political deadlock and stakeholder disagreement would likely heighten tensions and exacerbate political instability.

The region also faced political complexities related to the transition processes in countries experiencing unconstitutional changes of government. The military governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger extended the existing democratic transition timetables.²⁸ National dialogues held in Mali and Burkina Faso between April and May 2024 recommended the transition extensions to 2027 and 2029, respectively.²⁹ The transitional authorities in Mali suspended the activities of political parties

²⁵ Ivory Coast president signals he would like to run for a fourth term. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ivory-coast-president-says-he-would-like-continue-serving-president-2025-01-09/> (Accessed 10/01/2025).

²⁶ Guinea-Bissau President dissolves parliament after clashes. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/guinea-bissau-president-dissolves-parliament-after-foiled-coup-2023-12-04/> (Accessed 12/01/2025).

²⁷ BTI Transformation Index (2024). Guinea Bissau-Country Report 2024. Available at: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GNB> (Accessed 26 December 2024).

²⁸ Is West Africa Heading Towards A Protracted Military Transition? Available at: <https://wanep.org/wanep/is-west-africa-heading-towards-a-protracted-military-transition/>

²⁹ Political transition and democratic challenges in central Sahel. Available at: <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/political-transition-and-democratic-challenges-in-central-sahel/> (Accessed 26/01/2025)

and associations on 10 April 2024, arresting several political leaders who contravened the suspension notice.³⁰ The suspension order was lifted in July 2024, following advocacy and dialogues with civil society organisations and opposition groups, enabling a resumption of political activities.³¹ In Niger, legal proceedings by the State against former President Mohamed Bazoum were concluded on 14 June 2024, with the removal of his immunity to stand trial for high treason, conspiracy to undermine state security, condoning terrorism and escalating political tensions in the country.³² Guinea's 24-month transition plan, as agreed with ECOWAS in 2022, ended in December 2024 with little progress toward the conclusion and return to democratic governance.³³ Stringent civic and political restrictions and the transitional authorities' inability to abide by the timeline have intensified tensions with the political opposition, threatening further instability. These developments underscore the fragility of transitional governance and the persistent challenges facing political inclusivity and democratic restoration in the region.



Another notable factor within the period is the communiqué issued by the military leaders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on 28 January 2024, announcing their withdrawal of membership from ECOWAS. Prior to this announcement, the three states formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as a cooperative strategy to tackle violent extremism by armed non-state actors in the Sahel countries.³⁴

The ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government approved the withdrawal but offered a six-month readmission window of January to July 2025.³⁵ This will allow these countries to reconsider their decision and reengage with ECOWAS to preserve regional cooperation and stability. The political impasse has strained ECOWAS' relations with Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, undermined regional security cooperation as well as the effectiveness of sub-regional security mechanisms, such as the G5 Sahel, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and the Accra Initiative anchored on mutual obligations of member states to respond to transnational insecurities in the region. Current analysis indicates that the regional bloc will lose 17 per cent of its 446 million people and more than half of its total geographical area relevant for trade and economic development.³⁶ The ripple effect of this division includes diplomatic disputes between Benin and Niger and also between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. These developments underscore a complex and fragile regional environment with significant implications for peace, security, and governance in 2025.

Rising geopolitical tension between the West and Russia complicated by the war in Ukraine as well as the Middle-East crisis has rippling political, security and socio-economic implications in West Africa as manifest in rising inflation, food insecurity, energy shortages, unemployment and widening poverty gaps. It has recurrent agitations, protests and labour strikes by citizens. Between January and December 2024, the region recorded **924** protests related to economic hardships, resulting in **216** fatalities and **595** injuries.³⁷ The French-Russia-China dichotomy has led to a realignment of foreign policy engagements across the region.

³⁰ Mali: Junta Suspends Political Parties, Associations. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/12/mali-junta-suspends-political-parties-associations> (Accessed 26/01/2025)

³¹ Mali junta re-authorizes political activities suspended in April. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/11/mali-junta-re-authorizes-political-activities-suspended-in-april_6680751_4.html (Accessed 26/01/2025)

³² Niger court scraps immunity of deposed President Bazoum. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/14/niger-court-scraps-immunity-of-deposed-president-bazoum>

³³ Guinea proposes a shorter transition timeline of 24 months. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/guinea-junta-proposes-shorter-transition-timeline-24-months-2022-10-21/> (Accessed 12/01/2025).

³⁴ The withdrawal of three West African states from ECOWAS. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2024/06/the-withdrawal-of-three-west-african-states-from-ecowas/#:~:text=On%2028%20January%202024%2C%20the,%2C%20the%20regional%20economic%20bloc.> (Accessed 27/01/2025)

³⁵ West African bloc approves historic exit of military-run states. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp31lny4jweo?at_campaign_type=owned&at_campaign=Social_Flow&at_ptr_name=twitter&at_link_origin=BBCAfrica&at_link_id=185AD0C4-BBA5-11EF-BBE5-C64E3A7A2F9C&at_format=link&at_link_type=web_link&at_medium=social&at_bbc_team=editorial&s=09 (Accessed 12/01/2025).

³⁶ West African bloc approves historic exit of military-run states. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp31lny4jweo?at_campaign_type=owned&at_campaign=Social_Flow&at_ptr_name=twitter&at_link_origin=BBCAfrica&at_link_id=185AD0C4-BBA5-11EF-BBE5-C64E3A7A2F9C&at_format=link&at_link_type=web_link&at_medium=social&at_bbc_team=editorial&s=09 (Accessed 12/01/2025).

³⁷ WANEP NEWS. www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/01/2025).

The strained relationship between France and their former colonies. Beyond the disputes with the Sahel countries of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal have requested France to withdraw its troops from their territories.³⁸ The withdrawals would end France's decades-long military presence in these countries. These realignments are opening new frontiers of partnerships, such as China, Turkey, Brazil, the Gulf States, and Russia. Furthermore, stringent Structural Adjustment Programmes and austerity measures linked to International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans by most countries have generated social unrest and increased popular sentiment for UCGs and Russia's influence in the region.

Digital technology and social media enable civil society, governments and regional organisations, such as ECOWAS, to integrate AI-powered analysis to monitor security threats, detect extremist activity, and strengthen border control. In several countries, social media is utilised as an alternative medium to appraise and interface with state agencies to push alternative discourse spaces for accountability and good governance. It circumvents the shortcomings of the traditional media, which often presents restrictive channels and is therefore not ideal for popular participation and inclusion of diverse opinions needed as pressure points for government policies and actions.³⁹ Technologies have amplified West African voices to impact governance, especially through platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and X. In Senegal and Nigeria, civil society groups, political opposition groups and coalitions leveraged on social media platforms using various hashtags such as #FreeSenegal, #RecallYourMP, #TextYourMP, and #OccupyParliament in Ghana, and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria as counter pressures to elicit appropriate feedback from the State. Although AI and social media platforms have proven valuable for political education, active discussion of public policies, and mobilising people for voter registration, they were also exploited for harmful purposes. These include spreading propaganda, fake news, information disorder, misinformation, disinformation and violent communication, which intensified tensions and strained relationships.

2. 1. Key Outlook in 2025

2. 1. 1. Complex Transitions and Governance Instability

- West Africa continues to experience political instability, with military-led transitions shaping governance trajectories. In Burkina Faso, the military government of Captain Ibrahim Traoré extended its transition plan by five years with a return to democratic rule in 2029. In Niger, national dialogue aimed at defining the country's political transition was held from February 16 to 20, 2025, but the recommendations were still awaiting official approval. If validated, details on the implementation of the 5-year mandate will be clarified, including its start date and potential for renewal. These transitions underscore a shift in strategy that portends not only national and regional political uncertainty but also the future of multilateralism for security, economic and social capital development, the nature and influence of intergovernmental organisations and mechanisms to regional security, as well as the state of regional, continental or globalised instruments that also requires concerted regional obligations for impact. Specifically, it jeopardises the actualisation of the ECOWAS Agenda 2050, designed as a "people-centred" development with the overall well-being of West African citizens, the regional vision of citizen-free movement and trade, and the AU Agenda 2063. Without clear roadmaps for inclusive transitions, trust in governance will be further eroded, exacerbating socio-political vulnerabilities and loss of faith in democracy.
- Unlike the three AES countries of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the military government of Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya in Guinea has retained cooperation and its membership in ECOWAS. Despite recording some progress, the 10-point transition roadmap negotiated with the ECOWAS is criticised for lacking inclusivity of other political actors, transparency, commitment to timelines, and implementation of budgetary obligations. The Transition Government has announced plans to hold a constitutional referendum in May 2025. This process would likely set the tone for the election cycle in the country.

³⁸ Ivory Coast says French troops to leave West African nation. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y7zz99jlxo>. (Accessed 07/02/2025)

³⁹ Frimpong, O.B. (2020). Social Media in West Africa: A Security Quagmire? Africa Up Close. A blog of the Africa Programme. Wilson Center. Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/social-media-in-west-africa-a-security-quagmire> (Accessed 20/08/2024).

Additional concerns are raised on the potential conflict of interest, considering that General Doumbouya has indicated his interest in contesting elections while his military-led government is also responsible for overseeing the political transition process. A growing perception is the fear that the process will be biased in his favour to win the election. This could trigger political tension among other political parties and interest groups that will challenge the transparency and credibility of the entire transition.

2. 1. 2. Upcoming Elections in 2025

- Côte d'Ivoire's general election scheduled for October 2025 is poised to be very competitive in the region with unpredictable outcomes. It signals increased space for political tolerance. Historically, Côte d'Ivoire's election has faced disputed processes, violence, and political instability. President Alassane Ouattara's anticipated bid for a fourth term raises concerns over constitutional manipulation, further weakening the democratic system. If Ouattara secures another term, it could heighten ethnic divisions, undermining the country's social cohesion and national reconciliation efforts. It will reinforce the region-wide perception of sit-tight leadership, elite capture of the political space and tenure elongations, which fuels the citizens' complacency with the ideals of democracy.
- The electoral landscape in Guinea-Bissau is fraught with power struggles as opposition leaders have claimed that President Embaló's tenure ends on February 27 2025, which contradicts the President's assertion that his term extends until September 2025 with presidential elections due in November 2025. The President appears inclined to hold legislative elections before presidential polls, expecting to regain parliamentary control that bolsters his re-election chances. Meanwhile, the Parliament remains effectively non-functional, fueling accusations of political interference in the operations of democratic institutions. This pattern of governance dysfunction mirrors weak institutional checks and balances in line with democratic tenets. The outlook for 2025 remains volatile, with the potential for escalating political tensions, contested legitimacy, and governance stagnation.
- Togo's 2025 senatorial elections will occur in an increasingly challenging political landscape following the National Assembly's March 2024 constitutional revision that eliminated direct presidential elections. In line with this review, incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé will assume the newly created role of President of the Council of Ministers (PCM) - a position with full executive, military, and civil authority, renewable indefinitely. This will extend Gnassingbé's 20 years in power. The February 2025 senatorial elections will be conducted with two-thirds of senators elected by local authorities and one-third directly appointed by the PCM. Opposition parties, including l'Alliance Nationale, pour le changement (ANC), and Dynamique pour la Majorité du Peuple (DMP), have rejected the new electoral process, which they described as illegitimate and a "*constitutional coup*." The planned boycott indicates the non-inclusivity of opposition stakeholders in the reforms, undermining a fairground of political competition. Since 2022, political rallies have been banned while the security forces continue to crack down on the opposition. The significant shift in the democratic system could heighten the risk of longer-term democratic collapse in the country, especially as public trust continues to erode, provoking widespread unrest and violence in Togo.

2. 1. 3. Protracted political disagreements undermine democratic stability in Benin

- The adoption of a revised electoral code on March 5 2024, by the National Assembly increased the sponsorship threshold for presidential candidates from 10 to 15 per cent of Parliamentarians or Mayors in at least three-fifths of electoral districts. It also entails that political parties must secure 20 per cent of the national vote, increased from the previous 10 per cent threshold, to gain parliamentary or municipal seats. The law raises concerns that it would limit the space for inclusive political participation and deepen mistrust in the electoral process. Juxtaposed to this development is the reported intimidation of political opponents, which shrinks political space for consensus building and inclusive participation. It suggests a higher risk of protests, demonstrations, and agitations in the lead-up to the 2026 presidential elections

2. 1. 4. Geopolitics and Regional Security

- In 2025, West Africa's security landscape will continue to be shaped by ongoing geopolitical realignments and the expansion of armed non-state actors. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger's shift towards Russia, marked by security agreements with the Wagner Group, reinforced the diplomatic tensions and polarity with Western powers, particularly France, whose influence in these countries has waned significantly. Extremist groups such as JNIM and Katibat Hanifa continue to expand operations in ungoverned spaces, intensifying insecurity across the Sahel and the northern corridors of Cote d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo. The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has intensified efforts to conduct joint military operations to combat insecurity. However, their limited military resources and financial constraints undermine the sustainability of such initiatives. Acquiring advanced hardware, intelligence systems, and logistical support remains a significant challenge, weakening operational effectiveness.

Furthermore, the covert influence of external actors and informal support networks for armed groups complicates the security landscape. These groups leverage unconventional warfare tactics, asymmetric capabilities, and illicit funding streams, making them resilient against state-led counterterrorism efforts. Addressing these complexities requires enhanced military cooperation and a strategic reassessment of regional security dynamics.

- Strategic policy realignments and enhanced regional security frameworks are crucial for stabilising West Africa. ECOWAS, guided by the principle of subsidiarity, remains the primary regional peace and security mechanism. However, the AES and its divergence from ECOWAS highlights the need for broader multilateral involvement and a coordinated response to regional security threats. The African Union (AU) could be critical in forging a tripartite security arrangement between ECOWAS, AES, and development partners. This framework could define clear obligations, joint deployments, and coordinated operations, ensuring collective responsibility in tackling

terrorism, organised crime, and governance challenges. Such an approach would require a commitment to cooperation while balancing concerns over national sovereignty and external partnerships. Furthermore, the AU's mediation role could help bridge the existing discord, ensuring that ECOWAS and AES align their strategies within a broader continental security architecture. By fostering structured engagement, resource-sharing, and joint operations, a more inclusive and effective security framework can emerge, mitigating threats that transcend borders and impact all countries in the region.

2. 2. Key Resilient Factors

- The AU remains pivotal in mediation and preventive diplomacy, engaging the Transitional Governments (TGs) in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea. This provides a diplomatic channel to strengthen dialogue with the TGs. A joint AU-led mechanism could facilitate security cooperation, political engagement, and conflict resolution between ECOWAS and AES countries. This framework could focus on gradual reintegration, security coordination, and governance benchmarks, ensuring that regional stability efforts remain inclusive while respecting sovereignty concerns. Such an approach strengthens diplomatic ties while addressing shared security challenges.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) are essential in reshaping regional governance and advocating for inclusive reforms, accountability, and human security. ECOWAS requires technical support and institutional recalibration to restore credibility. However, the proposed Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of West Africa could serve as a structured platform for CSO engagement, bridging grassroots concerns with regional decision-making. If well-organized, it could strengthen participatory governance, enhance policy responsiveness, and foster citizen-driven accountability, ensuring that reforms are grounded in regional realities.
- There is a growing demand for good governance among citizens and civil society in the region, with increasing resistance against the suppression

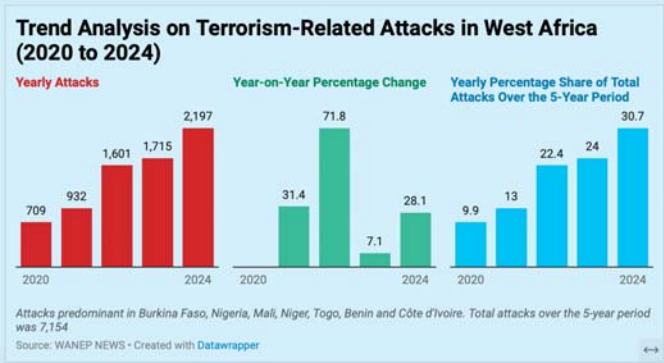
of inclusive participation in democratic processes. Digital tools and social media have transformed the civic space, enabling citizens and CSOs to demand transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance. Online activism and peaceful protests have heightened political awareness and resilience, pressuring governments to be more responsive.

2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The AU Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), primarily through ECOWAS member states such as Senegal, Ghana and Togo, should intensify power mediation with continued bilateral engagement with ECOWAS to resolve strained relations with the AES countries and explore cooperation agreements that define partnership on mutual interest.
- The Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) of ECOWAS needs to intensify partnerships with CSOs and international stakeholders to initiate sustained multistakeholder dialogues with political actors and other stakeholders in Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, and Guinea Bissau. These dialogues should minimise distrust in the democratic process while mobilising confidence and commitment to conducting peaceful and credible elections.
- With support from the AU, ECOWAS, UNOWAS, and other development partners, West African governments should consider strengthening multistakeholder collaboration and platforms that integrate Election Management Bodies (EMBs), security agencies, and the judiciary. The platforms should draw lessons from past electoral processes to refine strategies for democratic policing, electoral integrity, and political transitions. A tripartite coordination model could enhance political dialogue, cross-institutional learning and crisis response mechanisms, fostering trust and confidence among political actors while reinforcing credible elections and governance stability across the region.

3.0 Organised Crime and Violent Extremism

In 2024, West Africa’s coastal states faced escalating security challenges due to the southward spread of terrorist activities from the Sahel. Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, and Togo reported increased attacks on civilians and security personnel in their northern regions. While Ghana has not experienced direct attacks, violent incidents involving extremist groups were recorded at its northern border with Burkina Faso. This trend underscores the threat to the security of the littoral states as well as to regional stability, especially when weighed against statistics from preceding years.



Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) indicated an increase of 2,197 terrorism-related and armed attack incidents in 2024, compared to 1,715 attacks reported in 2023, and 1601 attacks recorded in 2022⁴⁰ Data of conflict-related fatalities by the third quarter of 2024 was over 8,500, compared to 7,215 over the same period in 2023. The attacks were mainly targeted at civilians, security operatives and installations, government facilities, international organisations, and aid workers.

Prominent incidents timelines include the killing of over 600 people by terrorists in Barsalogho, Burkina Faso, on 24 August 2024;⁴¹ armed attack at the National Gendarmerie Academy and Modibo Keita International Airport Bamako, Mali’s capital resulting in the death of about 77 people on 17 September 2024;

⁴⁰ WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS). www.wanepsystems.net (Accessed 10/01/2025).
⁴¹ Massacre in Burkina Faso left 600 dead, double previous estimates, according to French security assessment - <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/04/africa/burkina-faso-massacre-600-dead-french-intel-intl/index.html> - (Accessed 14/01/2025)

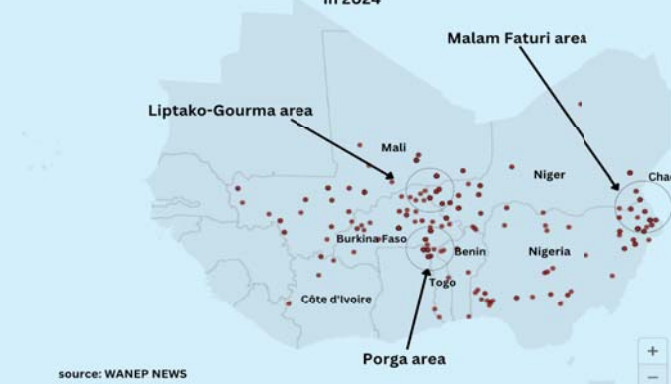
the killing of seven security personnel and five park rangers at National Park W in northern Benin on 24 July 2024;⁴² the attack at a military outpost in Kpinkankandi Togo, that led to the death of 12 soldiers on 20 July 2024;⁴³ clashes between non-state armed groups and a military patrol led to the death of 30 militants and 23 soldiers in Niger on 19 March 2024;⁴⁴ the killing of 21 people in an attack at Komonkuy, Kossi province, Burkina Faso, on 4 February 2024; the attack at Kaldiouani, Gourma province, that killed 50 civilians on 7 February 2024; the attack on three villages in Yatenga province resulted in 179 fatalities on 25 February 2024;⁴⁵ the death of 45 civilians, including children, in four separate attacks in Mopti and Ségou regions in Central Mali by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Dozo militia between January 3 to 27, 2024; the female suicide bombing that resulted in 32 deaths in Gwoza Local Government Area (LGA); and the killing of 16 persons by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Konduga LGA of Borno State in Northeast Nigeria.⁴⁶

Counter-insurgency efforts by security agencies in affected states have led to civilian casualties and reported human rights violations, especially in local communities. For instance, on 5 January 2024, an airstrike targeted at armed groups in Tiawa, Tillabéri region of Niger, caused reported deaths of over 50 civilians. A Human Rights Watch report indicates an extrajudicial killing by Burkina Faso's military of 223 civilians, including at least 56 children, in February 2024.⁴⁷ These incidents underscore the intensifying security crisis in the region, marked by the increasing vulnerability of the civilian population. Addressing these fatalities requires enhanced intelligence gathering and cooperation with hotspot communities to boost policies and regulations to protect affected populations.

Weak governance, the inability of the states to address security challenges as well as socio-economic difficulties, is exploited by armed groups to influence the attitude and actions of

the population in hotspot areas who succumb to their coercive approaches or propaganda for recruitment and ransom payments, taxes as well as cattle rustling and illegal gold mining.⁴⁸ In the Sahel, new groups have emerged, while others formed alliances to strengthen their territorial control at border communities, such as the Liptako-Gourma area bordering Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali; Tinzauátene borders of Algeria, Mali and Niger; Porga community borders of Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger; and Malam Faturi at Northern Nigeria border community with Niger and Chad.

Map Showing Prevalence of Terrorism-Related Attacks in Tri-Border Communities in 2024



The resurgence of extremist activities by the 'Lakurawa group'— mobilised initially in 2017 as a community-driven response to the growing influence of armed bandits in Sokoto state – has further complicated the security landscape of border communities in Northwest Nigeria (Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi states) and neighbouring Niger.⁴⁹ The group's transformation from a self-defence force into an extremist faction highlights the fragility of security governance in the region, where weak state presence, economic vulnerabilities and porous borders have created a vacuum for non-state armed actors to thrive. Strained relations between Nigeria and Niger, stemming from Niger's coup d'état in July 2023, have also affected joint military operations and given the Lakurawa group more space to expand.⁵⁰ In November 2024, the group attacked Mera town in the Augie Local Government Area

⁴⁰ WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS). www.wanepsystems.net (Accessed 10/01/2025).

⁴¹ Massacre in Burkina Faso left 600 dead, double previous estimates, according to French security assessment - <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/04/africa/burkina-faso-massacre-600-dead-french-intel-intl/index.html> - (Accessed 14/01/2025)

⁴² The 17 September Jihadist Attack in Bamako: Has Mali's Security Strategy Failed? - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/attaque-jihadiste-du-17-septembre-bamako-lechec-du-tout-securitaire-au-mali> - (Accessed 14/01/2025)

⁴³ Terrorist Attacks in Togo Spark Fears for Ghana's Security - <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/09/terrorist-attacks-in-togo-spark-fears-for-ghanas-security/> (Accessed 15/01/2025)

⁴⁴ Islamist militants kill at least 20 Nigerian troops, security sources say <https://www.voanews.com/a/islamist-militants-kill-at-least-20-nigerian-troops-security-sources-say/7950960.html> (Accessed 10/01/2025).

⁴⁵ About 170 people were killed in Burkina Faso. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/3/around-170-people-executed-in-burkina-faso-attacks-regional-official-says> (Accessed 10/01/2025).

⁴⁶ Bombing in Nigeria's Borno State kills over a dozen, authorities say. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/30-dead-100-injured-after-multiple-suicide-bombings/story?id=111566210>; <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20240802-bombing-in-nigeria-s-borno-state-kills-over-a-dozen-authorities-says>

⁴⁷ Burkina Faso's military summarily executed 223 civilians in a single day. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/apr/25/220-civilians-burkina-faso-human-rights-watch-killings-two-villages> (Accessed 10/01/2025).

⁴⁸ WANEP Peace and Security Report – Outlook 2022. www.wanep.org (Accessed 20/12/2022).

⁴⁹ Nigeria's terror group Lakurawa is nothing new – it exists because of government's failure: analysts - <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-terror-group-lakurawa-is-nothing-new-it-exists-because-of-governments-failure-analysts-243623> (Accessed 14/01/2025)

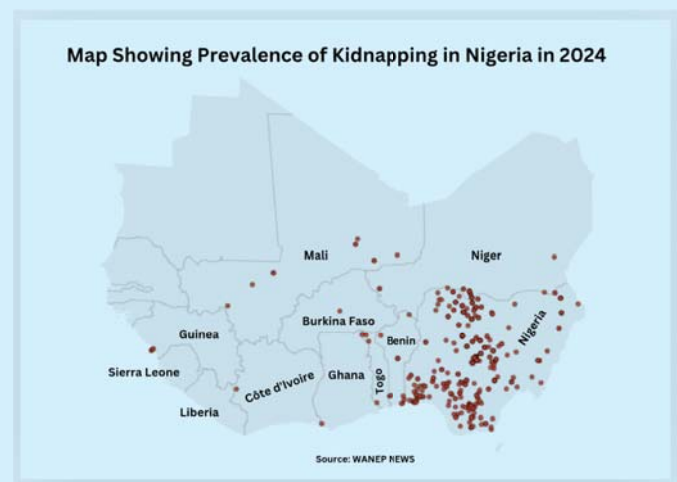
⁵⁰ Lakurawa, the new armed group wreaking havoc on the Nigeria-Niger border; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/10/lakurawa-the-new-armed-group-wreaking-havoc-on-the-nigeria-niger-border>; (Accessed 15/01/2025)

(LGA) of Kebbi State after the community refused to pay 'zakat' levy⁵¹. The attack resulted in the rustling of at least 100 cattle and the killing of 15 people.⁵² Lakurawa's ties to ISIS-affiliated groups in the Sahel, particularly from Mali and Niger, influence their ideological position to establish a local caliphate similar to the operational approach of Boko Haram and ISWAP in Northeast Nigeria and Niger.⁵³ In Southeast Nigeria, groups linked to separatist agitations target security personnel, government facilities, and civilians, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current security strategies in addressing recurring security threats.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees across the Sahel and Nigeria worsened in 2024. An estimated 3,150,710 million were displaced in the Central Sahel and in Liptako-Gourma, of which 67 per cent were from Burkina Faso, 6,067,908 million from the Lake Chad basin, with Nigeria hosting an estimated 74 per cent of all refugees.⁵⁴ The number of children displaced in the Central Sahel of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, has increased significantly over the past five years, from an estimated 320,000 in 2019 to 1.8 million in 2024. These statistics represent over 50 per cent of the 3.2 million displaced people in these three countries.⁵⁵ The recent spillover of the crisis into coastal states has led to a rising influx of refugees from the Central Sahel and an increase in internally displaced populations. As of August, displacement data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggest a total of 138,232 IDPs, including 25,852 in Benin, 58,079 in Côte d'Ivoire, 7,242 in Ghana, and 47,059 in Togo. This growing displacement underscores the urgent need for coordinated regional responses to address humanitarian needs and mitigate the broader security and socio-economic implications of the crisis.⁵⁶

Food insecurity, driven by recurrent violence, economic instability, inflation, and climate shocks, persists. Countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria continue to face the most severe levels

of food insecurity, disrupted by armed conflicts which limit market access and displace farming communities. In Nigeria, over 31.8 million people were impacted,⁵⁷ which marks a rise from the statistics of 18.6 million people reported in 2023.⁵⁸ The World Food Programme (WFP) projects that an estimated 33.1 million people in Nigeria will face acute food insecurity in 2025.⁵⁹ Beyond extremist attacks, incidents of banditry, kidnapping, gang and cult violence, armed robbery, homicide, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) were recorded in the period. Banditry remains a significant threat in Nigeria, with over 194 incidents recorded between January and December 2024, resulting in 1,236 fatalities.⁶⁰ Bandits have exploited security gaps in affected communities to control resources such as mining sites and impose tax regimes.



Kidnapping for ransom has evolved into a conflict economy used by criminal networks to sustain their operations in the region. Expansion of kidnapping across social classes and economic divides is predominant. According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 439 people were kidnapped in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2024,⁶¹ while Nigeria recorded the highest number of kidnapping incidents, with 630 cases and 5,454 victims.

⁵¹ Zakat is an Islamic financial obligation and one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It requires Muslims who meet a certain wealth threshold to donate a portion of their assets to those in need.

⁵² New terror group strikes in Kebbi, kills 15, rustles cattle - <https://punchng.com/new-terror-group-strikes-in-kebbi-kills-15-rustles-cattle/> - (Accessed 15/01/2025)

⁵³ Source: WANEP-Excerpt from an interview conducted with Associate Prof Murtala Rufai on December 7, 2025, in Abuja-FCT, Nigeria.

⁵⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/west-africa-key-message-update-inflation-and-flooding-are-driving-food-insecurity-vulnerable-households-august-2024>

⁵⁵ https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/RRSAN2024-IB-EN.pdf?utm_source (Regional report on food and nutrition security for West Africa and the Sahel 2024 | In brief)

⁵⁶ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (2024). <https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/reports/LGC%20-%20August%202024%20%28EN%29.pdf> (Accessed 17/01/2025)

⁵⁷ Insecurity, rising costs push 31 million Nigerians into acute food shortage, study says - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/insecurity-rising-costs-push-31-mln-nigerians-into-acute-food-shortage-study-2024-08-27/> - (Accessed 17/01/2025)

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Economic hardship, the climate crisis and violence in the northeast projected to push 33.1 million Nigerians into food insecurity in 2025 - <https://www.wfp.org/news/economic-hardship-climate-crisis-and-violence-northeast-projected-push-33-1-million-nigerians> - (Accessed 17/01/2025)

⁶⁰ Source: WANEP- www.wanep.org/news ; Excerpt from interview conducted with Associate Prof Murtala Ahmed Rufai on January 7, 2025.

⁶¹ Moroccan truck drivers kidnapped in Burkina Faso have been released - <https://apnews.com/article/morocco-drivers-kidnap-sahel-militants-fc5940438d14f37a3375dffa422bab> (Accessed 27/1/2025)

It marks an increase from the 4,959 victims reported in 2023.⁶² A total of 302 incidents of armed robbery were recorded in the period, with 151 deaths and 359 injuries.⁶³ Other cases of armed violence in the region, including homicide, recorded a total of 726 incidents.

Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea declined within the period, attributed to increased joint maritime patrols along the West African coast. Despite this decline, various piracy incidents were recorded. On 1 January 2024, Nigerian pirates attacked the chemical tanker Hana 1 near Equatorial Guinea, kidnapping nine crew members.⁶⁴ A tanker enroute from Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, was attacked near Bioko Island, demonstrating the transnational nature of these threats. In addition, an attack was also recorded on 29 May 2024, when two crew members were kidnapped from a cargo ship 25 nautical miles south of Bioko Island.⁶⁵ As the Gulf serves as a major artery for global and regional trade, such threats disrupt supply chains, increase shipping costs, and deter foreign investment, aggravating economic vulnerabilities in West Africa.

The region continues to serve as a major transit hub for the trafficking of cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine between Latin America, Europe and other global markets. The borders of Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Mali remain transit zones for illicit drugs.⁶⁶ Between January 2019 and June 2024, at least 126.4 tons of cocaine were seized in or en route to West Africa, mainly in international waters of the Gulf of Guinea (30.8 tons), followed by Cabo Verde (18.2 tons), Senegal (15.7 tons) and Guinea (5.6 tons).⁶⁷ Traces of potent synthetic opioids, such as nitazenes, had been detected among drug users in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, raising public health concerns. Reports by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime indicate that nitazenes are up to 100 times more potent than

heroin and 10 times more potent than fentanyl.⁶⁸ In Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) seized over 2.6 million kilograms of illicit drugs, including cannabis (Indian Hemp), cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, Tramadol, Rohypnol, and Diazepam, between January and December 2024.⁶⁹ The agency also destroyed 220 hectares of cannabis farms and arrested 18,500 drug trafficking offenders in the period.⁷⁰ In Côte d'Ivoire, 90 drug trafficking incidents were reported in 2024,⁷¹ while in Senegal, significant drug seizures included 365.4kg in Koupentoum, Tambacounda region, one tonne of cocaine in April 2024,⁷² which constitutes the largest seizure by land route in the country as well as 1137.6 kg in Kidira town.⁷³ The Guinea Bissau authorities reported a seizure of 2.63 tons of cocaine at the International Airport.⁷⁴ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), trafficking in firearms, drugs, and mineral resources remains among the most detected criminal activities in the region, complementing other illicit markets such as the cattle rustling industry.⁷⁵

Disputes between farmers and herders were reported in the region. Nigeria recorded 132 incidents of farmer-herder conflicts, resulting in 762 fatalities. These conflicts undermine the economic potential of affected locations, with severe consequences for food security, price volatility, household consumption, and income levels. It drives up competition over land and water resources while fueling climate change-induced migration, weak governance, and ethno-religious tensions with far-reaching socio-economic consequences.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) continues to intensify violence and increase fatalities. A notable Operation KAFO V, facilitated by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Benin, and Ghana,

⁶² Source: WANEP- www.wanepsystems.net

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security: Lessons, Latency, and Law Enforcement (Max Williams) - <https://warontherocks.com/2024/05/gulf-of-guinea-maritime-security-lessons-latency-and-law-enforcement/> - (Accesses January 16/01/2025)

⁶⁵ 2024-014-Gulf of Guinea-Piracy/Armed Robbery/Kidnapping for Ransom - <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/msci/2024-014-gulf-guinea-piracyarmed-robberykidnapping-ransom> (Accessed 13/01/2025)

⁶⁶ Senegal Customs Seize Cocaine Shipment Worth Over \$48m - <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/07/11/senegal-customs-seize-cocaine-shipment-worth-over-48m/>; (Accessed 13/01/2025)

⁶⁷ https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/westandcentralafrica/press/world_drug_report_2024.html

⁶⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/africa-drug-addiction-kush-sierra-leone-guineabissau-5a236b71cc3311c1a0dfb921aa2d4f65>

⁶⁹ NDLEA arrested 14,480, seized 2.4m kg of drugs in 10 months-Marwa - <https://punchng.com/ndlea-arrested-14480-seized-2-4m-kg-of-drugs-in-10-months-marwa/> (Accessed 15/01/2025)

⁷⁰ NDLEA Seizes Over 2.6 Million Kilograms of Drugs in 2024, Arrests 18,500 Offenders - <https://www.arise.tv/ndlea-seizes-over-2-6-million-kilograms-of-drugs-in-2024-arrests-18500-offenders/> (Accessed 13/01/2025)

⁷¹ www.wanep.news.org

⁷² Senegal Customs Seize Cocaine Shipment Worth Over \$48m - <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/07/11/senegal-customs-seize-cocaine-shipment-worth-over-48m/> (Accessed 13/01/2025)

⁷³ <https://english.news.cn/africa/20240415/795e0c1ce3e44d588ac74b6f2513f966/c.html>

⁷⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1w7vzxe1v1o>

⁷⁵ UNODC Supports North and West African Countries to Strengthen Cross-Regional Cooperation to Counter the Nexus between Terrorism and Organized Crime - <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/latest-news/2024-unodc-supports-north-and-west-african-countries-to-strengthen-cross-regional-cooperation-to-counter-the-nexus-between-terrorism-and-organized-crime.html> - (Accessed 13/01/2025)

led to the seizure of more than 400 firearms, over 4,000 rounds of ammunition, and substantial quantities of explosives and components for improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁷⁶ In addition, the Nigeria Defence Headquarters reported the seizure of 8,815 weapons and 228,004 rounds of ammunition in the country. In Ghana, the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority seized 53 pistols, 65 live ammunition, 74 magazines, and a PC hoster at the Golden Jubilee Terminal of the Tema Port.⁷⁷ The limitations of state security have evolved the formation of community-led defence groups in the Sahel, such as the Koglwéogo in Burkina Faso.⁷⁸ However, these communal self-defence groups have been accused of rights abuses. They are often set up by disputing communities or ethnic groups that fuel inter-ethnic conflicts and further complicate existing insecurity in these countries. In Niger, self-defence militias among ethnic Arab, Djerma and Tuareg communities in Tillabéri and Tahoua were accused of perpetrating attacks on civilians.

3. 1. Key Outlook in 2025

3. 1. 1. Escalating threats of terrorism and organised crime in coastal States

- As governments in the Sahel region contend with limited resources and escalating insurgent threats, extremist groups, such as JNIM and ISIS affiliates, continue to expand their operational reach into coastal states. While the governments of Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, and Benin have prioritised economic development and regional security cooperation, the growing threats of terrorism and organised crime pose a significant risk to these efforts, exacerbating governance challenges. Additionally, an emerging threat from the 'Lakurawa Group' is gaining traction in North-West Nigeria, while the re-adaptation of tactics by existing extremist groups presents a complex security environment. The interplay between violent extremism, transnational organised crime, and illicit economies fuels regional instability.
- The Sahel region accounted for nearly half of all deaths from terrorism in sub-Saharan

Africa, highlighting the urgency for coastal nations to bolster their security measures and regional cooperation to counteract the expanding influence of extremist groups.

3. 1. 2. Review the ECOWAS Action Plan (2020-2024) to strengthen Regional Security and counter-terrorism strategies

- The 2020-2024 ECOWAS Priority Action Plan to Eradicate Terrorism has had limited success in addressing rising terrorist threats in the Sahel and their spread into coastal West Africa. To enhance the effectiveness of the Priority Action Plan, a revision of the counterterrorism strategy to integrate security, socio-economic development, community resilience, and inclusive governance is crucial. Strengthening the ECOWAS Standby Force's operational capacity is a positive step toward improving regional security coordination.

3. 1. 3. Continued strained ECOWAS-AES Relations and Regional Security Challenges

- The AES has jointly strengthened internal cohesion, signing a treaty in July 2024 at their first summit in Niamey to deepen military and economic cooperation among its members while distancing itself from traditional Western allies and pursuing closer ties with Russia.⁷⁹ The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger poses significant challenges to regional counterterrorism efforts, disrupting established mechanisms for intelligence sharing and joint military operations. This departure will be detrimental to ECOWAS' economic integration strategy, as the AES countries represent a substantial portion of the region's population and land area. Moreover, the threat of Chad's withdrawal from the MNJTF following the October 2024 Boko Haram attack that killed 40 Chadian soldiers raises significant security and operational concerns for the Lake Chad Basin region.⁸⁰ Chadian officials have stated that the military is not receiving sufficient support to combat the terrorist group, particularly after the recent attack. This development may heighten instability and complicate efforts to fight Boko Haram and other terrorist organisations in the region.

⁷⁶ 75 arrested; thousands of weapons seized in Operation Kafo V- <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2025/January/75-arrested-thousands-of-weapons-seized-in-operation-kafo-v.html> (Accessed 23/01/2025)

⁷⁷ GRA seizes 53 pistols, other weapons at Tema Port - <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/11/gra-seizes-53-pistols-other-weapons-at-tema-port/> (Accessed 27/01/2025)

Central Sahel. <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/mali/> (Accessed 27/12/2024).

⁷⁸ Central Sahel. <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/mali/> (Accessed 27/12/2024).

⁷⁹ UN Security Council Report. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2024-12/west-africa-and-the-sahel-13.php> (Accessed 20/01/2025)

⁸⁰ Chad president launches operation to fight Boko Haram after attack kills over 40 troops - <https://www.voanews.com/a/chad-president-launches-vast-operation-to-fight-boko-haram-after-attack-kills-over-40-troops-/7843203.html> (Accessed 8/01/2025)

3. 1. 4. Rising levels of Organised crime and armed violence

- Criminal gangs operate across Nigeria, Niger, and the broader Sahelian states, facilitated by gaps in intelligence-sharing and the lack of sustained joint operations. Bandit groups have established intricate networks of informants and local collaborators, enabling them to sustain their operations. Cross-border attacks have intensified, with bandits frequently traversing rural areas of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad to carry out armed robberies and kidnappings. Beyond ransom, terrorist and criminal groups use kidnapping as a strategic tool to infiltrate communities and consolidate territorial control, as seen in Burkina Faso and northern Benin. Sabotage of critical infrastructure has emerged as a significant threat, with bandits targeting power installations in Shiroro, Niger State, disrupting electricity supply to 19 of Nigeria's 36 states.⁸¹ Between January and November 2024, an estimated 128 transmission towers were destroyed in Nigeria, either by vandals or bandits,⁸² exacerbating economic instability and increasing insecurity.
- Despite ongoing seizures of illicit arms and ammunition, several clandestine firearms manufacturing facilities were uncovered in Nigeria in Plateau, Delta, and Akwa Ibom States in Nigeria, amongst others.⁸³ The unchecked flow of these weapons has fuelled recurrent incidents of armed robbery, kidnapping, and inter-communal clashes, as reported in Plateau state, Nigeria. Efforts to curb arms proliferation have yielded limited success, as national and regional enforcement mechanisms remain hindered by porous borders, inadequate regulations, and weak law enforcement capacities.
- Ongoing conflicts and economic challenges in the Sahel region perpetuate vulnerabilities to human trafficking, manifesting in various forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ trafficking. In Nigeria, the prevalence of illegal

facilities known as '*baby factories*' remains a significant concern. In May 2024, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) reported the increasing incidents of baby factories and child trafficking nationwide.⁸⁴ Cross-border trafficking persists in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana, mainly for domestic servitude and exploitation, with most of these cases bound by oaths of secrecy, complicating rescue and rehabilitation efforts.⁸⁵

3. 2. Key Resilient Factors

- The consultations between the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) during the Addis Ababa UN-AU High-Level Conference on 21 October 2024, represent a pivotal step towards strengthening regional security architecture. A key outcome was the focus on deploying a regional counter-terrorism force, primarily funded through UN Security Council Resolution 2719. This will complement support to existing counter-terrorism initiatives, such as the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin.
- West African nations within the instability zone have intensified bilateral cooperation to address escalating security threats. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have secured a partnership with Russia's aerospace agency to procure communication satellites aimed at improving regional surveillance and security infrastructure. Ghana's National Security Minister engaged with Burkina Faso's Foreign Minister in Ouagadougou to strengthen security collaboration and coordinate humanitarian assistance for Burkinabe refugees. Libya seeks to enhance military coordination and border security measures with Niger, while Nigeria and Niger formalised a security partnership to reinforce counterterrorism efforts in the Lake Chad Basin. It signifies Niger's renewed commitment to the Multinational Joint Task Force.

⁸¹ Blackout Cripples Northern Nigeria After Infrastructure Sabotaged - <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/10/30/blackout-cripples-northern-nigeria-after-infrastructure-sabotaged/> (Accessed 20/01/2025)

⁸² Nigeria: Vandals Destroy 128 Transmission Towers in 11 Months - <https://allafrica.com/stories/202411290348.html> - (Accessed 14/01/2025)

⁸³ Source: WANEP – www.wanepsystems.net

- A key recommendation of the 52nd Session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council (MSC), held on 3 July 2024 in Abuja, Nigeria, underscored the region's commitment to collective security, democratic governance, and economic development. Beyond the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on the Fight Against Terrorism concluded the session calling for strengthening the National Early Warning and Response Centers and measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.
- The announcement of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) operationalisation in 2024 at the 65th Ordinary Session of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government marks a significant step in enhancing West Africa's regional security architecture.⁸⁶ This development strengthens ECOWAS' capacity to respond swiftly to emerging security threats, including armed conflicts, terrorism, and transnational organised crime. The ESF's deployment framework includes coordinated and rapid response mechanisms to safeguard peace, stabilise fragile states, and improve humanitarian access in conflict-affected areas. At the same time, the AES is actively pursuing a joint military cooperation framework to combat insurgency and cross-border security threats. Their collaboration aims to bolster national defence capabilities while reducing reliance on external security interventions. Given these parallel efforts, there is an urgent need for a common cooperation pact that fosters intelligence-sharing, harmonises military operations, and establishes a comprehensive regional response to insecurity.
- The high-level consultations held on 29 October 2024 in Accra between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and the acting Secretary-General of the Accra Initiative focused on revitalising the regional framework

to strengthen security cooperation among member states. Comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo, the Accra Initiative was initially designed to address the spillover of violent extremism and transnational threats from the Sahel into coastal West African states. Given the growing transnational security threats, the meeting emphasised the need for enhanced intelligence-sharing, joint border operations, and improved coordination in countering organised crime and armed violence. While these Sahelian states - Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger - remain formal members of the Accra Initiative, their evolving security posture raises questions about the extent of their engagement in the regional security framework. While the revitalisation of the Accra Initiative signals a renewed commitment to regional security, its success depends on its ability to navigate the complex political landscape and foster inclusive collaboration that transcends geopolitical divides.

3. 3. Recommendations

- The ECOWAS Counterterrorism Strategy and the 2020–2024 Medium-Term Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism require a comprehensive review and update for 2025–2029 to address emerging threats and align with evolving national and regional security priorities. As part of this process, a structured ECOWAS-AES security dialogue, supported by the African Union, could facilitate joint strategic planning around a coordinated and sustainable security framework that addresses regional threats collectively. This approach should prioritise intelligence-sharing, coordinated border security measures, and capacity building for security forces, ensuring a unified and forward-looking response to terrorism and violent extremism across the region.
- The AU should consider reinforcing its community-driven approach to peace and security by integrating civil society organisations

⁸⁴ NAPTIP Decries Surge in Baby Factories across Nigeria. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/05/naptip-decries-surge-in-baby-factories-sale-of-children-across-nigeria/#google_vignette (Accessed 20/01/2025)

⁸⁵ Human Trafficking: 13 Girls Trafficked to Ghana Returns. <https://nidcom.gov.ng/human-trafficking-13-more-girls-trafficked-to-ghana-return-as-nidcom-says-163-trafficked-victims-rescued-since-july/> (Accessed 20/01/2025)

⁸⁶ Source – YouTube Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sd4eXLI8UAU> (Accessed 20/01/2025).

and grassroots initiatives through Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and ECOSOC engagements. This would promote localised ownership of conflict prevention initiatives, including cross-border management, early warning systems and post-conflict recovery.

- ECOWAS, in collaboration with the AES countries, should consider establishing a Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) to coordinate a structured withdrawal. This should include a phased economic and security disengagement, sustained diplomatic dialogue to prevent regional fragmentation, and reinforced border security cooperation to mitigate vulnerabilities. Simultaneously, ECOWAS should accelerate the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) to address emerging threats while maintaining open channels for the potential reintegration of AES states.

females and 682 (85.1%) males, were accredited to contest in 276 constituencies.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the country continues to struggle with low female representation, with only 42 (15%) out of 276 parliamentary seats held by women in the Ninth Parliament,⁸⁹ and out of 42 full ministerial appointees, seven are women.⁹⁰ In Côte d'Ivoire, women remain underrepresented, occupying just 13.4 per cent of the 254 parliamentary seats and 13 per cent of ministerial positions.⁹¹

Female Representation in Legislatures (West Africa)

Country	Men	Women	% Men	% Women
Cape Verde (NA)	40	32	56	44
Senegal (NA)	97	61	59	41
Sierra Leone (Parl.)	105	41	71	29
Benin (NA)	80	21	73	27
Togo (Sen.)	46	15	75	25
Togo (NA)	96	17	85	15
Côte d'Ivoire (Sen.)	74	24	76	25
Côte d'Ivoire (NA)	220	34	87	13
Ghana (Parl.)	235	41	86	15
Liberia (HoR)	65	8	89	11
Liberia (Sen.)	27	3	90	10
Guinea-Bissau (NA)?	92	11	90	10
The Gambia (NA)	53	5	91	9
Nigeria (HoR)	346	14	96	4
Nigeria (Sen.)	106	3	97	3

Only Cape Verde and Senegal exceed the 30 percent global target. Sierra Leone is closest to the target, closely followed by Benin, Nigeria, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Ghana are still below the target.
Source: IPU, visualised by WANEP • Created with Datawrapper

4.0. GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY

Challenges persist in implementing the women and youth's peace and security agenda in the region. These include weak implementation of national policies and laws that promote gender parity, inadequate political will to support youth and women's participation in politics and governance, growing violence and intimidation in politics, and limited access to resources for empowerment. For instance, in the 2024 presidential elections in Senegal, no female candidate represented the key contesting political parties. The cabinet, unveiled on 5 April 2024 by Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, is youth-driven but lacks gender balance, with women holding only 13 per cent of 34 positions, down from 18 per cent.⁸⁷ In Ghana, the Electoral Commission (EC) accredited 13 candidates for the presidential election, consisting of two females and eleven males. For the parliamentary elections, 801 candidates, of whom 119 (14.8%) were

The low representation of women in governance and decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality fostered by sociocultural and economic conditions. This could suggest that states have inadequate gender consideration to ensure the participation of women. Also, the growing culture of violence in elections and politics is contributing to the low participation and representation of women in governance in countries across the region. While some political parties have deliberately developed gender policies to support and increase youth and women's participation and representation through elections, candidature fees for national elections and the cost of campaign financing continue to hinder such efforts.

Rising insecurity in the region continues to have an impact on youth, women, and children. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 10.6 million people require emergency health services in the Sahel region. In recent years, malnutrition has worsened, and the closure of health facilities has reduced communities' access to healthcare.⁹² The chronic malnutrition rate is close to 40 per cent.

⁸⁷ New Senegal President, News Cabinet, some limits on women: <https://mg.co.za/africa/2024-04-16-new-senegal-president-new-cabinet-same-limits-on-women/> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁸⁸ WANEP-EMAM Preliminary Statement on Ghana Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 2024. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁸⁹ Female MPs Elected in Ghana's 9th Parliament. <https://citinewsroom.com/2024/12/see-the-41-female-mps-elect-who-will-serve-in-ghanas-9th-parliament/> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹⁰ List of Mahama's 42 Ministerial Nominees made up of 7 women. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/see-list-of-mahamas-42-ministerial-nominees-made-up-of-7-women-and-24-mps.html> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹¹ UN Women. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/cote-divoire> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹² Territorial Development and Access to Basic Services. <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/press/territorial-development-basic-services/> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

Maternal and infant mortality remains very high, with a rate of 856 deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the highest rates in the world.⁹³ The education sector has also been significantly affected. As of December 2024, over 12,000 schools have closed across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria, depriving children of basic education.⁹⁴ In Burkina Faso, 5,365 schools were closed due to insecurity, affecting more than 833,800 students, with some facilities repurposed as shelters for internally displaced people, particularly in Boulsa, Centre-Nord.⁹⁵ In Niger, 937 schools in Tillabéri, Tahoua, Diffa, and Maradi have closed as of June 2024, disrupting education for 85,534 children, 48.8 per cent of whom are girls.⁹⁶ In Mali, over 1,545 schools were closed, impacting nearly 460,000 students.⁹⁷ Insecurity and displacement in the Sahel continue to deny children access to education, entrenched child labour as well as recruitments into terrorist and armed groups.

Casualties from irregular migration to Spain reached alarming levels, with 10,400 migrants, including 421 women and 1,538 children, dying or disappearing at sea.⁹⁸ This marks a 58 per cent increase from 2023, averaging 30 deaths per day between January to December 2024.⁹⁹ The majority of victims originated from 28 countries, primarily in West Africa. According to Spain's Interior Ministry, the Canary Islands saw a surge in arrivals, with 60,216 migrants landing between January and December 2024, a 14.5 per cent rise from the 52,591 recorded in 2023. Given the current economic and geopolitical challenges, African irregular migrants

will continue to embark on such perilous journeys while destination countries grapple with border management challenges in 2025.

Cases of gender-based violence, especially rape and ritual murder of women and girls, were recorded across the region in 2024. Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) showed there were 1,620 reported incidents of SGBV and 393 fatalities, predominantly in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Benin.¹⁰⁰ The majority of the victims were between 3 months to 14 years old.¹⁰¹

Despite these challenges, states have advanced progressive governance policies and laws in the region to create spaces for women and youth participation in political leadership that align with the global women and youth peace and security agenda. These laws and policies include key issues such as gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual offences, domestic violence, and gender-sensitive security sector reforms, as well as the development of a National Action Plan on The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and other related instruments, geared towards the protection of the rights of women in the region. Notably, women's representation in governance is encouraging in Cape Verde, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, where 44, 41, and 29 per cent of women are in the House of Legislatures, respectively.¹⁰² Additionally, the 2024 elections in Togo highlighted a slight increase in female representation, with 23 women or 20.35 per cent, elected to the 113-member National Assembly, up from 18 in 2023. This contributes to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) global framework for a minimum of 30 per cent quota representation for women in governance.¹⁰³

Similarly, there has been progress in youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts, including policy dialogues, capacity-building programs, and direct participation in mediation and conflict prevention initiatives. These efforts aim to institutionalise youth involvement in governance, security, and peace processes, reinforcing the principles of UNSCR 2250. At the country level, Nigeria was the first West African country to launch



⁹³ Burkina Faso Humanitarian Situation⁹³. Ibid.

⁹⁴ UN Women Global Database on Violence Against Women. <https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women> (Accessed 29/01/2025). on Report (April 2024) <https://www.unicef.org/media/155306/file/Burkina-Faso-Humanitarian-SitRep-31-March-2024.pdf> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹⁶ Insecurity Limits Children's Access to School. <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/niger#:~:text=Insecurity%20considerably%20limits%20children's%20access,mst%20affected%20by%20school%20closures> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹⁷ Humanitarian Action for Children in Mali (2024) <https://www.unicef.org/media/149881/file/2024-HAC-Mali.pdf> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

⁹⁸ Trente Migrants Morts Disparus Chaque Jour Traverse Espagne. <https://www.20minutes.fr/monde/espagne/4130928-20241226-2024-trente-migrants-morts-disparus-chaque-jour-traverse-vers-espagne> (Accessed on 12/01/2025).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ WANEP NEWS. Monthly Bulletins January – December 2024. www.wanep.org (Accessed on 12/01/2025).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² IPU Global Data on National Parliaments. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/CV/CV-LC01/> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

¹⁰³ Députés élus. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/elections/legislatives/resultats/deputes> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

its Youth Peace and Security (YPS) NAP (2021-2024), followed by The Gambia in 2024 (2024-2029), while Ghana, Liberia, Benin, Niger, and Mali have begun developing their plans for 2024. Through support from UNOWAS, Women, Youth, Peace, and Security (WYPS) Working Groups have been established in 15 West African countries. These multi-actor platforms bring together state and non-state actors to coordinate efforts and resources to advance the WYPS agenda across the region.

4. 1. Key Outlook in 2025

4. 1. 1. *Persistent Challenges in Advancing the WPS and YPS Agenda*

- Even though countries in the region have developed various generations of National Action Plans (NAPs) of UNSCR 1325 and enacted progressive policies and laws, effective implementation is still challenging. Weak implementation of NAPs on UNSCR 1325 and 2250 and related laws in most ECOWAS Member States continue to undermine adequate protection and promotion of youth and women's safety and security. Critical challenges facing the implementation include inadequate budgetary allocation, weak capacity of state institutions and fragmented CSO collaboration, as evident in countries across West Africa. Given the weaknesses of implementing existing laws and frameworks that protect and promote women and children's security, the prevalence of SGBV and violence against women in conflict are likely to hinder existing efforts to address the issues of low representation, participation, and protection of women and girls across the region.

4. 1. 2. *Promoting youth and women's leadership and participation in peace and security*

- Demanding the state's accountability and responsiveness in implementing NAPs and related instruments on the minimum 30 per cent quota is key to gender-sensitive and inclusive governance, peace, and security. It reinforces the need to promote the implementation of minimum gender quotas and accountability mechanisms in

line with ECOWAS and AU Peace and Security Architectures (EPSA and APSA) as well as the Continental Results Framework (2018–2028) to ensure improved monitoring of and reporting on respective Regional, Continental and National Action Plans.

4. 2. Key Resilient Factors

- In West Africa, international partners, regional bodies, States and civil society organisations have collaborated to implement the WPS and YPS Agenda through comprehensive National Action Plans (NAPs). In terms of progress in terms of progress in implementing the UNSCR 1325, nine countries in the region (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo)¹⁰⁴ are in their second-generation NAPs, while four countries (Benin, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria)¹⁰⁵ have reached their third generation. Also, a significant milestone in implementing the UNSCR 2250 - Youth Peace and Security (YPS) was the renewal of the African Union's Young Special Envoys for Peace and Security initiative. In March 2024, with a two-year mandate, Simone Mbode Diouf was appointed the first young woman to serve as the AU Special Youth Envoy for Peace in West Africa. Through its regional Conflict Prevention Framework, ECOWAS has developed and supported initiatives to advance the YPS agenda in the region. As the global community prepares to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995-2025), the 25th Anniversary UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (October 2000 – October 2025) and 10th Anniversary of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (December 2015 – December 2025), it is crucial for states and regional actors to assess the progress made in implementing these frameworks. To sustain this momentum, governments and partners in the region should consider integrating lessons learned and best practices into national development plans. Strengthening local ownership and institutionalising the WPS and YPS agendas will ensure their continued relevance and impact in shaping inclusive, sustainable peace and security efforts.
- The WPS Working Group in various countries was established by the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to advocate for inclusive participation, representation, and protection of women and girls against SGBV. The working group provides capacity-building support to member states, CSOs, and other stakeholders in responding to

¹⁰⁴. Women Account for only 16-1 of Lawmakers in West Africa. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/10/women-account-for-only-16-1-of-lawmakers-in-west-africa-ecowas-parliament/> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

¹⁰⁵. Women's Political Participation – Africa Barometer 2024. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf> (Accessed 29/01/2025).

gender-based challenges. Similarly, FemWise-West Africa – a Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation has been set up by the ECOWAS Commission in conformity with the Africa Union (AU) continental arrangement for FemWise Africa as a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise. It aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation within the ECOWAS mediation and security framework and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The Network provides a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity building, and networking to enhance the implementation of commitments to women's inclusion in peace and security processes.

- The ECOWAS Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda promotes the involvement of youth in peace and security in the region. Considering their significant demographic presence and potential societal influence, it recognises the importance of engaging young people in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, the YPS Agenda complements and enhances the effectiveness of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) by ensuring the meaningful participation of youth in efforts to promote peace and stability in West Africa. These frameworks could be harnessed to empower youths to engage constructively with policy-makers at all levels.
- Continued CSOs' contribution in monitoring and advancing the implementation of the WYPS Agenda. CSOs' have delivered consistent capacity enhancement of women and youth through training and advocacy by women and youth groups, as well as CSOs, to promote inclusive participation and empowerment of women and youth in peace, security and governance processes. Regional and national CSOs provide women and youth mentorship programs and skills transformation interventions for the Sahel. Also, CSOs have developed advocacy activities on women, peace and security (WPS), monitoring and reporting progress on implementing the WPS agenda in line with the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF - 2018-2028). For instance, the women leaders network in Mali is leading

advocacy targeting key stakeholders at national and regional levels to address the effects of the political impasse and sanction on the lives and livelihoods of women and their families in the country.

4. 3. Recommendations

- Governments and development partners should consider intensifying engagement on UNSCRs 1325, 2250 and other WPS and YPS priorities. In countries with legislated gender quotas, the national frameworks should be strengthened through inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the review processes to set ambitious targets and enforce placement rules for gender parity in elective positions and appointments across various sectors in the country. Also, the development of NAPs on UNSCR 2250 is imperative, and the lessons learned from the NAP processes in Nigeria could serve as a blueprint for further adaptation and implementation in other ECOWAS member states.
- There is a need for AU and ECOWAS to exploit the regionalised CRF to support regular data collection, monitoring and reporting on the compliance of laws and policies promoting women's participation, leadership, and decision-making in line with NAPs on WPS and YPS Agenda. It is also imperative for regional actors to consider providing technical support on the WPS and YPS Agenda for the AES countries.
- Integrating Gender-Sensitive Budgeting for Sustainable Peace and Security. A gender-sensitive budget is crucial for mainstreaming gender in peace and security. Governments and institutional policies should prioritise youth and women's participation, ensuring their needs are addressed. Aligning the WYPS framework with broader security, humanitarian, and development initiatives guarantees long-term impact.

5. 0. Environmental Security

Climate change and its nexus with insecurity were prominent in the regional peace and security landscape in 2024. Its adverse effects on the depletion of resources, including water, land, food, fisheries, and biodiversity, challenge the livelihoods of populations across the region. The phenomenon continued to drive intercommunal conflicts, internal displacements, migration, and food insecurity.



According to an OCHA report, flooding devastated 7.2 million people across West and Central Africa, displacing more than 1.1 million people in 2024.¹⁰⁶ As of November 2024, over 642,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, 1,038 schools were impacted, and 218 healthcare facilities were disrupted.¹⁰⁷ The floods also severely damaged agriculture and affected 960,000 hectares of cropland, which resulted in the loss of 128,000 cattle.¹⁰⁸ The 2024 Humanitarian Report of OCHA also revealed that 33 million vulnerable people across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad were in urgent need of humanitarian aid and protection services.¹⁰⁹

Climate change and conflicts spurred food insecurity, especially in the conflict zones of West Africa, with over 38 million people experiencing acute food and nutrition insecurity.¹¹⁰ In the Sahel, agriculture and pastoralism account for 40 per cent of the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ between 60 and 80 per cent of the population.¹¹¹ More than 90 per cent of farmers in the Sahel

rely on rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism for their livelihoods. However, water scarcity, land degradation, and insecurity have affected 80 per cent of the population residing in these areas.¹¹²

Between June and November 2024, flash floods affected multiple countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Niger, Senegal, and Liberia. Heavy seasonal rains, exacerbated by climate change, led to widespread flooding, landslides, and collapse of roads and buildings that displaced thousands, destroyed infrastructure, and heightened health risks across the region. In the review period, 177 disasters were reported, leading to 651 deaths and 801 injuries. Over 100,000 people were displaced, with fatalities reported across the region. In Nigeria, flooding affected nearly 30,000 people and resulted in more than 100 deaths, primarily in the northern states. In addition, the floods devastated crops and livestock, raising food security concerns. Ghana and Nigeria reported crop losses that threaten local food supplies and livelihoods. Also, Niger experienced catastrophic floods due to torrential rains affecting all regions of the country. According to the Niger Directorate of Disaster Preparedness and Management, the incidents destroyed over 73,500 houses, affected more than 710,000 people and caused 273 fatalities, including 121 from drowning and 152 from building collapses. Infrastructure damage was extensive, with 2,757 huts, 6,208 walls, 120 classrooms, and 858 shelters destroyed. Additionally, 1,920 granaries, 823 shops, and 21,145 tons of food were lost, severely impacting local livelihoods. Nearly 18,000 livestock also perished, worsening conditions for communities reliant on animals for sustenance. Flooding and landslides remain recurring phenomena in most parts of the region, especially coastal communities.



Nigeria: Floods affect 1 million people in the city of Maiduguri <https://maghrebajourdhui.com/15562-Nigeria---les-inondations-affectent-1-million-de-personnes-dans-la-ville-de-Maiduguri>

¹⁰⁶ OCHA (2024). West and Central Africa Flooding Situation Overview. 16 October 2024 Report

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Alliance Sahel (2024). Sahel Alliance Members' Priority: Resilience to Shocks Through Food Security. Available at: <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/news/agriculture-rural-development-and-food-security/priority-food> (Accessed 27 December 2024).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.



Le 20 août 2024, à Niamey (Niger),
sur la route nationale 25. - © BOUREIMA HAMA / AFP
<https://reporterre.net/Au-Niger-la-capitale-Niamey-encerclée-par-les->

Climate change has adversely impacted West Africa's blue economy as rising sea temperatures and overfishing have significantly reduced fish stocks, undermining the livelihoods of coastal communities and increasing food insecurity. This economic sector loses \$2.3 billion annually due to, among other factors, climate change's effects and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.¹¹³

Additional threats to environmental security include illegal mining, logging, and the pollution of water bodies in the region. In Ghana, for example, illegal mining, locally known as “*Galamsey*,” continues to harm forest resources, water systems, fisheries, and land, with implications for the food, health, and economic security of populations. According to Ghana's Water Resource Commission, more than 60 per cent of water bodies have been contaminated by chemicals such as mercury and cyanide primarily due to illegal mining activities.¹¹⁴ This indicates that Ghana risks importing water by 2030.¹¹⁵ The country's main rivers, such as Pra and Ankobra, which are lifelines for millions of people, have also been polluted by illegal mining, exacerbating water scarcity in the country. It has devastated farmlands and valuable crops such as cocoa, which generates 15 per cent of the country's GDP.¹¹⁶ The Ghana

Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) production data reveals that 429,323 tonnes are less than 55 per cent of its average seasonal output, mainly due to illegal mining. The ecological destruction has displaced thousands of farmers, leading to a 20 per cent decline in cocoa production in regions like Ahafo and Bono.¹¹⁷ The impact on the country's forest reserves is also a cause for concern. According to Ghana's Forest Commission, the country lost 34 of its 288 forest reserves due to illegal mining.¹¹⁸ Over 2.5 million hectares of forest have been destroyed in the past decade, constituting about 12 per cent of Ghana's total forest reserve.¹¹⁹ Major forest reserves, including Atewa in the Eastern Region and parts of Sefwi in the Western Region, have been ravaged by mining activities. These forests serve as carbon sinks, absorbing substantial amounts of CO₂ and mitigating climate change's effects. The destruction of the carbon sinks has national implications with regional and global ramifications. It contributes to increased greenhouse gas emissions, undermining efforts to curb the impacts of climate change on human security across West Africa.

Logging activities, both legal and illegal, along with deforestation, persisted in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Senegal, with significant threats to West Africa's forests and biodiversity. West Africa hosts almost 11 per cent of the world's 12 million m² of dense tropical forests.¹²⁰ It contributes directly or indirectly to the livelihoods of 53 per cent of West Africa's population.¹²¹ The forests are also home to several endangered species, including woods and non-wood products, leaves and trees for local medicines, and a rich biodiversity of fauna and flora. Despite its inestimable value and the existence of various regulatory frameworks across the national and regional levels, West Africa records an estimated average annual loss of 52,920 hectares.¹²² A critical concern is the exploitation of forest products,

¹¹³ Food and Agriculture Organisation (2017). West Africa: Illegal Fishing, the Black Hole in the Seas. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/familyfarming/detail/en/c/1055065/#:~:text=Illegal%20fishing%20is%20worth%20US,global%20loss%20from%20illegal%20fishing> (Accessed 27 December 2024).

¹¹⁴ Aikins, E. (2024). Ghana Must Stop Galamsey Before It Sinks the Country. ISS Today. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ghana-must-stop-galamsey-before-it-sinks-the-country> (Accessed 29 December 2024).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Amoa-Abban, K. (2024). Ghana's Gold Gamble: How Illegal Mining Threatens Our Future and Global Relations. Opinion, Myjoyonline News. Available at: www.myjoyonline.com

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization (2024). Enhancing Forest Laws to Foster Sustainable Management and Empower People: A Focus on West Africa. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/redd/news/detail/en/c/1719166/> (Access 27 December 2024).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

especially timber, by armed groups to fund their activities in conflict zones of the region. While forest depletion threatens biodiversity, it further accentuates the region's growing vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

The 29th Conference of Parties (COP29), held in Baku, Azerbaijan, focused on climate financing for developing countries to assuage the global surge in the threat of climate change. A key outcome was the agreement on the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG), which seeks to triple finance to developing countries from the previous goal of USD 100 billion annually to USD 300 billion annually by 2035.¹²³ This is encapsulated in the new global target to provide 1.3 trillion climate finance annually to support developing countries by 2035.¹²⁴ The latest financial goal builds on the climate action at COP27, which agreed on a historic Loss and Damage Fund, and COP28, which delivered a global agreement on the Energy Transition from fossil fuel to energy system. COP29 also reached an agreement on carbon markets, which aims to support countries in effectively delivering their climate plans and ensure progress in halving global emissions within the decade.

While the new climate finance represents a step forward in supporting vulnerable regions like West Africa, often referred to as a climate hotspot, there are concerns regarding the amount developed countries allocate to fund climate adaptation projects to mitigate the adverse effects. In addition, West African countries' implementation of the energy transition from fossil fuels to more eco-friendly energy sources is fraught with challenges. With economies primarily dependent on fossil-based resources such as crude oil, the region's realisation of transitioning from fossil fuel by 2030 could be unattainable. This is further compounded by a significant rural and agrarian population relying on forest resources, including firewood and charcoal, for energy production and subsistence farming for sustainable livelihood. The region is also confronted with recurrent energy volatility, which affects fuel prices in countries. Given these

dynamics, the lack of sustainable climate financing and weak climate adaptation strategies to enhance the region's resilience is unlikely.

The regional vulnerability to pandemics and epidemics is mainly attributable to weak healthcare systems, limited public health education, and limited investments in healthcare systems across the countries in West Africa. In 2024, West Africa faced several disease outbreaks, with Monkeypox (Mpox), Diphtheria, Cholera and Malaria as primary concerns due to seasonal rains and flooding. Cases were reported across multiple countries, notably in Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ghana, affecting thousands and straining public health systems. A total of two hundred forty-one cases of (Mpox) were confirmed in the year, comprising Nigeria one hundred twenty-four cases, Cote d'Ivoire with ninety-one cases and one death, Liberia twenty-three cases with one death while Ghana and Guinea two and one cases, respectively.¹²⁵

A total of 6,524 cases and 175 deaths from diphtheria outbreaks were reported in Guinea's Kankan, Faranah, Kindia, and N'zerekore regions.¹²⁶ Over 15,000 Cholera cases were reported in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, especially in areas affected by flooding, disrupting sanitation and clean water access. The outbreak resulted in more than 500 fatalities across the most affected countries.¹²⁷ Also, Malaria cases increased significantly, fueled by stagnant water from flooding, which provided breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Ghana and Nigeria reported the highest upticks, with thousands of cases and several deaths, primarily among children under five.¹²⁸ Other diseases, such as Lassa fever and Dengue, were also recorded, particularly in rural areas with limited healthcare access, further burdening health systems already managing cholera and malaria outbreaks. While States, CSOs and NGOs implored containment measures, continued rains pose a risk of further spread. Strengthened disease surveillance, improved access to healthcare, and sustained international support will be critical to controlling the situation and preventing future outbreaks.

¹²³ Joint Continental Situation Report on the Mpox Epidemic in Africa. [https://africacdc.org/download/joint-continental-situation-report-on-the-mpox-epidemic-in-africa-23-september-03-november-2024/#:~:text=Four%20Member%20States%20have%20reported,Mauritius%2C%20Zambia%2C%20and%20Zimbabwe.&text=Democratic%20Republic%20of%20Congo%20\(DRC,Clade%201a%20and%20Clade%201b.](https://africacdc.org/download/joint-continental-situation-report-on-the-mpox-epidemic-in-africa-23-september-03-november-2024/#:~:text=Four%20Member%20States%20have%20reported,Mauritius%2C%20Zambia%2C%20and%20Zimbabwe.&text=Democratic%20Republic%20of%20Congo%20(DRC,Clade%201a%20and%20Clade%201b.) (Accessed 29/10/2024).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ ECOWAS Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control's Situation Report on Mpox. <https://www.wahooas.org/web-ooas/sites/default/files/publications/2430/emergencympoxbulletin.pdf> (Accessed 29/10/2024).

¹²⁶ WHO Weekly Bulletin on Outbreaks. <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/379331/OEW40-300906102024.pdf> (Accessed 29/10/2024).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

5. 1. Key Outlook in 2025

5. 1. 1. *Gaps in responses and inadequate international financial support to climate adaptation systems*

- Given the existing gaps in climate response strategies at national, regional, and continental levels, coupled with inadequate sustainable financial support to strengthen climate adaptation systems in the region, West Africa's vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change is likely to persist in 2025. Consequently, the acute food and nutrition insecurity observed at the end of 2024 remains a critical concern, affecting 38 million vulnerable people, particularly in the conflict zones of the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Additionally, persistent flooding has left over 7.2 million people across West and Central Africa severely impacted, devastating homes, healthcare facilities, and schools, exacerbating the heightened humanitarian crisis. These trends portend severe food and humanitarian crises in the region if the worrying dynamics continue in the years ahead.

5. 2. Key Resilient Factors

- ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy adopted in 2022, as well as the first Plan of Action (2022-2030), are in line with ECOWAS Vision 2050, which aims at establishing integrated, peaceful and prosperous communities supported by strong institutions, respecting fundamental freedoms and working towards inclusive, sustainable development. The AU Regional Stabilisation Strategy for Recovery of Boko Haram affected Countries in the Lake Chad Basin also contributed to mitigating the impact of climate change and humanitarian emergencies and strengthening the resilience of communities in Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria. At the level of the United Nations, the UN Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP), which covers the period 2018-2030 to address the complex humanitarian emergencies facing Sahel countries, focuses on six priority areas cross-border cooperation, climate action, crisis prevention, women and youth

empowerment, economic revitalisation, and renewable energy. The overarching goal is to galvanise efforts to enhance peace and security in the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063.

- The Alliance for Sahel (AES) countries have also introduced several national climate policies, including Burkina Faso's National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2012), Mali's National Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change (2011), and Niger's National Policy on Climate Change (PNCC) (2012). The overarching objective of these climate strategies is to strengthen the resilience of ecosystems, social systems, and production chains in vulnerable areas of the country. Strategies will be implemented to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. These efforts will focus on addressing challenges such as heightened droughts, extreme weather events, and changing rainfall patterns, with an emphasis on enhancing agricultural practices, water management, and community-based adaptation initiatives.
- The agreements on climate financing reached at COP29 and the 'loss and damage' decisions made at COP27 are designed to support developing countries severely affected by climate change. Additionally, the Global Goal on Adaptation offers a platform for multilateral cooperation, strengthening national, regional, and continental efforts to enhance the resilience of African countries against the threat

5. 3. Recommendations

ECOWAS should strengthen its position and negotiation with the AU to intensify multilateral engagement with the UN, EU, G7 and G20 to commit to sustainable funding and galvanise regional benefits from the COP29 agreement on climate financing and also ensure that COP28 resolution related to fossil fuel emission regulation is not only addressed but also ensures that the economic implications for regional agenda including the ECOWAS Member States are protected.

6.0. Conclusion

West Africa's governance, peace, and security environment comprised peaceful democratic transitions, regional fragmentation, shifting alliances, continued terrorist and violent extremist activities, citizen protests against socio-economic challenges, and multilayered effects of climate change. While Ghana and Senegal successfully organised presidential and legislative elections that led to peaceful democratic transitions, transitional processes to restore constitutional rule in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger were either extended or faced political uncertainties. The withdrawal of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) countries from ECOWAS membership and their complex geostrategic alignments with Russia, Iran and Turkey spotlights new dynamics and rethinking of multilateral approaches to define their future collaboration with ECOWAS, especially on mutual issues of regional security and development.

Despite national, regional, and international mechanisms to mitigate the threat of violent extremism and transnational organised crimes within the region, the activities persist and have evolved, especially in the central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Terrorist attacks in the Sahel are increasing and spilling over into coastal states, especially Benin, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire, validating the long-held concern that unmitigated terrorist violence in the Sahel will escalate into littoral states. The region also faces continued escalation of the complex impacts of climate change, including intense flooding, droughts and humanitarian emergencies. These proximate and accelerating factors deplete essential resources such as water, fisheries, biodiversity, food, and pasture, which are vital to the livelihood of the West African population. Deforestation and illegal mining threaten vital forest zones and water bodies crucial to ecosystems. The COP29 agreement on the New Collective Goal on Climate Finance, with a committed provision of \$300 billion annually by 2035 for developing countries, is analysed as insufficient given the growing vulnerability of developing countries such as West Africa. Additionally, weaknesses in regional response mechanisms exacerbate these concerns. Under its advancements, Gender Peace and Security, West Africa has exhibited progress in its Women,

Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda by developing National Action Plans (NAPS) while strengthening the capacities of women and young people to harness their agency in decision-making processes, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts. Nevertheless, significant challenges persist, from inadequate implementation of NAPS and frameworks to limited representation and weak policy influencing, which undermine progress already achieved.

What is crucial, in light of the region's complex governance, peace, and security challenges, is the need for key stakeholders comprising ECOWAS, AES countries, the AU, civil society organisations, and international partners to explore mutually fostering and sustainable collaboration, cooperation, and engagement that will enhance community resilience and mitigate the adverse impacts of these threats on the region's human and state security ecosystem.

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING OUTLOOK 2025



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