

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING

OUTLOOK

2026



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



**WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING**
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

FEBRUARY 2026



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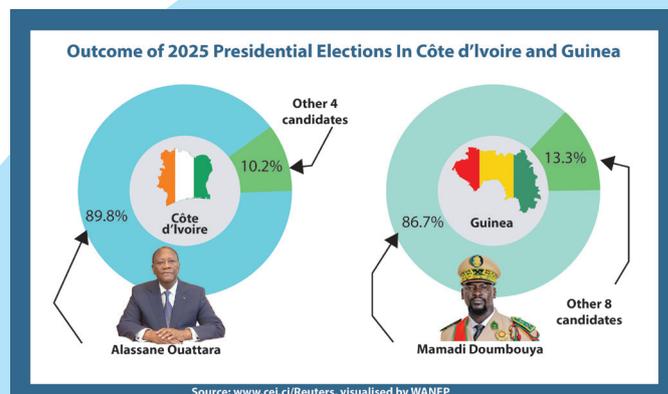
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The governance and security trajectory of West Africa in 2025 was shaped by a convergence of unconstitutional change of government, democratic backsliding, protracted conflicts, and efforts to strengthen resilience amid weakened regional norms. Despite sustained regional and international efforts to promote democratic governance, Guinea-Bissau experienced another military coup on 26th November 2025, the day before the National Electoral Commission announced provisional results from the 23rd November 2025 Presidential and Legislative elections. The coup not only stymied the country's political stability but also reinforced the wider regional trajectory of democratic decline. Benin, regarded as one of the region's resilient democratic dispensations, likewise witnessed an attempted coup on 7th December 2025, which was swiftly quelled by loyalist forces with support from Nigeria and other ECOWAS member States. While the rapid response demonstrated the utility of national and regional safeguards, the underlying political, security, and socioeconomic grievances that fueled the plot remain largely unaddressed.

Electoral processes in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea elicited mixed opinions, suggesting a weakening of democratic systems in the region. While Côte d'Ivoire re-elected President Alassane Ouattara for a fourth term with 89.77 per cent¹ of the vote, Guinea returned to democratic rule with the election of General Mamadi Doumbouya as transitional leader, who received 86.72 per cent.²

Both elections were marked by the systematic exclusion of key opposition figures, executive control over the Election Management Bodies (EMBs), and the instrumentalisation of restrictive legal frameworks, raising concerns about their competitiveness and inclusiveness. In Côte d'Ivoire, former President Laurent Gbagbo was barred from contesting the election due to a criminal conviction, while Tidjane Thiam was disqualified on grounds of nationality stemming from his acquisition of French citizenship. In Guinea, former Prime Ministers Sidya Touré, leader of the Union of Republican Forces (UFR), Cellou Dalein Diallo, leader of the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG), and former President Alpha Condé, all in exile, were excluded

from the December 2025 Presidential election for failing to meet domestic residency requirements.



Constraints on civil dissent in 2025 further accelerated the shrinking civic space and the violations of human rights across the region. According to the 2025 Freedom House report, only Ghana, Cabo Verde and Senegal were classified as 'Free', while Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo were rated 'Partly Free'. Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger were categorised as 'Not Free', underscoring the growing decline in political rights and civil liberties.³ Of particular concern was the situation in the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, where some reports claim more than 40 journalists, activists, human rights defenders, and citizens were arrested, threatened, or forcibly disappeared under the pretext of national security and counter-terrorism.⁴

Extremist activities remained active in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, as armed groups exploited weak governance, intercommunal tensions, and socioeconomic headwinds to expand their influence and destabilise local communities. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the Sahel alone accounted for 19 per cent of all terrorist attacks worldwide and 51 per cent of global terrorism-related deaths in 2024, up from 48 per cent in 2023.⁵ Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) also indicate a surge in terrorism-related and armed attacks, with 3,971 reported in 2025, compared with 2,197 in 2024 and 1,715 in 2023. For instance, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) attacked more than 100 fuel tankers and abducted

¹ Côte d'Ivoire, Independent Electoral Commission: Available at: https://www.cei.ci/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/EPR_2025_RESULTAT_NATIONAL.pdf (Accessed 15 December 2025).

² Guinea, Ministry of Territorial Administration. Available at: https://web.facebook.com/AdministrationTDGN/posts/-r%C3%A9sultats-d%C3%A9nitiés-de-1%C3%A9lection-pr%C3%A9sidentielle-du-28-d%C3%A9cembre-2025voix-obtenu/1205128668421108/?_rdc=1&_rdr# (Accessed 15 December 2025).

³ Freedom House (2025). Freedom in the World 2025: The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/FITW_World_2025_Feb.2025.pdf (Accessed 01/01/2026)

⁴ Amnesty International (2025). Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2025/10/silence-and-repression-the-new-face-of-the-sahel/> (15 December 2025).

⁵ Institute for Economics and peace (2025). Global Terrorism Index 2025. Available at: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/reports/> (Accessed 01/01/2026)

fuel truck drivers in Mali.⁶ The group's months-long siege disrupted access to essential supplies and exacerbated the country's acute humanitarian conditions and social pressures. Moreover, a United Nations report from the region observed that entire communities were emptied in Burkina Faso, northern Mali, and western Niger, as violence between armed groups, intercommunal clashes, and military activity escalated.⁷

Emerging trends in violent extremist activity in 2025 included intensifying rivalries and the increased use of technology to execute complex attacks aimed at consolidating territorial control. Notably, clashes between Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in November 2025 in Dogon Chiku, near Lake Chad, underscored escalating competition among non-state armed groups for dominance in the basin, resulting in over 200 fatalities among the terrorist groups.⁸ Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) demonstrated enhanced operational sophistication through coordinated attacks employing drones, improvised explosive devices, and large formations against fortified military positions.⁹ These developments highlighted a strategic shift toward political entrenchment, with violent extremist groups increasingly positioning themselves as de facto governing authorities through territorial control. Beyond the Sahel, terrorist activities spill over into Coastal West Africa, with Benin and Togo recording a sustained rise in attacks. This highlights the growing diffusion of Sahelian security deterioration into Coastal States.

In addition to incidents and threats of violent extremism, growing insecurity in West Africa during the reporting period was also significantly driven by socio-economic pressures arising from both domestic and global dynamics, which adversely affected livelihoods. These dynamics fostered a permissive environment for protests, demonstrations, and labour strikes, both manifestations of and contributors to the ongoing erosion of the social contract, thereby undermining social cohesion and deepening trust deficits between states and citizens. Across the region, governments have implemented a range of interventions to mitigate the effects of economic headwinds on livelihoods and to revitalise economies. While these measures are projected to support average regional GDP growth of 4.3 per cent in 2026,¹⁰ persistent structural challenges,

including high debt burdens, inflationary pressures, tight global credit conditions, and declining official development assistance, are likely to impede growth amid rising demands for employment, infrastructure, and socioeconomic relief.

Furthermore, the effects of climate change on human security were pervasive in 2025. Droughts, floods, and shifting seasonal patterns have undermined livelihoods, food security, and water security in the region. These pressures acted as risk multipliers, intensifying competition over scarce resources and attendant conflicts, straining governments' resources, and heightening vulnerability in communities. The climate-conflict nexus has been identified as the main driver of food insecurity, hunger, and displacement in the region. However, a key outcome of the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30), held in Belém, Brazil, in November 2025, was the commitment to triple climate adaptation finance for developing countries to US\$1.3 trillion annually by 2035, with the aim of strengthening resilience in vulnerable regions such as West Africa.

In 2025, key stakeholders also introduced initiatives to advance the women, youth, peace, and security agenda at the national, regional, and continental levels. States have adopted progressive policies and laws 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 were geared towards addressing key issues such as gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual offences, domestic violence, and gender-sensitive security sectors reforms, as well as the development of National Action Plans on the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 2250 as well as other related instruments, aimed at protecting the rights of youth and women in the region. Nevertheless, persistent armed conflict, violence, climate shocks, and insecurity, along with the resulting humanitarian crises, continued to heighten youth and women's vulnerabilities. Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against women and children, remained pervasive in countries including Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. In Nigeria, mass abductions of school children, including over 300 students and 12 teachers in Niger State and 25 schoolgirls in Kebbi State in November 2025,¹¹ underscore a pattern of targeting education

⁶ United Nations Security Council (2025). West Africa and the Sahel. November 2025 Monthly Report Forecast. Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-11/west-africa-and-the-sahel-15.php> (Accessed 15 December 2025).

⁸ Ibid.

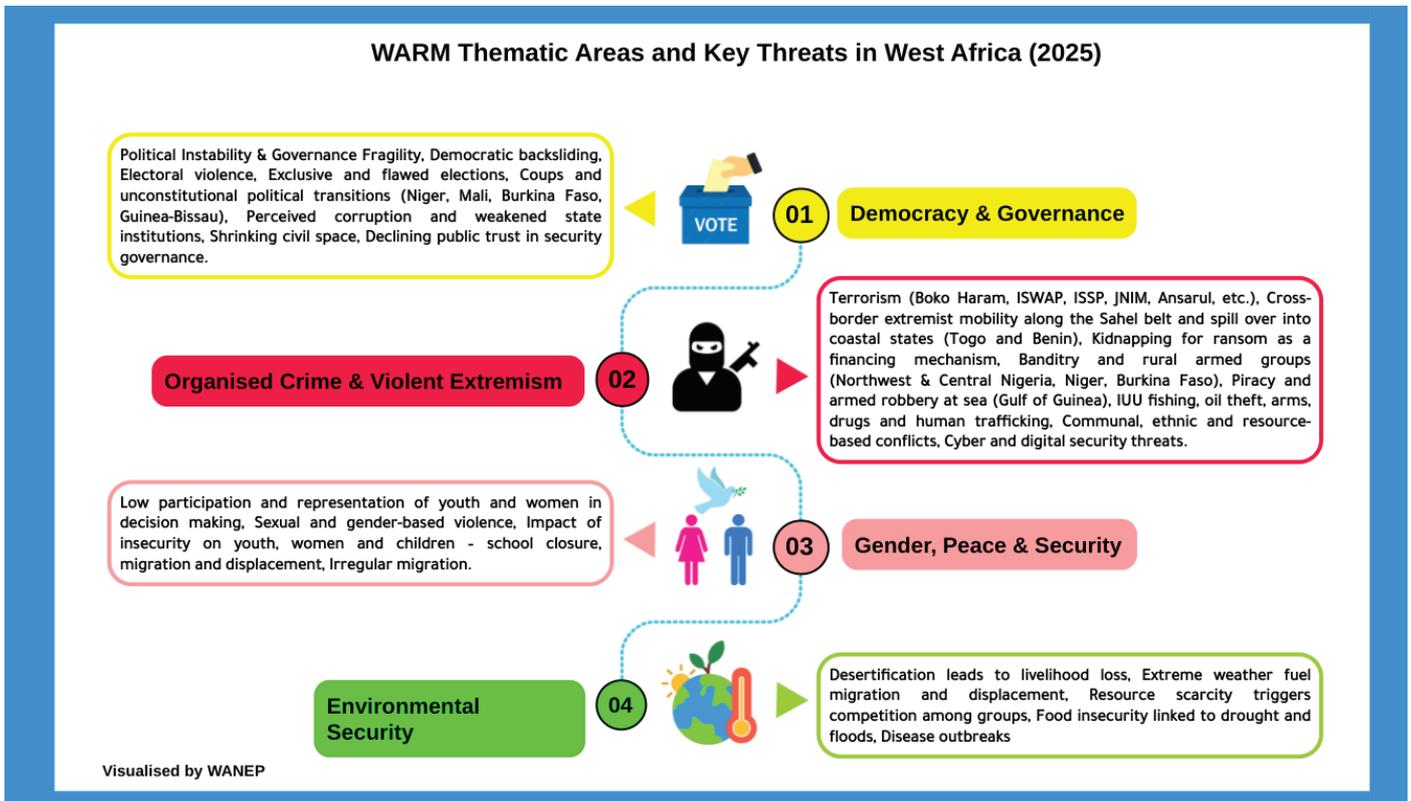
¹⁰ Amare, T. (2025). Africa in 2026: Global uncertainty demands regional leadership. Chatham House. Available at: www.chathamhouse.org (Accessed 15 December 2025)

¹¹ Ibid.

that both restricts access to schooling and reflects the instrumentalisation of children for ransom, forced marriage, domestic labour, and operational support to armed groups.

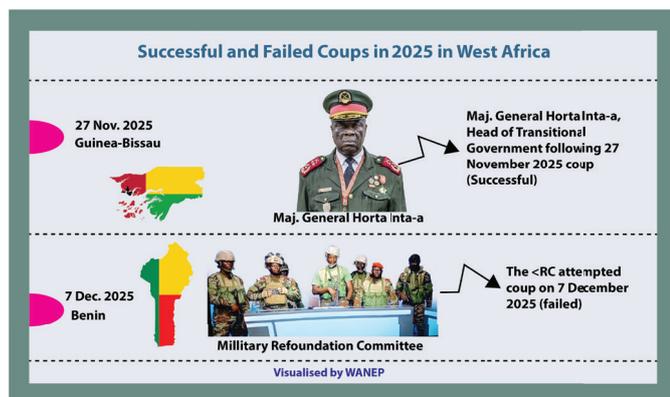
The *Annual Peace and Security Outlook* analyses the governance and human security challenges

that confronted West Africa in 2025 and projects emerging risks and vulnerabilities to inform targeted strategic interventions in 2026. The analysis is anchored on four main thematic areas: Democracy and Governance; Organised Crime and Violent Extremism; Gender, Peace, and Security; and Environmental Security.



2.0 DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

In 2025, political tensions, election controversies, and other systemic governance challenges weighed heavily on the region's political landscape. In Guinea-Bissau, tensions intensified as the end of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló's first mandate approached. Opposition parties argued that his five-year term expired on 27th February 2025. However, the Supreme Court of Justice rejected this position, ruling that the presidential mandate runs until 4th September 2025. At the same time, the electoral calendar became increasingly contested. Parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for November 2024, were postponed by the President and later rescheduled for 30th November 2025. In addition, the exclusion of the main opposition party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), from the November 2025 general elections further aggravated the political climate. This led to widespread protests, arrests of opposition figures, and reports of police brutality during demonstrations across the country. After multiple delays, the government announced that elections would be held on 23rd November 2025. The process, however, descended into a crisis. Following the presidential vote, both the incumbent and his main challenger, Fernando Dias de Costa, declared victory before the Electoral Commission's mandated timeframe for releasing official results. The crisis created an opportunity for a military coup, which led to the arrest of President Embaló and the suspension of the electoral process.¹² Major General Horta Inta-a was appointed as Head of a Transitional Government with a one-year transition mandate.



The African Union (AU) and ECOWAS have rejected the UCG and emphasised a shorter pathway to the

reinstatement of constitutional order, warning of possible targeted sanctions. Despite the military authorities signing a commitment on 10th December 2025 to oversee a one-year democratic transition process, Guinea-Bissau membership of ECOWAS and The African Union remains suspended until the constitutional order is restored.¹³

Guinea marked a pivotal phase of its political transition with a constitutional referendum held on 21st September 2025, followed by presidential elections on 28th December 2025. These events restored constitutional order following the military takeover on 5th September 2021. The new Constitution was approved in the referendum by 89.38 per cent amid boycotts by opposition coalitions and sections of civil society.¹⁴ The new Constitution, among other measures, extends the presidential term from five to seven years, renewable once, establishes a bicameral parliament by creating a Senate, and introduces a Special Court of Justice for senior officials. It also removes the clause barring military personnel from running for office, thereby paving the way for General Mamadi Doumbouya to contest in the December 2025 presidential elections, despite his earlier promises not to do so.¹⁵ General Mamadi Doumbouya won 86.4 per cent of the total vote cast. Although the election was relatively peaceful, it was also marred by the exclusion of key opposition party leaders, including Alpha Condé, Mamadou Cérou Dalein Diallo, and Sydia Touré, who were barred from contesting. Parties that participated in the election alleged that the election was marred by "systematic fraudulent practices", citing the expulsion of poll observers, ballot stuffing, and intimidation.¹⁶

In Côte d'Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara promised an inclusive and transparent election in 2025. However, despite this promise, political parties and other opposition figures, such as former President Laurent Gbagbo, former Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, Charles Blé Goudé, Tidjane Thiam, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and Noël Akossi Bendjo, were excluded from the electoral lists due to prior convictions and the loss of their civic rights.¹⁷ The exclusions constituted the centre of controversy before, during, and after the October 2025

¹² Guinea-Bissau coup: what happened, why it matters, what happens next? <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/27/guinea-bissau-coup-what-happened-why-it-matters-what-happens-next> (Accessed 01/01/2026)
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Voters in Guinea Approves New Constitution. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/voters-guinea-approve-new-constitution-with-89-support-2025-09-24/> (Accessed 6/10/2025)
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ APANEWS. Available at: <https://fr.apanews.net/cote-divoire/rci-election-exclusion-politique-de-3-opposants-pdci/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

presidential election in the country. Of 60 presidential applications submitted, the Constitutional Council validated only five, namely Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, Jean-Louis Billon, Ahoua Don Melo, Henriette Lagou Adjoua, and incumbent President Alassane Ouattara, who was seeking a controversial fourth term.¹⁸ The presidential election was held on 28th October 2025, amid a tense political climate marked by institutional mistrust, legal controversy, and fragile security contexts. According to the Independent Electoral Commission, the incumbent President Ouattara won with 89.77 per cent of the vote cast. The elections were marred by pre- and post-election protests, inter-party clashes, and other forms of violence.¹⁹ The election resulted in 11 fatalities, and several arrests, and imprisonment of protesters.²⁰ The legislative elections were held on 27th December 2025. The elections were widely criticised by opposition parties for a lack of inclusivity and transparency. The party of former President Laurent Gbagbo did not participate in the legislative elections, citing alleged political interference in the electoral process, an uneven playing field, and political intimidation.²¹

In Benin, Parliamentary and Municipal elections were scheduled for 11th January 2026. More than 7.8 million registered voters were expected to cast ballots at about 17,000 polling stations nationwide.²² Under Benin's electoral Code, 109 members of the National Assembly are elected by direct universal suffrage through proportional representation on party lists for a seven-year term, representing 77 municipalities, clustered into 24 constituencies. To secure seats in a constituency, a political party must obtain at least 20 per cent of valid votes both at the constituency level and nationwide. In the municipal elections, 1,815 Councillors will be elected across 546 districts in 77 municipalities, using a multi-member proportional voting system with a dual electoral threshold. Seat allocation is likewise contingent on securing at least 10 per cent of valid votes at both the local and national levels. The election outcomes will shape the political landscape ahead of the April 2026 presidential polls, from which the main

opposition party, "The Democrats", was disqualified to contest the elections for failing to obtain the required number of signatures. The new Electoral Code and its eligibility requirements for seat allocation remain at the centre of controversy in the country.²³ During the 11 January, 2026, Legislative and Municipal Elections, only the ruling coalition, the Progressive Union for Renewal and the Republican Bloc, won 60 and 49 seats in the National Assembly, respectively.²⁴ In contrast, the main opposition party, The Democrats, won 16 per cent of the votes cast but failed to meet the threshold required by the new Electoral Code.²⁵ As Benin prepares for the Presidential Election in April 2026, President Patrice Talon has reaffirmed that he will not seek a third term but has officially endorsed Romuald Wadagni, Minister of Economy and Finance, as a presidential hopeful.²⁶ In January 2025, before this endorsement, one of President Talon's allies, Olivier Boko, and the former Sports Minister, Oswald Homéky, were sentenced to 20 years in prison for conspiracy against the State.²⁷ This situation suggests political uncertainty and the Government's intention to silence potential Presidential candidates ahead of the 2026 elections.

Preceding the election was the coup attempt on 7th December 2025, in which a group of soldiers from the Military Refoundation Committee failed to overthrow the Government despite temporarily seizing the National Television Station, announcing the UCG, and the suspension all State Institutions.²⁸ At the request of the Government of Benin, special forces from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire were deployed, who coordinated with the Beninese Republican Army to counter the coup. The deployment of soldiers in response to the attempted UCG in Benin suggests ECOWAS renewed commitment to preventing further erosion of democracy in its member states. However, this deployment, while necessary to preserve democratic gains in the region, entails risks for ECOWAS, which is often perceived as selective in its responses to crises in West Africa. The pre-electoral environment intensified as the country prepared for the presidential election.

¹⁸ <https://www.ecofinagency.com/news/0909-48515-five-candidates-confirmed-for-cote-d-ivoire-s-october-2025-election> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

¹⁹ Côte d'Ivoire's democratic backslide: elections leave even less space for freedom. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/cote-divoires-democratic-backslide-elections-leave-even-less-space-for-freedom-269469> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

²⁰ Ivory Coast Opposition Asserts 12 Dead in Election Violence. available at: <https://apnews.com/article/international-news-boycotts-ouattara-elections-abi-djan-9b09ba7e3778647fd4ee6abbf11d548> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

²¹ Ibid

²² Xinhua (2026). <https://english.news.cn/20260112/1158161308c44eaa9e03376351b34dc7/c.html> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

²³ Base de données des textes de loi - Law No-2024-13 of March 15,2024. Available at: <https://documentation-anbenin.org/s/texes-de-lois/item/2765> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

²⁴ Benin's opposition loses all parliamentary seats, provisional results show. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/18/benin-opposition-loses-all-parliamentary-seats-provisional-results-show> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Two Associates of Benin's President sentenced to 20 years in prison for coup plot. Available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2025/01/31/2-associates-of-benins-president-sentenced-to-20-years-in-prison-for-coup-plot/> (Accessed 7/01/2026).

²⁸ Benin coup attempt updates. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2025/12/7/benin-attempt-coup-live-soldiers-on-state-tv-claim-to-have-topped-talon> (Accessed 7/01/2026)

The current socio-political situation stemming from this failed coup is likely to heighten political tensions in the lead-up to the 12th April 2026 presidential elections. Additionally, it has the potential for continued arrests and restrictions on political gatherings, which are susceptible to political violence, in the country before, during, and after elections.

Cape Verde is preparing for a politically significant year in 2026, marked by Parliamentary and Presidential Elections that could shape the country's political direction and governance. Parliamentary polls are scheduled for May 2026, followed by the Presidential election in November 2026.²⁹ The Legislative election will test the strength and appeal of the ruling Movement for Democracy (MpD) and the main opposition, the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV), as well as other political parties. Political discourse in the lead-up to these elections has underscored both competition and calls for civility. Religious and civic leaders have urged parties to focus on substantive issues rather than divisive rhetoric during campaigns, reflecting a broader concern about maintaining democratic norms. The 2026 State budget has also become a point of contention. Opposition critics frame budget allocations as politically motivated, arguing that resources are being channelled toward short-term, election-oriented spending rather than toward addressing long-standing structural challenges such as poverty and public debt.³⁰ This budget debate signals that economic policy and governance performance are likely to feature prominently in public discourse, election campaigns, and voter decision-making in 2026.

The Togolese National Assembly transitioned the country to the fifth Republic by adopting a new Constitution that abolished direct universal suffrage for the election of the President of the Republic and established a parliamentary system.³¹ This constitutional change grants the Head of State full powers and removes any further term limits. Many Togolese, both within the country and in the diaspora, have expressed dissatisfaction with this

constitutional change. Togo's ruling party, Union for the Republic (UNIR), led by President Faure Gnassingbé, secured 34 of 41 Senate seats in the recent senatorial election, marking the final phase of a controversial constitutional reform enacted in 2024. This election was seen as a critical step in the transition to a parliamentary system, part of broader constitutional reforms that have faced strong opposition from other political parties and CSOs across the country. UNIR's dominant victory strengthens its grip on power, while the ongoing opposition backlash over the constitutional reform highlights the widening political divide and potential challenges to the legitimacy of the electoral process.³² Nationwide protests in June 2025 were met with violent responses. According to Togolese CSOs, clashes between protesters and security forces resulted in the deaths of at least seven people.³³ Accusations of kidnappings, torture, and summary executions have also been levelled against security forces.³⁴ The aftermath of the June demonstrations continues to shape political discourse in the country. Between 1st and 4th July 2025, 49 human rights activists and political actors were arrested, and 18 of them were convicted for disturbing public order.³⁵

In addition, the Togolese authorities announced international arrest warrants for several protest leaders and activists, especially those in the diaspora. The municipal elections held on July 17, 2025, were followed by the Supreme Court's confirmation of the results on August 6, which granted the ruling Union for the Republic (UNIR) 1,150 of the 1,527 council seats (approximately 75% of the total). Opposition political parties, along with civil society groups, challenged the credibility of the elections, citing irregularities and limited transparency. Meanwhile, the Government continues to restrict civic space by banning public rallies and protests. On August 4, 2025, a memorial mass planned in honour of Jacques Koami Koutoglo, a young man who died during the June protests, was banned by the authorities, citing a pending judicial investigation into the assassination case. A planned peaceful demonstration on August 9 was also cancelled.

²⁹ Upcoming Elections. Available at: <https://africa24tv.com/cap-vert-lelection-presidentielle-prevue-le-15-novembre-2026#:~:text=Un%20rendez%2Dvous%20politique%20majeur%20pour%20l'archipel%2C%20organisé,le%20calendrier%20des%20élections%20nationales%20prévues%20en> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

³⁰ Cape Verde opposition blasts 2026 proposed budget as 'wasteful'. Available at: https://www.whoownsafrika.com/politics/cape-verde-opposition-blasts-2026-proposed-budget-as-wasteful/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 7/01/2026)

³¹ Togo: << Nous continuerons de nous battre pour la démocratie >>, promet l'opposante Brigitte Kafui Adjagamba-Johnson. Available at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1693095/politique/togo-nous-continuerons-de-nous-battre-pour-la-democratie-promet-l-opposante-brigitte-kafui-adjagamba-johnson/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³² Ibid

³³ Solidarité régionale : FreeTheCitizens annonce une manifestation devant l'ambassade du Togo à Accra. Available at: <https://togoactualite.com/solidarite-regionale-freethecitizens-annonce-une-manifestation-devant-lambassade-du-togo-a-accra/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³⁴ Violent Togo protest crackdown must be investigated. Available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2606819/world> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³⁵ WANEP-Togo July NEWS Monthly Bulletin. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³⁶ Liberia is Reforms-Ready, Says the World Bank. Available at: <https://derlimited.com/2025/07/17/liberia-is-reform-ready-says-world-bank/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³⁷ Liberia Set for First Chieftaincy Elections in 40 Years. Available at: <https://liberianinvestigator.com/news/liberia-set-for-first-chieftaincy-elections-in-40-years/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

In response, civil society launched a nationwide civil disobedience campaign, “Opération Togo Mort,” on August 16, 2025. This highlights the growing frustration with restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. Despite this, they are demanding a return to the 1992 Constitution and a genuine democratic transition.

The political landscape of Liberia in 2025 was predominantly characterised by the Government’s efforts to address corruption and to improve the country’s overall governance system. For the first time since 2007, a fiscal policy reform was enacted under President Joseph Boakai’s leadership.³⁶ These reforms are expected to stabilise public finances, restore investor confidence and significantly reduce fiscal vulnerabilities in the country. In addition, the country is expected to hold chieftaincy elections in October 2026. Since the adoption of the 1986 Constitution, these elections have not been conducted in the country. In 2026, the Government intends to implement its decentralisation policy and the Local Government Act (LGA) to enable the election of local chiefs, thereby fostering democratic governance and enhancing accountability in communities.³⁷ This constitutes a major step in the decentralisation efforts aimed at empowering communities and bringing governance closer to the people. Despite these efforts to improve governance, challenges such as economic hardship, inadequate public services, persistent perceptions of corruption in the public sector, and unemployment, among others, remain widespread in the country. Following the adoption of the 2026 National budget, citizens continue to raise concerns that the Government has allocated more funding to legislative and executive offices while neglecting job creation and improving public service delivery.³⁸ The dwindling public trust in governance could undermine existing reforms and stall progress towards effective implementation in 2026 and beyond.

In The Gambia, key political actors, including the ruling National People’s Party (NPP), the opposition, and their supporters, particularly the

United Democratic Party (UDP), have not reached a consensus on adopting a new constitution to replace the 1997 Constitution. The persistent failure to adopt a new constitution nine years after the 2016 elections reflects a deeper governance challenge in The Gambia. The rejection of the 2020 draft constitution, despite its inclusive approach, signified a strategic retreat from democratic commitments. It marked a critical point where elite interests overtook national consensus-building. Consequently, the drafting of the 2024 constitution, largely driven by the executive, has drawn criticism for its opacity and exclusivity, further eroding public trust in the reform process. The exclusion of key provisions addressing corruption, impunity, and institutional accountability has exacerbated mistrust between the ruling NPP and opposition groups, particularly the UDP. Another contentious issue is a clause limiting President Barrow’s use of executive powers to reset his eligibility to contest the 2026 Presidential election, which ends in 2025. The persistent lack of consensus among Gambian political actors on adopting a new constitution ahead of the December 2026 general elections poses a significant risk to political stability. As the elections approach, this unresolved constitutional debate may heighten political tensions and undermine social cohesion in The Gambia.

Ghana is undertaking significant constitutional reform to update its 1992 Constitution in response to longstanding governance challenges. This is the third major reform initiative since the start of the Fourth Republic, reflecting persistent concerns about structural gaps in the constitutional framework and the need to align the law with contemporary political and socio-economic realities.³⁹ The process gained momentum in 2025, when, in January, President John Dramani Mahama established a Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) tasked with examining past reform efforts, engaging broad segments of society, and proposing actionable amendments. The committee conducted extensive nationwide consultations in 2025, drawing submissions from individuals, civil society organisations, professional groups, and traditional authorities. It also organised

³⁶ Liberia is Reforms-Ready, Says the World Bank. Available at: <https://derlimited.com/2025/07/17/liberia-is-reform-ready-says-world-bank/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)
³⁷ Liberia Set for First Chieftaincy Elections in 40 Years. Available at: <https://liberianinvestigator.com/news/liberia-set-for-first-chieftaincy-elections-in-40-years/> (Accessed 6/01/2026)
³⁸ Critical Analysis of Liberia’s FY 2026 National Budget (US \$1.2 Billion). In Light of the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development. Available at: https://www.liberianobserver.com/opinion/commentaries/critical-analysis-of-liberia-s-fy-2026-national-budget-us-1-2-billion-in-light/article_aeda7e59-f710-4ef1-94a6-85258b0608cc.html (Accessed 6/01/2026)
³⁹ Ghana’s Constitution Review Committee’s Plan to Fix Governance Deficits. Available at: https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/third-time-could-be-charm-ghanas-constitution-review-committees-plan-fix-governance-deficits?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/01/2026)
⁴⁰ Ibid
⁴¹ See full report of H. Kwasi Prempeh’s Constitutional Review Committee proposing extension of presidential term from 4 to 5 years. Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/see-full-report-of-h-kwasi-prempehs-constitutional-review-committee-proposing-extension-of-presidential-term-from-4-to-5-years.html> (Accessed 6/10/2025)
⁴² Constitutional review committee submits final report to President Mahama and proposes extension of presidential term from 4 to 5 years. Available at: https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/constitutional-review-committee-submits-final-report-to-president-mahama.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/10/2025)

thematic stakeholder engagements across regions to ensure diverse inputs. On 22nd December 2025, the CRC submitted its final report to President Mahama, marking the completion of nearly a year of work.

The report reflects an effort to move constitutional reform beyond procedural fixes toward a framework that better supports stable, accountable, and development-focused governance. Key recommendations span several areas, from executive governance structures to local government reforms.⁴⁰ The most debated proposals in the report are recommendations to extend the presidential term from four to five years, to introduce elections for Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives (MMDCEs), and to integrate traditional chiefs into local governance.⁴¹ Proponents argue this adjustment could enhance governance continuity and allow elected leaders more time to implement medium- to long-term policies. Other opinions suggest that extending the term without adequate safeguards could weaken democratic accountability and reduce voters' ability to respond to poor performance at the ballotbox.⁴² In 2026, the focus will shift from consultation to implementation. The Government plans to establish an Implementation Committee to begin implementing the approved recommendations. This phase will be crucial, as it entails detailed legal drafting, legislative action, and a subsequent referendum. A broad national consensus and timely implementation could strengthen democratic institutions, respond to demands for more inclusive governance, enhance Ghana's democratic credibility, and reinforce its role as a democratic anchor in West Africa.

Sierra Leone's constitutional review process has been among the most protracted governance reforms in the country's post-war history, spanning more than two decades. This effort, which commenced after the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement and the subsequent 2002 Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendation to revise the 1991

Constitution, has seen successive committee reports and recommendations, but political transitions, shifting priorities, and gaps in political consensus have repeatedly delayed progress. Early action by the Peter Tucker Committee in 2007 and by the Justice Edmund Cowan Committee from 2013 to 2017 resulted in extensive public consultations, but their recommendations were not fully implemented due to differing political agendas across elected governments, despite the issuance of White Papers to adopt a new constitution.⁴³

Under President Julius Maada Bio's administration, the process gained renewed traction. A White Paper outlining accepted and rejected recommendations was released, and the Government moved toward drafting the revised constitution, reflecting extensive consultations and technical review. Proposed reforms include setting fixed national election dates to improve predictability, among other governance-focused adjustments. Despite these developments, the process remains incomplete. Key challenges include political disagreement over reform priorities, limited clarity on timelines for parliamentary debate and potential referendum to amend provisions of the 1991 Constitution. Analytical debates highlight unresolved issues in electoral reform and the lack of broad political buy-in, which delays consensus, thereby increasing uncertainty and posing a threat to future elections.

In 2025, the region also faced fragmentation and political shifts from the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. After officially withdrawing from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 29th January 2025, the three countries jointly announced their withdrawal from the Francophonie⁴⁴ in March 2025. This move reaffirmed their commitment to safeguard mutual national security and to prevent broader geopolitical interference by France, as evidenced by the severance of existing diplomatic ties and military cooperation. This action by the AES countries was to counter their earlier suspensions from the Francophonie grouping, following the

³⁸ Critical Analysis of Liberia's FY 2026 National Budget (US \$1.2 Billion). In Light of the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development. Available at: https://www.liberianobserver.com/opinion/commentaries/critical-analysis-of-liberia-s-fy-2026-national-budget-us-1-2-billion-in-light/article_aeda7e59-f710-4ef1-94a6-85258b0608cc.html (Accessed 6/01/2026)

³⁹ Ghana's Constitution Review Committee's Plan to Fix Governance Deficits. Available at: https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/third-time-could-be-charm-ghanas-constitution-review-committees-plan-fix-governance-deficits?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/01/2026)

⁴⁰ Ghana's Constitution Review Committee's Plan to Fix Governance Deficits. Available at: https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/third-time-could-be-charm-ghanas-constitution-review-committees-plan-fix-governance-deficits?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/01/2026)

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² See full report of H. Kwasi Prempeh's Constitutional Review Committee proposing extension of presidential term from 4 to 5 years. Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/politics/see-full-report-of-h-kwasi-prempehs-constitutional-review-committee-proposing-extension-of-presidential-term-from-4-to-5-years.html> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁴³ Constitutional review committee submits final report to President Mahama and proposes extension of presidential term from 4 to 5 years. Available at: https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/constitutional-review-committee-submits-final-report-to-president-mahama.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁴⁴ CARL-SL Concludes National Conference on Ongoing Constitutional Review. Available at: https://thecalabashnewspaper.com/carl-sl-concludes-national-conference-on-ongoing-constitutional-review/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁴⁵ APNEWS. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/mali-niger-burkina-aes-withdrawal-francophonie-43d04a46d293f647d7eb69f6c17d1592> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

UCGs. These political realignments by military governments continue to shape socio-political dynamics within the Sahel and the region.

In Niger, the military Government announced a five-year transition period following a National Consultation held in February 2025. It also dissolved the existing political parties and adopted a new "Refoundation Charter" to guide the transition process. As outcomes of the national consultation, new institutions, including the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP), the Refoundation Government, and the Refoundation Advisory Council (CCR),⁴⁵ were established. The Transitional Government prioritised strengthening local and national security; spearheading national reconciliation and social cohesion; strengthening defence and security forces; promoting the socioeconomic integration of young people; and advancing justice and combating impunity. General Abdourahmane Tiani was confirmed as President for a five-year transition, while the provisions of the Refoundation Charter allow military leaders to contest future elections in Niger.⁴⁶

In Burkina Faso, the Government dissolved the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and transferred electoral management to the Ministry of Territorial Administration on 17th July 2025.⁴⁷ It justified this move as a measure to reduce costs and minimise foreign interference in Burkina Faso's electoral processes. However, this reform could further delay the transition to democracy, with implications for inclusive political participation.⁴⁸ In its effort to fight crime, treason, terrorism and espionage, President Traoré's Government plans to revive the death penalty seven years after it was abolished in 2018 in the country.⁴⁹ The bill to revive this law was adopted by Burkina Faso's Council of Ministers on 4th December 2025.⁵⁰ However, the bill requires the transitional Council's approval and may be subject to judicial review. Its adoption will constitute a significant setback for the protection of human rights and further undermine freedom of expression in Burkina Faso. Since the military coup of September 2022, the regime has passed

laws to curb dissent, restrict political activities, and shrink the civic space. These restrictions are likely to be reinforced in 2026 as the country continues to struggle with insecurity and governance challenges.

In Mali, a transitional Charter was promulgated on 8th July 2025, which dissolved political parties, suspended elections indefinitely and granted a five-year, renewable mandate to the transitional President, General Assimi Goïta.⁵¹ This action, which suggests a prolonged period of military rule, was rejected by opposition figures who demanded a clear electoral timeline. On 13th May 2025, the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Mali dissolved political parties and barred similar activities.⁵² This decision followed a demonstration by opposition parties on 3rd May 2025, which was seen as a defiant act against the military authorities. Despite this decision, leaders of the dissolved parties initiated legal proceedings to challenge the dissolution decrees issued by the Malian transitional authorities.⁵³ These developments underscore a complex and fragile political environment, with significant implications for regional peace, security, and governance in 2026.

Other threats are the increased use of existing legal frameworks, especially Anti-Terrorism Cyber Crime laws, to curtail dissenting views and human rights violations evident in the arrest of opposition figures, pro-democracy activists, and journalists, as well as the killing of peaceful protesters in demonstrations across the region.⁵⁴ These have contributed to the shrinking of political spaces for inclusivity and dissent and to the protection of citizens' civil liberties in several countries in the region. Although WANEP-NEWS data show a decline in protest incidents from 924 in 2024 to 755 in 2025, fatalities fell sharply from 216 to 83 and injuries from 595 to 353 in 2024 and 2025, respectively. While unrest persists, the reduced lethality suggests improved crowd management and de-escalation measures, though persistent economic and political grievances continue to sustain social mobilisation risks into 2026.

⁴⁵ APNEWS. Available at: <https://fr.apnews.net/news/niger-les-resolutions-des-assises-nationales-entretiyiyitiktty/jhgr9op\nt-en-vigueur-le-25-mars/> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁴⁶ IDEA. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/niger/february-2025> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁴⁷ APNEWS. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/burkina-faso-electoral-commission-910d22d0493e5302509782c7c18953c0> (Accessed on 7/10/2025)

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Burkina Faso plans to restore death penalty for treason, terrorism and espionage. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/burkina-faso-death-penalty-4bc692c9c40ba9b5c077035a5ff0ccae> (Accessed on 28/12/2025)

⁵⁰ Ibid

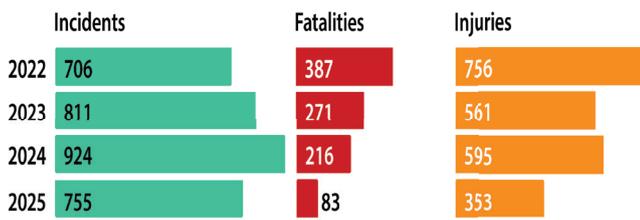
⁵¹ IDEA. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/mali/july-2025?pid=8200> (Accessed on 7/01/2026)

⁵² Mali : la junte dissout les partis politiques et suspend la chaîne TV5 Monde. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/05/13/mali-la-junte-dissout-les-partis-politiques-et-suspend-la-chaîne-tv5-monde_6605840_3212.html#:~:text=La%20dissolution%20des%20partis%20survient,a%20Dt%20il%20ajout%C3%A9 (Accessed 6/01/2026)

⁵³ Mali: la dissolution des organisations politiques attaquée en justice. Available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250522-mali-la-dissolution-des-organisations-politiques-attaque-en-justice> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

⁵⁴ Rights Reversed: A Downward Shift in Civic Space (2019-2023). Available at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/rights-reversed-2019-to-2023/> (Accessed 12/01/2026).

Trend Analysis on Protests / Demonstrations in West Africa from 2022 to 2025



Source: NEWS, visualised by WANEP - Created with Datawrapper



While the Western partners' influence continues to decline in the region, Russia, China, and middle powers such as the Gulf States, Turkey, and Iran have further increased and strengthened their presence and influence in West Africa. The growing Africa-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economic partnership, shaped by geographic proximity, focuses on addressing critical issues such as food security, energy transition, and infrastructure development.⁵⁵ Additionally, the Africa-GCC partnership is expected to deepen, marked by increased investment, trade, and joint ventures, thereby contributing to economic resilience and growth.⁵⁶ The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has committed \$19 billion to transport and energy projects in Niger and \$500 million to Mali's gold, transport, and energy projects.⁵⁷ Saudi Arabia and Qatar prioritised rural development, agriculture, and energy, with Saudi Arabia pledging \$325 million to Mali, including a 2023 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance air transport.⁵⁸ Across ECOWAS, Saudi Arabia has invested \$120 million in transit, education, and healthcare, notably the Bouna-Doropo-Burkina Faso Border Road in Côte d'Ivoire.⁵⁹

In Ghana, the UAE has renewed its \$3 billion commitment to energy, agriculture, education, healthcare, real estate, and tourism.⁶⁰ These strategic investments underscore the Gulf states' growing role in fostering economic development and long-term partnerships across the region. During the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum in Cairo, Egypt, 19th–20th December

2025, the President of ECOWAS Commission and the Russia's Foreign Minister highlighted recent developments in the region, including elections and efforts to combat terrorism, and explored ways to strengthen ECOWAS-Russia collaboration in the areas of peace, security, infrastructure, and business initiatives in West Africa.⁶¹ The shifting regional dynamics are reshaping prospects for West African integration. However, the fragmentation suggests that future negotiations and decisions will increasingly occur through bilateral channels rather than within a unified framework, leaving States in the region more vulnerable to external influence and manipulation. Therefore, regional integration must be strengthened, and countries in West Africa need to address challenges of political instability, policy unpredictability, infrastructure gaps, and currency volatility to boost investor enthusiasm and trust.

Digital technology and social media have become central tools in contemporary security governance, particularly in monitoring threats, detecting extremist activity, and supporting border management. Governments and security agencies increasingly rely on digital surveillance, open-source intelligence, and data analytics to track online recruitment networks, monitor cross-border movements, and identify early warning signals of violence. In West Africa, States such as Nigeria use digital platforms and social media tools to monitor terrorism narratives. Ghana has also deployed digital border management systems linked to biometric databases, illustrating how technology can strengthen preventive and response capacities. Beyond security, digital platforms have also opened new spaces for civic engagement and accountability. Social media has enabled citizens to bypass traditional gatekeepers and to demand transparency and responsive governance from duty bearers. However, these same tools carry significant risks. Social media can accelerate social mobilisation in ways that outpace state capacity to manage protests, sometimes leading to violence. Extremist groups exploit online platforms for propaganda, recruitment, and fundraising, especially during

⁵⁵ Rising Gulf Investments in Africa: A New Era of Strategic Partnership. Available at: <https://chambers.com/articles/rising-gulf-investments-in-africa-a-new-era-of-strategic-partnership> (Accessed 6/01/2026)

⁵⁶ A new economic partnership is emerging between Africa and the Gulf states. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/04/africa-gcc-gulf-economy-partnership-emerging/> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁵⁷ West Africa at a crossroads of partnerships. Available at: https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2025-04/PB-20-25%20%28Hermine%20Sam%29_0.pdf (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ GCC & Sub-Saharan African Countries Relations and Opportunities. Available at: https://grc.net/w/GCC-Sub-SaharanAfricaReport_2.pdf (Accessed 6/10/2025)

⁶¹ ECOWAS, Russia pledge support for West African Security and Development. Available at: <https://www.channelafrica.co.za/channelafrica/news/ecowas-russia-pledge-support-for-west-african-security-development/> (Accessed 6/10/2025)

periods of unconstitutional changes of government. With the popularity of social media platforms such as X, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok, polarising rhetoric, disinformation campaigns, and inflammatory statements have spread more easily, with legal frameworks deemed insufficient to address them in the region. The spread of fake news, hate speech, and information disorder has fuelled mistrust and threatened stability and social cohesion in countries across the region.

2.1. Key Outlook in 2026

2.1.1. Coup Contagion and Governance Challenges

According to International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (2025) report, African countries accounted for the largest share of democratic declines, at 33 per cent across global regions.⁶² In West Africa, ECOWAS suspended Guinea-Bissau, following a military coup that occurred after the 2025 Presidential election. The regional bloc continues to face an increasing trend of coup attempts across its member states over the last three years, as exemplified by reported incidents in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and most recently in Benin. It reflects the weakening state of democracy in the region, driven by systemic and political challenges that reinforce the military's incursion into politics and governance. A recurring element is the widening discontent and distrust of democracy among citizens, who accuse political elites of manipulating and abusing existing democratic systems to prevent broader participation, inclusivity, and consensus-building. Given these vulnerabilities across the region, there is a risk of continued political and ethnic tensions and coup attempts, which could undermine democratic governance and heighten political uncertainty in 2026.

2.1.2. Continued Complex Political Transitions

West Africa continues to experience political instability, with military-led transitions shaping governance trajectories. The political uncertainty in Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Guinea-Bissau indicates continued entrenchment of military rule across the region and the Central Sahel, with significant implications for 2026. The extension of transition timelines, the dissolution of political

parties, and the absence of credible electoral roadmaps signal a clear shift away from short-term transitions toward open-ended military governance. Given this, the outlook suggests increased political rigidity rather than transition. Military authorities are likely to prioritise regime consolidation, security operations, and control over political space, often justified by the persistence of insecurity and violent extremist threats. Prolonged exclusion of political actors and civil society risks deepening public frustration, fragmenting social cohesion, and escalating instability.

At the regional level, these trajectories will continue to strain relations between the Transitional Governments and ECOWAS, the African Union and other international actors, while undermining collective norms against military coups. It weakens regional coordination on security, migration, and economic governance at a time of heightened transnational threats. Without a credible transition plan to democratic rule, the risk is not immediate collapse but a slow normalisation of military-led governance, with long-term consequences for democratic recovery, state legitimacy, and regional stability.

2.1.3. Constitutional and Electoral Reforms: The Challenges of Inclusivity

Across West Africa, constitutional and electoral reform processes are increasingly challenged by questions of inclusivity, credibility, and political trust. In several countries, reforms intended to strengthen democratic governance have become sources of contention due to limited consultation, constrained dialogue, and perceptions of elite capture. In The Gambia, repeated attempts to adopt a new constitution have failed, largely due to concerns about political interference and insufficient consensus among political actors. This has weakened public confidence in the reform process and delayed efforts to address key governance gaps inherited from the post-Jammeh transition. In Ghana, although nationwide consultations were conducted as part of the constitutional review process, segments of civil society and the public argue that the process has not been broad or in-depth enough to meaningfully reflect citizen inputs,

⁶² The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move. Available at: https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2025-09/global-state-of-democracy-2025-democracy-on-the-move_0.pdf (Accessed 6/01/2026)

raising concerns about ownership and legitimacy. Sierra Leone's constitutional review has faced similar criticism for limited inclusivity and slow implementation. The failure to implement the tripartite recommendations agreed after the disputed 2023 elections has reinforced perceptions that political dialogue outcomes do not translate into concrete reforms, which erodes trust in state-led processes. In Benin, the shrinking political space is exemplified by the exclusion of the main opposition party from the 2026 local and presidential elections. This has the potential to heighten concerns about fairness, competitiveness, and the credibility of the broader electoral environment. Given this, the outlook across these countries and the wider region is likely to exacerbate political disputes and trust deficits. Where reform processes are perceived as exclusive or manipulated, the risk of citizen apathy, protest, or electoral boycotts increases. Restoring confidence will require an inclusive, multistakeholder dialogue that is transparent and committed to agreed reforms.

2.1.4. Instrumentalisation of Laws and Human Rights Concerns

Across the region, State actors are abusing normative and legal frameworks for political ends, thereby restricting political freedoms and civic space. Governments of Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Benin and Guinea-Bissau have been reported to arrest opposition members and supporters, while political activities have been banned in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Bissau. These actions reflect a broader pattern where laws are compromised as a political weapon misapplied as counter terrorist, cybercrime or misinformation to justify the detention of critics or a dissenting voice. This undermines basic rights to political participation, freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Press freedom data points to a regional erosion of civil liberties. According to Reporters Without Borders' 2025 Press Freedom Index, 11 of 16 West African countries experienced declines in media freedom, with significant declines in Guinea and regional downturns in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria. Only a few states, such as Senegal, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone and Liberia, posted improvements. It signals media suppression,

given the limited capacity of independent platforms to hold the state accountable.

Human rights monitoring groups also document frequent arrests and harassment of journalists across the region. For example, six journalists in Niger were arrested under a cybercrime law for sharing state information online, illustrating how broadly written legislation can be weaponised against media practitioners.⁶³ In 2026, these legal and political pressures are likely to intensify civic mistrust and polarisation, as citizens feel their voices are stifled, and avenues for peaceful dissent are limited. Where oppositional political activity is constrained, there is a greater risk of political frustration, underground mobilisation, or unstable protest cycles, especially as governance grievances, political and economic marginalisation persist. For democratic resilience, States will be required to apply moral authority in enforcing security laws, media protections and press freedom. Without these measures, the human rights environment across the region may deteriorate further in 2026.

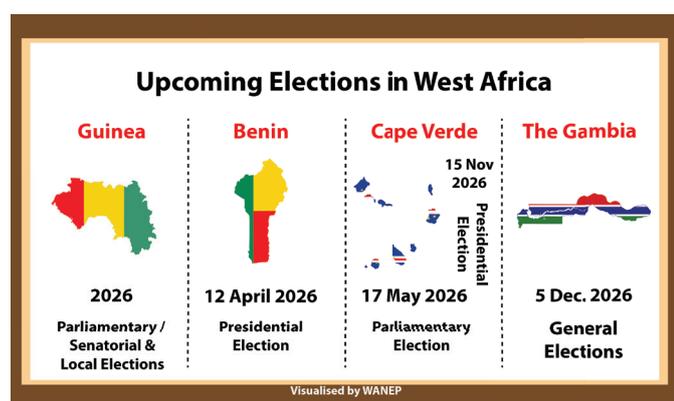
2.1.5. Upcoming Elections in 2026

Benin's April 2026 Presidential election will be a critical test for the country's democratic resilience after the recent coup attempt and political restrictions. The exclusion of major opposition figures from previous contests and the barring of the main opposition party from the 2026 Local and Presidential elections have eroded political competition and heightened concerns about fairness and inclusivity. This poses high risks to the upcoming elections, with the potential to disrupt the peaceful conduct of the elections and the political transition. The key outlook hinges on Benin's ability to open political space and safeguard electoral integrity. International and domestic pressure for transparent, competitive polls could push authorities toward reforms, but continued restrictions risk deepening political apathy and weakening civil liberties, with implications for stability beyond 2026.

Cape Verde's 2026 elections, with parliamentary polls set for May and the presidential vote in November, will be pivotal for the country's democratic

⁶³ Journalists in Niger Arrested Under Cybercrime Law. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/06/journalists-in-niger-arrested-under-cybercrime-law> (Assessed on 6/01/2026)

trajectory. The elections are expected to be competitive but peaceful, reflecting Cape Verde's reputation for electoral integrity and stable governance. Political debate is likely to centre on economic performance, public services, and social inclusion, as citizens assess the incumbent's performance against pressing development challenges. The key outlook for 2026 and beyond is that credible and inclusive elections can reinforce democratic norms and institutional trust. Effective engagement by all political actors, respect for civil liberties, and transparent processes will be critical to sustaining political stability and encouraging constructive public participation in governance.



Guinea's transition from military rule to an elected civilian government in December 2025 represents a significant step in restoring constitutional order and multiparty democracy. Although the presidential election was relatively peaceful, the exclusion of prominent opposition leaders narrowed political competition and raised concerns about inclusivity. This managed transition risks entrenching a dominant-party system rather than fostering genuine pluralism. Ahead of the 2026 Legislative and Local elections, the political landscape is likely to be characterised by heightened mistrust between the ruling authorities and opposition parties, as well as increased mobilisation by youth and civil society demanding inclusivity and broad-based participation. While large-scale violence may be avoided, tensions could manifest as protests, boycotts, or low voter turnout in legislative elections, thereby undermining confidence in democratic institutions.

The December 2026 General Elections in The Gambia will take place against a backdrop of persistent political and socio-economic stress. Although the country has maintained competitive politics since the end of Yahya Jammeh's rule, frustrations over slow economic growth, high unemployment, and gaps in service delivery have deepened. Persistent

discontent with governance performance has sharpened public expectations for leadership that can deliver tangible improvements in livelihoods. Political debates around constitutional reform, accountability, and institutional effectiveness are likely to shape electoral outcomes. There is a growing perception that President Adama Barrow may seek a third term. Given the repeated rejection of the draft constitution with term limits. It has fueled public suspicion of political interference and elites' resistance to reform. These concerns resonate in a broader regional context in which constitutional manipulation and tenure extension have become widespread. Against this backdrop, The Gambia elections are expected to be a litmus test of political party positions, and manifestos risk economic and governance targets. Uncertainty around the constitutional adoption of term limits could deepen public mistrust, polarise the political space, and undermine confidence in the electoral process and political transition. In 2026, The Gambia's outlook will depend on whether political actors can rebuild consensus around constitutional reform and reaffirm commitment to democratic norms. A credible and inclusive electoral process could reinforce democratic norms and provide a platform for renewed commitments to governance. However, failure to address core economic grievances and political polarisation may increase social disillusionment and strain institutional trust, challenging stability in the post-election period.

2.1.6. Geopolitics and Regional Security

West Africa's geopolitical and regional security landscape has undergone significant strain over the past few years, shaped by a series of military coups, rising extremist violence and shifting external influences. Since 2020, six of the seven successful coups in the region have occurred in francophone States (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea), a pattern that has triggered neo-colonial debates about the role of France in francophone West Africa. In many of these contexts, military leaders have framed their takeovers as a rejection of external interference, arguing that biased geopolitical influences have impacted security, development, and respect of sovereignty. This rhetoric exploits the sentiments of a population frustrated by insecurity, economic stagnation, and governance deficits. This perception has accelerated the shift toward alternative security partnerships, particularly with Russia, through private military actors such as the Africa Corps, as well as through other security arrangements with Turkey and Gulf States, which

are seen as offering less conditional support. These shifting alignments have complicated regional integration and security cooperation by reducing member States' engagement with ECOWAS and AU-led mechanisms. This undermines intelligence sharing, joint operations and compliance with protocols on governance and collective security. This affects ECOWAS and AU leverage to address transnational crime and rising insecurity, which contribute to growing public frustration and declining State-citizen trust across West Africa. Therefore, it requires multi-level advocacy and diplomatic engagements to seek strategic policy alignments both at the level of the United Nations Security Council and the African Union, as well as multi-national cooperative mechanisms that are inclusive and enhance the position of ECOWAS to leverage its supra-national strength and role in Member States, including the Sahel States.

2.2. Key Resilient Factors

- As civic space continues to shrink across West Africa, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are intensifying efforts to engage communities at local, regional, and national levels through election observation missions, sensitisation campaigns, dialogue, and mediation. These initiatives provide platforms for discussing governance, peace and security. By fostering inclusive conversations, CSOs help strengthen community perspectives and promote democratic principles. Sustained engagement can enhance citizen awareness, encourage accountability, and advance social justice and development across the region.
- Despite widespread attempts to silence independent media and human rights defenders across West Africa, journalists, activists, and citizens continue to demand inclusive participation in democratic processes and respect for human rights. The expansion of digital tools and social media platforms such as X, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok across borders transforms the communication landscape, creating spaces for CSOs and citizens to advocate for greater transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.
- Since the exit of the AES countries from ECOWAS, regional frameworks such as the Trade Liberalisation Scheme (TLS) remain operational, despite the 0.5 per cent import levy imposed by AES on goods from ECOWAS Member States. AES countries have maintained visa-free entry for West African nationals, consistent with the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Goods and People. In April 2025, the invitation

and participation of the AES countries in the ECOWAS extraordinary summit in Accra Ghana, signal a window for further dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

- State authorities, CSOs, and citizens are leveraging cross-border ethnic, social, and religious ties to build trust and promote collaborative peace initiatives. If sustained, these measures could form platforms to strengthen multilateral partnerships between ECOWAS and the AES.

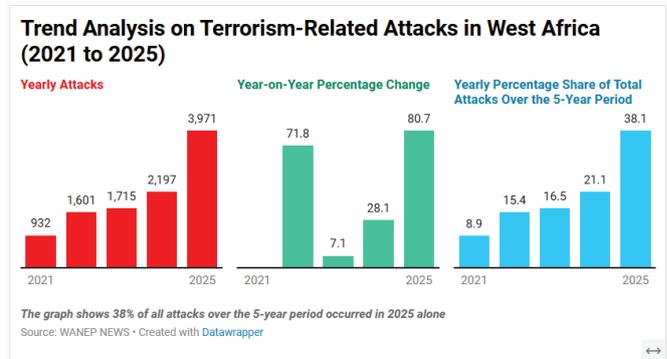
2.3. Recommendations

- The ECOWAS Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) should deepen and systematise its engagement with CSOs and international partners to support sustained, inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue in Benin, Guinea, Cape Verde and The Gambia ahead of the upcoming elections. These dialogues should bring together political actors, electoral institutions, security agencies, and civic groups to address grievances, reduce mistrust in democratic processes, and build shared commitment to peaceful, transparent, and credible elections. Early and continuous engagement will be critical to preventing escalation and strengthening confidence ahead of key political milestones in 2026.
- The African Union, ECOWAS, UNOWAS, and development partners are encouraged to intensify support for Governments in West Africa to prioritise the establishment of structured local and national platforms that connect Election Management Bodies, security agencies, and the judiciary to improve electoral integrity, democratic dispute resolution, and peaceful transitions. These structures should build on existing national early warning, mediation, and inter-agency frameworks, with regional institutions providing standard training and peer learning.
- As civic space continues to shrink across West Africa and the Sahel, there is an urgent need to establish or strengthen (if it exists) a strong CSO-Media forum for more engagement and collaboration. This will provide a forum for regular updates on peace and security, as well as on human rights violations that affect the operational freedom of civil society organisations, the media, and human rights advocates. Such a framework should promote transparency, accountability, and inclusivity to strengthen good governance, peace, and security across West Africa and the Sahel.

3.0 ORGANISED CRIME AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent conflict and organised crime remain critical and interlinked threats to peace and security in West Africa. Terrorism, insurgencies, communal and border disputes persisted, while organised criminal activities, including kidnapping, armed robbery, trafficking of arms, drugs, humans, and contraband medicines, continued to strain governance and social cohesion. Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger accounted for the highest figures of violence incidence reports in the region. The activities of violent extremist groups and organised criminal networks also intensified in the northern regions of Benin and Togo. While the threat of Sahelian violence spilling into Coastal States remains, armed extremist activity was recorded along Côte d'Ivoire's northern frontier, near Difita in Téhini department, close to the Burkina Faso border, and in Ghana's Upper East and Upper West regions, which border Burkina Faso. Data from the WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS) indicate a rise in attack levels, with

3,971 terrorism-related and armed attacks in 2025, up from 2,197 in 2024 and 1,715 in 2023.⁶⁴



Data on conflict-related fatalities by December 2025 indicated more than 9,000, compared with 8,500 in the same period in 2024.⁶⁵ Security operatives and installations, worship places, schools, mining communities and local authorities such as chiefs, religious leaders, teachers and opinion leaders were the main targets of attacks.

Below is an example of key incidents timeline, location and casualty recorded in 2025 (Source: WANEP NEWS)

Date	Location	Incident	Casualties	Actor(s)
Jan 2025	Dumba, Borno State, Nigeria	Attacks on farming villages	At least 40 farmers and civilians killed	ISWAP /Boko Haram
7 Feb 2025	Near Kobé, Gao Region, Mali	Attack on civilian convoy escorted by Malian and allied forces	34 casualties (civilians and soldiers)	IS-Sahel
21 Mar 2025	Fambita Mosque, Kokorou, Tillabéri Region, Niger	Attack on worshippers during prayers	At least 44 civilians killed; over 20 injured	Terrorist group (IS-linked)
9 May 2025	Guilmaro, Atakora Department, Benin	Attack on police post; weapons seized and detainees freed	Weapons looted; detainees released	Terrorist group affiliated to JNIM
May 2025	Djibo and Diapaga, Burkina Faso	Large-scale attack and temporary seizure of provincial capitals	Over 100 fatalities	JNIM
23 May 2025	Dioura, Tenenkou Cercle, Mali	Military camp overrun; weapons seized	41 soldiers killed	JNIM
19 Jun 2025	Banibangou, Tillabéri Region, Niger	Attack on an army base	71 soldiers killed; 14 wounded	IS-Sahel
21 Jun 2025	Manda village, Niger	Attack on civilians and worshippers	At least 71 civilians killed; about 20 people injured	Jihadist group
20 Jun 2025	Konduga Market, Borno State, Nigeria	Female suicide bombing (IED) at crowded market	At least 12 killed; dozens injured	Boko Haram
Jan-Jul 2025	Northern Togo	Series of terrorist attacks	54 civilians and 8 soldiers killed	Al-Qaeda-linked group
22 Nov 2025	Papiri community, Niger State, Nigeria	Raid on boarding school; mass abduction	215 schoolchildren and 12 teachers abducted	Armed group

⁶⁴ WANEP NEWS Monthly Bulletin (January – December 2025). Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 10/01/2026)

⁶⁵ Ibid

Apart from jihadist activity, terrorists and affiliated militant groups also intensified violent conflicts with rival factions. Between 5 and 8 November 2025, clashes around Lake Chad between Boko Haram and ISWAP resulted in significant militant casualties, with reports indicating that at least 200 fighters were killed.⁶⁶ In addition, counter-insurgency efforts by state security and allied forces have contributed to the rise in fatalities recorded in the review period. For Instance, a suspected militia associated with pro-government forces killed at least 130 civilians in villages near Solenzo in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region in Burkina Faso on 10th - 11th March 2025.⁶⁷

In December 2025, the United States-Africa Command (U. S. AFRICOM)⁶⁸ airstrikes targeted ISIS-linked camps in Sokoto State, killing multiple militants with no civilian casualties reported.⁶⁹ These incidents underscore the growing vulnerabilities of the civilian population and expose significant pressure on states' border security architecture, as well as suggesting an enhanced capacity of armed groups to disrupt state authority and administration in West Africa. Addressing these fatalities requires enhanced intelligence gathering and cooperation with hotspot communities to boost policies and regulations to protect affected populations.

Another emerging trend of terrorist activity in the region is the attack on economic assets and facilities. JNIM, Boko Haram, the 'Lakurawa group', and ISWAP deliberately target businesses, supply chains, and civilian livelihoods to weaken State authority while ensuring financial inflows that sustain their operations. According to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) report of October 2025, JNIM's operations in Mali reflected a clear strategy of economic coercion, evident in the takeover of Farabougou in August 2025 and the destruction of over 40 fuel tankers in September 2025, as part of an enforced fuel and trade blockade.⁷⁰ It was reported that fuel supply routes from Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, particularly the Bamako-Zégoua-Sikasso corridor, were targeted, resulting in the burning of fuel

supply tankers, transport vehicles, and the kidnappings of travellers on the Senegal and Mauritania route. It disrupts the movement and supply of essential commodities, triggering fuel shortages and extending economic pressure toward Coastal States. At least seven foreign industrial sites have been attacked, including six Chinese-owned premises, engaged in livestock theft and levied taxation on communities to secure their revenue.

These trends are unfolding amid shifts in the regional security architecture. In 2025, the transition from the Wagner Group to the Russia-linked Africa Corps in parts of the Sahel, particularly Mali, altered security arrangements but has not translated into sustained improvements in civilian protection.⁷¹ The reconfiguration has coincided with reduced regional security cooperation and accountability, creating operational space that violent extremist groups and organised criminal networks continue to exploit.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram and ISWAP increasingly targeted critical transport arteries in Borno State, deploying Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), landmines, and ambushes along highways, bridges, and commercial convoys, notably the Maiduguri-Monguno corridor, cutting farmers off from markets and worsening food insecurity. On 28th April 2025, at least 26 civilians were killed when a commercial truck struck an IED near the Cameroon border, underscoring the persistent vulnerability of trade and transport routes in a conflict that has claimed over 40,000 lives over the past 15 years.⁷² Coordinated assaults on 12th and 13th May 2025 temporarily gave militants control of Marte district, a strategic node for Lake Chad-linked smuggling corridors, which underscores the use of transport nodes for revenue generation, population control, and sustained pressure on state authority.⁷³ In northern Ghana, particularly the Upper West region, up to half of the cattle sold in some markets were smuggled livestock taken as forced zakat by militants from Burkina Faso, with proceeds used to fund fuel, food, and weapons for terrorist groups.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ Terrorist turf war battle in north-eastern Nigeria leaves about 200 dead - Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/nov/10/terrorist-turf-war-battle-north-eastern-nigeria#:~:text=2%20months%20old-,Terrorist%20turf%20war%20battle%20in%20north%2Deastern%20Nigeria%20leaves%20about,seized%20by%20Boko%20Haram%20forces> (Accessed on 09/01/2026).

⁶⁷ Burkina Faso military accused of killing over 100 civilians in 'massacre'. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgj871wej3lo> (Accessed on 09/01/2026).

⁶⁸ USAFRICOM is one of the eleven unified combatant commands of the United States Department of Defence, headquartered at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. It is responsible for U.S. military operations, including fighting regional conflicts[5] and maintaining military relations with 53 African nations.

⁶⁹ US says it struck Islamic State militants in northwest Nigeria. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-launches-strikes-against-islamic-state-militants-northwest-nigeria-trump-says-2025-12-25/> (Accessed on 09/01/2026).

⁷⁰ Terrorist roadblocks strangle the economies of Mali and its neighbours - Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/terrorist-roadblocks-strangle-the-economies-of-mali-and-its-neighbours> (Accessed on 16/01/2026).

⁷¹ Transition to Africa Corps Unlikely to Improve Sahel Security, Experts Say. Available at: <https://adf-magazine.com/2025/07/transition-to-africa-corps-unlikely-to-improve-sahel-security-experts-say/#:~:text=However%2C%20analysts%20say%20that%20the%20Africa%20Corps%20juntas%20than%20helping%20local%20troops%20fight%20insurgents> (Accessed on 29/01/2026).

⁷² 26 killed in Nigeria as truck drove over explosive device - Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2025/04/29/26-killed-in-nigeria-as-truck-drove-over-ied_6740716_124.html (Accessed on 16/01/2026).

⁷³ Resurgent jihadist violence in northeast Nigeria part of a worrying regional trend - Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/06/02/resurgent-jihadist-violence-northeast-nigeria-part-worrying-regional-trend> (Accessed on 16/01/2026).

⁷⁴ Terror Groups Use Ghana's Cattle Markets for Quick Cash - Available at: <https://adf-magazine.com/2025/09/terror-groups-use-ghanas-cattle-markets-for-quick-cash/#:~:text=By%20ADF%20September%202025,Islamic%20charity%20payment%20called%20zakat> (Accessed on 16/01/2026).

A consequence of the armed attacks in the region is the growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. For instance, the Liptako-Gourma Gourma tri-border region accounted for 3.35 million displaced people. As of 30th September 2025, Côte d'Ivoire hosted 90,141 IDPs, including 14,987 Malian and over 77,666 Burkinabe refugees.⁷⁶ Over 30,000 displaced persons, comprising 71 per cent women and children from Burkina Faso, have been granted refugee status in Ghana⁷⁷ In Senegal and across five neighbouring countries of Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone, a total of 20,805 IDPs and stateless persons were registered by 31st August 2025.⁷⁸ The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) data recorded 38,763 cross-border movements between July and September 2025, confirming sustained intra-regional displacement along key corridors such as Senegal-Mali.⁷⁹ Also, attacks have been targeted against places of worship, markets, health centres, and education facilities across the region, as well as the abduction and killing of teachers. As of October 2025, insecurity in the Sahel had forced the closure of over 14,800 schools and more than 900 health facilities, depriving over three million children of education and severely constraining access to healthcare.⁸⁰ Nigeria faces extensive humanitarian challenges, with an estimated 33 million people experiencing food insecurity. Additionally, 1.8 million children in six northeastern and northwestern States are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.⁸¹

Food insecurity remains a critical humanitarian challenge in the central Sahel and north-eastern Nigeria, driven by persistent conflict, economic strain, climate shocks, and shrinking humanitarian funding. Recent food security analyses estimate that over 50 million people in West and Central Africa will face acute food insecurity during the lean seasons, with

conflict-affected areas in the Sahel and Nigeria among the hardest hit.⁸² In Nigeria, about 27 million people are already experiencing crisis-level food insecurity, with projections rising to nearly 35 million by mid-2026 if conditions deteriorate further.⁸³ In Borno State, conflict and displacement could push thousands into catastrophic hunger, mirroring Africa's most severe food crises.⁸⁴ The prevailing macroeconomic challenges, security, and climate crises remain potential factors in the deterioration of food security in conflict-affected countries.

Illicit flow of arms across conflict zones continues to sustain localised violence, while illegal gold mining and other extractive activities emerged as critical sources of financing for extremist operations. In 2025, it was estimated that artisanal and small-scale gold mining, with much of it operating outside regulatory frameworks, accounted for nearly 50 per cent of total gold production in the region.⁸⁵ In Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, extremist groups generated millions of dollars through the taxation of miners, the provision of protection services at mining sites, and the control of smuggling corridors linking rural extraction zones to regional markets.⁸⁶ In January 2025, the results of an INTERPOL-led Operation Sanu targeting illegal mining activities in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea, and Senegal mentioned more than 200 arrests and the seizure of over 7,000 explosive devices, alongside large quantities of cyanide and mercury used in illicit extraction.⁸⁷ In the tri-border areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire, thousands of stolen livestock were laundered through local markets, providing armed groups, including JNIM, with relatively clean and rapidly accessible funding.⁸⁸ These trends demonstrate the direct overlap between criminal supply chains and violent extremist logistics.

⁷⁵ Situation in Central Sahel, Liptako Gourma and Coastal Countries - DTM Monthly Dashboard #63 (October 2025) - <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/situation-central-sahel-liptako-gourma-and-coastal-countries-dtm-monthly-dashboard-63-october-2025#:~:text=The%20crisis%20has%20triggered%20significant,in%20Ghana%20and%20in%20Togo> (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁷⁶ Côte d'Ivoire-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-September-2025.pdf - <https://www.unicef.org/media/175281/file/C%3%B4te%20d%E2%80%99Ivoire-Humanitarian-SitRep-30-September-2025.pdf.pdf> (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁷⁷ GHANA: MONTHLY STATISTICS - file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/EN_FR-Monthly%20Statistics%20Dashboard%20GHANA%20Nov%202025.pdf (Accessed on 19/01/2026)

⁷⁸ OPERATIONAL UPDATE - MCO Senegal - July -September 2025 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/119924> (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁷⁹ MALL Migration_FMP_Sitrep_14_EN.pdf - https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/MALL_Migration_FMP_Sitrep_14_EN.pdf (Accessed on 19/01/2026)

⁸⁰ *United Nations News (2025). In Africa's Sahel, conflicts and climate change force millions from homes.* Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166076> (Accessed on 15 December 2025).

⁸¹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2025. <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2025/article/nigeria-2> (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁸² West and Central Africa faces deepening food crisis. https://www.wfp.org/news/west-and-central-africa-faces-deepening-food-crisis-un-agencies-call-enhanced-humanitarian?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁸³ FG reaffirms commitment to zero hunger as FAO warns 34m Nigerians at risk of food insecurity by mid-2026. https://businessday.ng/news/article/fg-reaffirms-commitment-to-zero-hunger-as-fao-warns-34m-nigerians-at-risk-of-food-insecurity-by-mid-2026/?amp=&utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁸⁴ Nigeria's northeast faces worst hunger in a decade as aid cuts hit region. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerias-northeast-faces-worst-hunger-decade-aid-cuts-hit-region-un-says-2026-01-16/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed on 19/01/2026).

⁸⁵ Gold mining's potential in West Africa - Available at: <https://www.mining-technology.com/features/gold-minings-potential-in-west-africa/?cf-view> (Accessed on 09/01/2026).

⁸⁶ Illicit activities fuel extremism in the Sahel's conflict zones - Available at: <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/illicit-activities-fuel-extremism-in-the-sahel-s-conflict-zones> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁸⁷ INTERPOL operation highlights the human and environmental impact of illegal mining in Western Africa - Available at: <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2025/INTERPOL-operation-highlights-the-human-and-environmental-impact-of-illegal-mining-in-Western-Africa2> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁸⁸ Cattle theft fuels rising insecurity across West and Central Africa (report) - Available at: <https://www.ecofinagency.com/news-agriculture/2011-50662-cattle-theft-fuels-rising-insecurity-across-west-and-central-africa-report#:~:text=GI%2DTC%20report%20links%20cattle,states%2C%E2%80%9D%20the%20report%20states> (Accessed on 15/01/2026).

Arms trafficking also escalated during the year in review, reinforcing what has increasingly been described as a “Sahel-to-Coast” weapons corridor. Estimates in 2025 suggested that approximately 10 million illicit weapons were in circulation across West Africa.⁸⁹ Seizures during the year indicated a shift from predominantly small arms to more sophisticated weaponry, including drones and advanced components for Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).⁹⁰ Key transit and distribution hubs were identified in tri-border towns such as Porga in Benin and Bawku in Ghana, where weapons originating from Sahelian conflict zones directly feed into localised ethnic, chieftaincy, and community violence. These dynamics increasingly served as early warning indicators of extremist penetration into coastal and border communities.

Drug trafficking and trade networks expand within the coastal corridors through Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria, recording rising levels of local synthetic drug production and narcotics activities. In 2025, it was estimated that at least 30 per cent of Europe-bound cocaine transited through West Africa.⁹¹ In March 2025, Ghanaian authorities intercepted 4.5 tonnes of cocaine, valued at approximately USD 500 million, in two separate truck seizures near Takoradi, marking one of the largest drug seizures in the country’s history.⁹² At the same time, the local production, distribution and abuse of synthetic drugs such as “Kush”, “Zombie”, and “Kadhafi” are prevalent in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, The Gambia and Côte d’Ivoire, attesting to the growing phenomenon of drug abuse, especially amongst young people in the region. In Nigeria, a mixture of tramadol, cannabis, codeine, rohypnol, and alcohol is known as “gutter water”, and a cocktail of homemade gin, cannabis seeds, leaves, stems, and roots is known as “monkey tail”.⁹³ At the same time, a substance considered an aphrodisiac and perceived as a “heart cleanser” by

users has been found in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire.⁹⁴ In 2025, WANEP’s National Early Warning System (NEWS) recorded 1,018 drug-related incidents involving such substance abuse and seizures. The surge in the use of synthetic drugs and substances presents additional security and public health-related dilemmas to States and policymakers in the most affected countries of the region.

Banditry, kidnapping for ransom, and cattle rustling further entrenched what has been described as a dark economy of violence across the region. In Nigeria, available data from mid-2025 indicated that more than 2.5 billion Naira was paid as ransom within a single year, affecting over 4,700 victims.⁹⁵ Data from WANEP NEWS recorded a total of 562 incidents of armed robbery in 2025, with 159 fatalities and several injuries.⁹⁶ Other cases of armed violence in the region, including homicide, recorded a total of 1,020 incidents, an increase of 34 per cent compared with 2024 data.⁹⁷

Maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea continue to gain prominence, strengthening the linkage between Sahelian instability and coastal vulnerabilities. The Gulf of Guinea recorded 21 piracy incidents in 2025, compared with 18 in 2024. Twenty-three (23) persons were kidnapped in four separate events, while three were taken hostage and one was injured.⁹⁸ In addition, oil theft, illegal bunkering, and unregulated fishing were also reported along the Gulf of Guinea. Despite gradual improvement in regional collaboration and coordination, persistent challenges, including limited maritime surveillance and the lack of advanced technology in the sector, continue to impede effective responses. As the Gulf of Guinea 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.

⁸⁹ The Borderless Guns That Keep Africa Wounded – Available at: <https://yourcommonwealth.org/editors-pick/the-borderless-guns-that-keep-africa-wounded/#:~:text=by%20Immanuel%20Mwendwa%20Kiilu,conflicts%20and%20undermining%20peace%20efforts> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁹⁰ Trends in IED manufacturing and dual-use technologies in West Africa - Available at: <https://aoav.org.uk/2025/trends-in-ied-manufacturing-and-dual-use-technologies-in-west-africa/#:~:text=This%20report%20takes%20a%20great,peacekeeping%2C%20and%202%2C324%20civilian%20victims> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁹¹ Mapping the future of drug markets in West Africa - Available at: <https://page.globalinitiative.net/mapping-future-drug-markets-west-africa-high-level-dialogue-acra-2025/index.html#:~:text=In%20parallel%2C%20the%20region%20is,Africa%2C%20Latin%20America%20and%20Europe> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁹² Cocaine Trafficking in Ghana and West Africa: Seizures, Governance, and Security - Available at: <https://www.africansecurityanalysis.com/updates/cocaine-trafficking-in-ghana-and-west-africa-seizures-governance-and-security> (Accessed on 14/01/2026).

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Nigerians paid N2.57bn in ransoms in one year as kidnappers abduct 4,722 – Report - Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/816978-nigerians-paid-n2-57bn-in-ransoms-in-one-year-as-kidnappers-abduct-4722-report.html> (Accessed on 14/01/2026)

⁹⁶ Source: WANEP - Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 14/01/2026)

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Maritime piracy incidents rise in 2025 – Available at: <https://www.freightnews.co.za/article/maritime-piracy-incidents-rise-in-2025#:~:text=In%20both%20cases%2C%20well%20Dprepared,were%20reported%20in%20three%20cases> (Accessed on 15/01/2026).

Farmer-herder conflicts remain a major driver of violence across West Africa in 2025, cutting across fragile and relatively stable contexts. Between January and December 2025, Nigeria reported 191 incidents, over 1,169 fatalities and 470 injuries, particularly in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Edo, Jigawa, Ondo, Gombe, Kogi, Taraba, Ebonyi, Enugu and Adamawa.⁹⁹ Similar dynamics were observed in Mali and Burkina Faso, where competition over land and water intersected with insecurity and displacement. In Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire, clashes were reported along transhumance corridors in the northern regions. These conflicts erode agricultural productivity, disrupt markets, and exacerbate food insecurity, contributing to price volatility, reduced household incomes, and declining livelihoods. It is intensified by climate stress, mobility pressures, weak land governance, and unresolved identity-based grievances. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons continues to increase violence and fatalities in the affected countries

In response to limited State protection, community-based self-defence groups have proliferated, including the Koglweogo and the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP) militia groups in Burkina Faso, the Dan Na Ambassagou in Mali, the "Garkuwar Kassa" ("Shield of the Fatherland") and other ethnic militias in Niger.¹⁰⁰ While they intend to fill security vacuums, these groups have been implicated in abuses against civilians and reprisals along ethnic lines, deepening intercommunal mistrust and complicating the already fragile security context. Human Rights Watch reported that State forces and VDP militias were involved in large-scale abuses in 2025, including killings of Fulani civilians in Banwa and Sourou provinces near Solenzo, indicating the severe human rights implications of armed civilian mobilisation.¹⁰¹

3.1. Key Outlook in 2026

3.1.1. Continued Expansion of Crime-Terror Nexus

The continued expansion of terrorism and transnational organised crime is likely to remain a defining security outlook for 2026. Armed extremist groups are expected to deepen their presence across fragile borderlands, particularly along the Sahel-

Coastal interface, exploiting weak State control, local grievances, and shrinking civic space. At the same time, criminal networks involved in arms trafficking, drug smuggling, kidnapping, cybercrime, and human trafficking will further entrench themselves by leveraging conflict economies and porous borders.

The convergence between terrorist groups and organised crime is becoming more pronounced. Terrorist actors increasingly rely on illicit economies for financing, logistics, and recruitment, while criminal groups benefit from the protection, territorial control, and coercive capacity of violent extremists. This alliance of convenience and relationship blur the line between ideological violence and profit-driven crime, complicating traditional counterterrorism and law enforcement responses. Unless addressed through coordinated regional strategies that integrate security operations with governance reforms, border management, intelligence sharing, and community-based preventive measures, these threats will continue to reinforce one another. Their expansion risks further undermining State authority, eroding public trust, and constraining development across already vulnerable contexts in 2026.

3.1.2. The Littoral States to watch (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Senegal)

The southward expansion of armed insurgency in Burkina Faso and Mali indicates an increasing vulnerability, continued attacks in Togo and Benin, and intensifying the threats to bordering littoral States such as Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Ghana. While the latter have not experienced direct attacks in the reporting period, violent incidents involving extremist groups were recorded along the Burkina Faso border with Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire and the Senegal-Mali border. This trend underscores the threat to the security of littoral states and to regional stability, particularly when compared with statistics from previous years. It also portends a significant threat to maritime security and the potential alliance with pirates into organised crime syndicates channelling arms, illicit drugs and oil bunkering along the Gulf of Guinea.

⁹⁹ WANEP weekly highlight reports from Nigeria, January to December 2025. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed on 14/01/2026)

¹⁰⁰ Central Sahel. Available at: <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/mali/> (Accessed 27/12/2025).

¹⁰¹ Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/12/burkina-faso-army-directs-ethnic-massacres?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 27/12/2025).

3.1.3. Regional Cooperation and Security Architecture

The expanding threats posed by terrorism and transnational organised crime are set to further undermine regional and global security in 2026. At the regional level, persistent violence weakens State authority, strains already fragile security institutions, and fuels cycles of displacement and humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, ECOWAS-AES fragmentation poses significant challenges to regional counterterrorism efforts by disrupting established mechanisms for intelligence sharing and joint military operations. This departure will be detrimental to ECOWAS' economic integration strategy, as the AES countries account for a substantial share of the region's population and land area. Moreover, regional fragmentation, funding, intelligence, and logistical challenges will affect the effectiveness of existing regional security mechanisms, including the ECOWAS Standby Forces (ESF), the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF), and the Accra Initiative (AI), with implications for collective regional and national responses to terrorism and transnational organised crime.

At the international level, the threats extend beyond immediate conflict zones. Illicit flows of arms, drugs, finances, and illegal migration link local conflicts to international criminal markets, which reinforce instability across regions. Terrorist and organised crime networks exploit digital platforms to recruit, finance operations, and project influence far beyond their areas of control. This diffusion of risk increases exposure for coastal and transit States, international trade routes, and the diaspora communities. The erosion of trust in regional cooperation frameworks and multilateral security arrangements further compounds these challenges. Without stronger coordination, intelligence sharing, and preventive diplomacy, expanding insecurity in one region is likely to generate spillover effects that destabilise others.

Despite a largely challenging outlook, several positive trends point to opportunities for stabilisation and renewed cooperation across the region. In December 2025, the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS approved the admission of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as non-ECOWAS members of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA).¹⁰² This decision preserves a critical channel for regional engagement on financial

integrity and counterterrorism financing, even amid broader political fragmentation. Admission is contingent on the three countries' clear political commitment to fully implement their GIABA obligations, particularly to address gaps in their AML/CFT/CPF frameworks and to comply with all statutory requirements. In parallel, ECOWAS and the AES countries have reaffirmed their commitment to the free movement of persons, goods, and services, as well as to continued intra-trade under the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme. This continuity helps mitigate economic dislocation and reduces incentives for illicit cross-border activity.

Operational cooperation has also shown signs of strengthening. INTERPOL's Operation Screen West Africa, between July and October 2025, exemplified enhanced cross-border cooperation, yielding measurable interdictions and increased security data sharing. In December, joint action between the Nigerian Government and U.S. AFRICOM led to targeted airstrikes against ISIS-linked camps in Sokoto State. These developments underscore the importance of sustaining coordinated regional and international efforts to effectively counter terrorism, violent extremism, and organised crime.

3.1.4. Digital Technology and the Impact on Security

Digital technology and artificial intelligence are shaping security dynamics, with implications for safety and security in 2026 and beyond. Violent extremist and criminal groups are increasingly using digital platforms, drones, and commercially available technologies as force multipliers for surveillance, propaganda, recruitment, financing, and combat operations. While social media content can be harmful, it also generates data that supports security intelligence and operations. The use of armed drones by groups such as ISWAP and IS in the Sahel signals a shift toward more sophisticated tactics enabled by the proliferation of low-cost technologies. States can leverage technology through strategic advances in satellite imagery, airborne systems, AI-driven analytics, and ground-based surveillance to improve situational awareness and enable more targeted responses. In Nigeria, these tools have been used to map¹⁰³ insurgent exploitation of natural resources, track illegal mining and environmental degradation, and understand how armed groups finance themselves through taxation and illicit economies.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² ECOWAS Authority admits Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger as non-ECOWAS Members of GIABA. Available at: https://www.giaba.org/pressreleases/3613_ecowas-authority-admits-burkina-faso-mali-and-niger-as-non-ecowas-members-of-giaba.html (Accessed 12/01/2026).

¹⁰³ Disrupting Terrorist Financing Networks in Nigeria: The Importance of Financial Intelligence in Addressing Non-Traditional Threats. Available at: - <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/disrupting-terrorist-financing-networks-nigeria-importance-financial-intelligence#:~:text=Nigeria%20is%20strengthening%20efforts%20to,extremist%20groups%20like%20Boko%20Haram> (Accessed on 29/01/2026)

¹⁰⁴ Nigeria Deploys Space Technology. Available at: <https://www.ecofinagency.com/news-digital/2101-52132-nigeria-deploys-space-technology-to-fight-illegal-mining-and-financial-crime#:~:text=EFCC%20and%20NASRDA%20sign%20cooperation,more%20advanced%20satellite%2Dbased%20solutions> (Accessed on 29/01/2026).

Generative AI and new media also enable civil society, Governments, and regional organisations such as ECOWAS to integrate enhanced analysis to monitor security threats, detect extremist activity, and strengthen border controls. Such insights support both counterterrorism operations and longer-term governance, resettlement, and resource management strategies. However, capacity gaps remain, including reliance on external satellite data and limited regional technical expertise. In 2026, the ability to integrate AI, financial tracking systems, and environmental intelligence into early warning and policy responses will be critical for addressing the converging threats of terrorism, organised crime, and environmental insecurity.

3.2. Key Resilient Factors

- Despite political fragmentation and strained relations following the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), regional and subregional cooperation frameworks remain an important asset for resilience. Platforms under ECOWAS, the African Union, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and associated intelligence-sharing mechanisms continue to offer entry points for coordination, joint analysis, and collective response. When operationalised, these mechanisms improve cross-border situational awareness, support harmonised early-warning analysis, and enhance early-response capacity in threat environments.
- Local peace infrastructures continue to mitigate vulnerability to violent extremism and organised crime in exposed communities. Dialogue platforms, traditional mediation mechanisms, and community-driven conflict resolution initiatives help manage intercommunal tensions, reduce grievance-based mobilisation, and protect social cohesion. The growing involvement of women mediators and youth leaders, reinforced by the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) frameworks, has strengthened the legitimacy and effectiveness of preventive interventions at the community level. In countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, active or renewed WPS National Action Plans have supported women's participation in community early warning, border monitoring, and local stabilisation efforts in areas exposed to extremist

infiltration. Benin's earlier WPS commitments and emerging YPS processes provide opportunities to strengthen youth-led prevention amid rising coastal threats. Although implementation remains uneven, these frameworks contribute to community trust, inclusive intelligence flows, and preventive-response capacity, which are critical to addressing recruitment, criminal facilitation, and the crime-terror nexus.

- Sustained international and donor support remains a key factor in resilience across Sahelian and Coastal States. Investments in stabilisation, humanitarian response, early recovery, livelihoods, and basic service delivery, when aligned with early-warning insights, national action plans, and local priorities, help address structural drivers of fragility and reinforce early-response pathways. Such support is most effective where it strengthens local ownership, inclusive governance, and the operationalisation of WPS and YPS commitments.

3.3. Recommendations

- Nigeria's role within multilateral frameworks, particularly the Accra Initiative (AI) and other joint counter-terrorism platforms, presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen regional responses to violent extremism and organised crime. With expanded military air capability and advanced intelligence assets, Nigeria can provide a critical enabler to strengthen regional efforts against violent extremism and organised crime.
- The AU, ECOWAS, and UNOWAS are encouraged to reinforce coordination frameworks for cross-border early warning, intelligence sharing, and joint response, particularly along Sahel-coastal corridors and in the maritime spaces of the Gulf of Guinea. ECOWAS and the African Union should continue efforts to operationalise their Standby Forces and strengthen cooperation with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to minimise coordination gaps that can be exploited by extremist and criminal actors. Reliable funding and sustained political commitment will be essential to ensuring the effectiveness of these collective security arrangements.

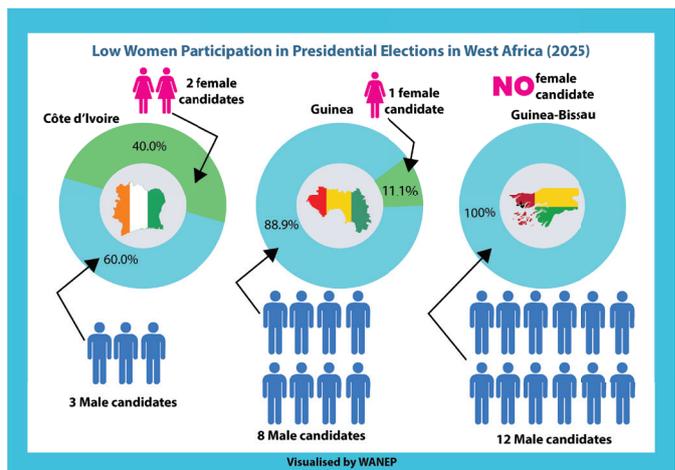
- National authorities should prioritise the strengthening of integrated early warning and early response systems that capture conflict, terrorism, organised crime, maritime, and cyber-related threats. The institutionalisation of multistakeholder early warning analysis involving non-state experts within national security and policy decision-making processes will be essential to enable effective and preventive responses.
- Security and human rights institutions, as well as other oversight bodies, should consider strengthening accountability mechanisms for security operations, particularly in counter-terrorism contexts. Addressing allegations of abuse and ensuring adherence to international

humanitarian and human rights standards can reduce grievances, enhance legitimacy, and improve the quality of early warning signals by increasing community cooperation.

- Civil society actors, community-based organisations, traditional leaders, women mediators, and youth groups should be further supported to play a central role in community-based early warning, dialogue, and preventive action. Strengthening local peace infrastructure and cross-border community networks will enhance the detection of early risk indicators, including recruitment patterns, intercommunal tensions, and population movements, while supporting timely, locally grounded early-response initiatives.

4.0 GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY

Persistent challenges of low youth and women's participation and representation in governance, growing violence and intimidation in politics, and limited access to economic support were key features of the women, youth, peace, and security landscape in 2025. For instance, in the 2025 Presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau, the representation of women among Presidential candidates remained low, underscoring persistent gender inequality in political leadership across the region. In Côte d'Ivoire, the National Independent Electoral Commission received 60 applications, including eight (8) from female aspirants, representing 13.33 per cent. However, the Constitutional Council validated five candidates for the October 2025 Presidential election, of whom only two were women: Simone Ehivet Gbagbo and Henriette Lagou Adjoua were on the ballots.¹⁰⁵ In Guinea, provisional lists for the December 2025 presidential election similarly showed a significant gender gap, with Hadja Makale Camara as the sole female among nine candidates.¹⁰⁶ Data for Guinea-Bissau's November 2025 elections indicate the absence of women in the presidential race, reflecting a broader pattern of underrepresentation despite legal frameworks intended to increase women's participation in political life.¹⁰⁷



Women's representation in governance fluctuated over the years. In the 2025 Parliamentary Elections in Côte d'Ivoire, female representation remained low despite modest gains in the number of candidacies. Preliminary results show that 34 women were elected to the 255-seat National Assembly, representing roughly 13.4 per cent of members, well below the 30 per cent quota required by law and short of meaningful parity progress.¹⁰⁸ In Mali's Transitional Governments, six of 29 ministers were women (approximately 21.4%) in June 2021,¹⁰⁹ a share that declined to 17.9 per cent in the current administration. In Niger, the 2023 Transitional

¹⁰⁵ Côte d'Ivoire. Présidentielle 2025: voici la liste définitive des candidats retenus. Available at: https://afrique.le360.ma/politique/cote-divoire-presidentielle-2025-voici-la-liste-definitive-des-candidats-retenus_NGZLWRIRMNDFRBJ7Z57IOPMGTY/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹⁰⁶ Opposition candidates in Guinea's post-coup presidential election. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/opposition-candidates-guinea-post-coup-presidential-election-2025-12-22/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹⁰⁷ IFES Election Guide. Available at: https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4362/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹⁰⁸ 2025 Legislative Elections: 34 women elected, a step toward parity welcomed by UNDP. Available at: https://news.abidjan.net/articles/746227/legislatives-2025-34-femmes-elues-un-pas-vers-la-parite-salue-par-le-pnud?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹⁰⁹ Security Council (2021). Situation in Mali. Available at: https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/259/21/pdf/n2125921.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 10/01/2026)

Government had only 4 women out of 21 ministers (19%),¹¹⁰ and this proportion increased slightly to 5 women out of 21 ministers (23.8%)¹¹¹ in the current Government. The underrepresentation of women in governance and decision-making processes is attributable to entrenched gender inequality, fostered by the country's sociocultural and economic conditions. This suggests the State's inadequate consideration of gender, thereby failing to ensure the participation of youth and women. Also, the growing culture of violence in elections and politics is contributing to 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 the participation and representation of youth and women, candidacy fees for national elections and campaign finance costs continue to hinder these efforts.

Insecurity and conflict further heighten exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, displacement, and economic exclusion. Violent Extremist and Terrorist Groups operating across the Sahelian and Coastal States have increasingly targeted diverse population groups, including men, women, young boys, girls, displaced persons, and refugees. In 2025, an estimated 12,500 individuals were recruited in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria (2,500 women and girls, 5,000 youth aged 15-24, and 3,000 men).¹¹² During the same period, more than 5,600 people were kidnapped in Nigeria (Borno and Kaduna States), Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, including 1,200 women,¹¹³ 2,800 youth and 1,600 men.¹¹⁴ Despite the scale and complexity of these threats, response strategies remain largely generic and limited, with low consideration for the specific vulnerabilities and needs of affected gender groups. This lack of context-sensitivity and gender-aware interventions reduces the effectiveness of counterextremism initiatives in the region.

The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and humanitarian cases identified during the year affected the following sectors:

(a) Humanitarian aid and protection, with more than 55 per cent of GBV survivors in the Sahel and Nigeria losing access to essential services due to funding cuts,¹¹⁵

(b) Education, with more than one million girls and boys out of school in the Sahel and northern coastal countries due to terrorism and insecurity, increasing their vulnerability to forced marriage and kidnapping;

(c) Health and nutrition, with high maternal mortality rate (70%) and stillbirth rates (47%)¹¹⁶ in countries like Nigeria, Niger and Burkina Faso,¹¹⁷ which is below the expectations of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 targets 3.1 and 3.2,¹¹⁸ and nearly 30 million people acutely food insecure in the Sahel;¹¹⁹

(d) Economic impacts, with productivity losses linked to GBV estimated at 1.2 per cent to 3.7 per cent of Gross domestic product (GDP) in some countries, representing a significant annual shortfall for regional economic growth;¹²⁰

(e) Peace and security, where violent extremist groups use GBV, including kidnapping and forced marriage, as a deliberate tactic of war. UN Women reported approximately 76,000 GBV survivors in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad: 52,000 women and girls, 18,000 children, and 6,000 men.¹²¹

Data from WANEP's NEWS system further show that GBV overwhelmingly affected women and girls (90%), compared to 10 per cent of men and boys. Six major forms of GBV were documented during the year: (i) women trafficking (over 400 cases),¹²²

¹¹⁰ ONEP Niger (2023). Communiqué du Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement: Formation d'un Gouvernement de 21 membres dont 4 femmes. <https://www.lesahel.org/communiqué-du-secretariat-general-du-gouvernement-formation-dun-gouvernement-de-21-membres-dont-quatre-femmes/> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹¹¹ Portail Officiel du Gouvernement (2015). Les membres du Gouvernement. Available at: <https://www.gouv.ne/index.php/institutions/gouvernement> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹¹² Global Conflict Tracker Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹¹³ Forced marriage for the purpose of expanding the population of the VETG

¹¹⁴ UN Meetings Coverage and Press Release –Escalating Terrorism in West Africa, Sahel Hits Women Hardest, Speakers Tell Security Council, August 2025 - Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16138.doc.htm> (Accessed 19/01/2026)

¹¹⁵ WHO - Available at: <https://www.afro.who.int/fr/news/la-mortalite-maternelle-et-neonatale-dans-la-region-africaine-est-en-baisse-mais-les-progres> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹¹⁶ The Lancet Global Health - Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X18303851#:~:text=Implications%20of%20all%20the%20available%20evidence&text=These%20implications%20include%20increased%20focus,neonatal%20deaths%20in%20these%20sites.> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹¹⁷ The lack of qualified personnel during childbirth and the inadequacy of antenatal care (less than 4 workers for many women) remain major obstacles.

¹¹⁸ SDG Target 3.1 aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by improving access to quality maternal healthcare, skilled birth attendance, and reproductive health services. SDG Target 3.2 seeks to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five, reducing neonatal mortality to at least 12 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality to at least 25 per 1,000, through strengthened child health systems and basic care interventions.

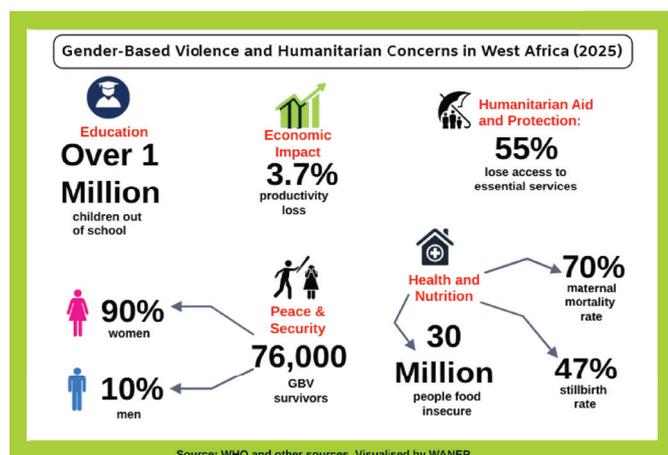
¹¹⁹ WHO - Available at: <https://aho.afro.who.int/atlas-sdg-targets/afjsessionid=9EC7596BD7A3BA2D8257485B74967E6D#:~:text=Nearly%2099%25%20of%20maternal%20deaths,the%20highest%20in%20the%20world> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹²⁰ NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NY. Available at: <https://ngocsw.org/feminization-of-poverty/#:~:text=GBV%20can%20also%20reinforce%20cycles%20of%20poverty,double%20what%20some%20countries%20spend%20on%20education.> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹²¹ UN Meetings - <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16138.doc.htm> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹²² Most of the cases of women trafficking reported by WANEP's NEWS data indicate that victims are disembarked in three key locations: Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. On the other hand, it has been noted by WANEP analyses that most of these victims leave on the promise of an interesting job and unfortunately end up in the hands of pimps who pay up to 500,000 CFA francs (1,000 USD) per victim to the intermediaries.

(ii) child trafficking (over 200 cases), (iii) rape (more than 200 reported cases),¹²³ (iv) sexual and digital harassment, (v) female genital mutilation, and (vi) ritual killings. Sexual GBV cases were recorded across the region, with a higher prevalence in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Senegal, Benin, Togo, and Cabo Verde. These trends underscore the limitations of current prevention frameworks and highlight the urgent need for stronger, gender responsive protection mechanisms across West Africa.



Irregular migration remains a persistent challenge across West Africa and the Sahel, particularly affecting Senegal, The Gambia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. While available data suggest a slight decline in attempted crossings in 2025, migration pressures remain high, with Senegal remaining a major departure point for West Africans seeking passage to Europe. Early warning data from WANEP indicate that between 2024 and 2025, the Senegalese National Gendarmerie arrested more than 2,000 irregular migrants from eight West African countries, of whom an estimated 30 to 40 per cent were women, and five per cent were children. Despite ongoing awareness campaigns and development efforts, migrants remain highly vulnerable to trafficking networks, exploitation, and life-threatening transit conditions. The expansion of irregular migration routes underscores the limitations of current national and regional responses. Addressing these risks requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral strategy that integrates prevention, youth empowerment, strengthened law enforcement cooperation, and enhanced international partnerships.

Digital technology has become a major frontier shaping the Women, Youth, Peace and Security (WYPS) agenda in West Africa and the Sahel. In 2025, women and young leaders faced cyber risks of targeted abuse, surveillance and manipulation. Online Gender-Based Violence has intensified, with common forms including cyberstalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, "sextortion," and the use of deepfakes to discredit or silence individuals. Women politicians and human rights defenders are especially vulnerable, frequently subjected to digital attacks intended to discourage their public presence. In Ghana, for example, reports show that body shaming and online insults have become the most prevalent forms of aggression against women leaders on social media, reinforcing barriers to their political participation and leadership.¹²⁴ According to a 2025 INTERPOL report, cybercrime accounts for more than 30 per cent of all recorded crimes in West and East Africa.¹²⁵ There has been an expansion of cybercriminal networks mainly composed of young people specialising in extortion through sophisticated methods such as fake job scams, the use of artificial intelligence to impersonate voices or faces, and romance scams.¹²⁶ The illusion of a better life and rapid enrichment constitutes a major motivation for both perpetrators and victims, among whom there is a significant number of young girls and boys. Beyond GBV, digital technologies are increasingly exploited by violent extremist groups, particularly in the Sahel, for the recruitment and mobilisation of young people. These actors use online platforms to manipulate feelings of exclusion, marginalisation, or injustice, which deepen youth vulnerability to radicalisation.

Despite these challenges, progress in legal and institutional frameworks, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and community resilience remains a critical driver of new achievements in support of the WYPS agendas. Many countries have implemented specific measures to enhance women's representation and participation in governance and decision-making processes. Some countries have adopted gender quota laws, including Sierra Leone, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Guinea-Bissau, while Benin uses reserved seats for women in its legislature. Others have opted for more ambitious parity frameworks, notably Senegal, Guinea, and Cape Verde.

¹²³ Rape victims registered through the NEWS System in 2025 have the following characteristics: aged 9 months to 22 years; abused by men and boys aged 16 to 81 years and often in places such as home, school and isolated spaces. Among the victims are minors, women and women and girls suffering from mental illness. The profiles of the perpetrators are varied: students, public and Koranic school teachers, cousins, uncles, neighbours, masons, etc. The countries concerned are: Senegal, Liberia, Nigeria, Benin.

¹²⁴ The culture of Insults on Ghanaian social Media: A Threat to Healthy Discourse. Available at: <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1383591/the-culture-of-insults-on-ghanaian-social-media.html> (Accessed 10/01/2026)

¹²⁵ 2025 Interpol Report. Available at: <https://cybersecuritymag.africa/ne-vous-laissez-plus-arnaquer-en-2026/#:~:text=2026%20est%20%C3%A0%20une%20vous%20laissez%20plus,en%20Afrique%20de%20l'Ouest%20et%20de%20l'Est> (Accessed 16/01/26)

¹²⁶ Dealers in West Africa and the Sahel are mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Nigeria and Ghana

Regarding the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, West African countries currently have WPS NAPs: eleven have developed second-generation NAPs, while five (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo) have advanced to their third-generation NAPs. Although States mobilisation around the adoption of Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) NAPs remains limited, 2025 marked a significant milestone with the adoption of three new YPS NAPs in The Gambia, Liberia, and Senegal, following Nigeria's launch in 2021. In addition, seven other Member States comprising Benin, Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Mali, and Sierra Leone are at advanced stages of the process and are expected to adopt their YPS NAPs in 2026. These policies and frameworks have yielded positive results in some countries, particularly in increasing women's representation in national parliaments. Cabo Verde, Senegal and Sierra Leone illustrate this progress, with 44, 41 and 29 per cent of women's representation in parliament, respectively.¹²⁷ This contributes to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) global framework, which advocates a minimum quota of 30 per cent for women in governance.¹²⁸

Similarly, there has been progress in youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts, including policy dialogues, capacity-building, advocacy 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 its Youth Peace and Security (YPS) NAP (2021-2024), followed by The Gambia's 2024-2029 NAP. Ghana, Liberia, Benin, Niger, and Mali have held various advocacy events and begun developing their plans for 2025. With support from ECOWAS and The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the 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 2026

4.1.1. Persistent gaps between policy and practice in the implementation of the WYPS Agenda

While frameworks and National Action Plans exist, their translation into concrete, measurable

and sustainable transformation remains weak. The implementation of adopted frameworks and National Action Plans is constrained by inadequate funding, weak coordination, and limited monitoring, evaluation, and learning, resulting in limited measurable impact. In 2026, closing this gap will hinge on political will, financing, and accountability mechanisms that move commitments into actions.

4.1.2. The continued isolation of the WYPS agenda from the broader security architecture

The Women, Youth, Peace and Security (WYPS) agenda remains largely isolated from mainstream security planning across the region, where women's participation is often treated as a peripheral issue rather than a core driver of security effectiveness. Despite over 90 per cent of West African States having adopted WYPS National Action Plans, and 26 per cent having developed plans on YPS, many remain constrained, with limited budgetary allocations and weak integration into defence, counterterrorism, and early warning frameworks. This disconnect undermines local ownership and reduces implementation to ad hoc or donor-driven activities rather than sustained state policy. Evidence from regional reviews shows that few NAPs are costed, monitored, or linked to national security strategies. Looking ahead to 2026, continued isolation of WYPS principles from broader security architectures risks perpetuating ineffective responses to conflict and insecurity. Progress will depend on reframing youth and women's participation as a strategic security imperative, backed by high-level leadership, international and domestic financing, and institutional accountability.

4.1.3. Persistent insecurities continue to disproportionately affect youth and women in the region

Persistent insecurity, conflict and displacement leave many youths and women as survivors, displaced and deprived of land, livelihoods, and access to finance. In West Africa and the Sahel, youth and women account for over 50 per cent of displaced populations, yet responses remain largely protection-focused, with limited investment in economic recovery and financial inclusion. This gap reinforces dependency and vulnerability. Looking ahead to 2026, shifting toward skills development

¹²⁷ IPU Global Data on National Parliaments. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/CV/CV-LC01/> (Accessed 01/01/2026).

¹²⁸ Députés élus. Available at: <https://www.vie-publique.sn/elections/legislatives/resultats/deputes> (Accessed 01/01/2026).

and economic empowerment as a core prevention strategy will be critical to building resilience, reducing exposure to exploitation, and addressing the structural drivers of insecurity.

4.1.4. Promoting localisation and ownership of the WYPS agenda at the community level

Localisation and community ownership of the WYPS agenda have remained a cause for concern in the region. While most countries have adopted NAP, implementation is often centralised and elite-driven, with minimal engagement of grassroots youth and women's groups. Language barriers and low literacy levels, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, will further restrict access and participation. As a result, national frameworks are disconnected from the lived realities of youth, women and girls. In 2026, the effectiveness of WYPS will increasingly depend on shifting resources, decision-making, and leadership to local youth and women's organisations to promote ownership of the WYPS agenda and enhance relevance, legitimacy, and impact.

4.1.5. Rising level of drug abuse among young people

Drug abuse among young people in West Africa and the Sahel has evolved into a major public health crisis. Once considered primarily a transit zone, the region is increasingly recognised as both a transit corridor and a significant area of local consumption. Cannabis remains the most widely used substance among adolescents and young adults. The synthetic opioid tramadol is widely consumed due to its low cost and accessibility outside formal medical channels. Kush, a highly destructive synthetic drug composed of cannabis, chemicals, and in some cases crushed human bones, has emerged as a serious threat, particularly among urban youth. In addition, cocaine and crack cocaine consumption are expanding rapidly because of intensified transatlantic trafficking routes through the region. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) projections, the number of drug users in Africa is expected to increase by 38 per cent in 2030, largely driven by youth populations. UNODC further reports that approximately 51 per cent of individuals receiving treatment are aged 25-34, including a significant proportion of secondary school pupils and university students.

4.1.6. Growing youth unemployment and the expanding geographical scope of irregular migration

Despite ongoing efforts to transform the region's demographic dynamics into an opportunity, youth unemployment and underemployment remain major challenges in West Africa and the Sahel. Rates are particularly high in the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) zone, where unemployment among young people is estimated at 30-40 per cent. Youth aged 15-24 are disproportionately affected compared to the general population. In addition, the proportion of young people classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) in Africa in 2025 is estimated at 23.2 per cent, representing nearly a quarter of the youth population. Young women are especially affected by unemployment, underemployment, and NEET status. As highlighted in the Call for Action of the 2025 West Africa and Sahel Youth Forum (Dakar), there is an urgent need to support multi-stakeholder initiatives that deliver more structured and effective responses to improve youth employability. Such efforts are essential to reduce the negative consequences of unemployment and underemployment, including drug abuse, exploitation, delinquency, and irregular migration. This continues to affect eight of fifteen countries in West Africa and the Sahel: Senegal, The Gambia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. Although 2025 recorded a relative decline compared to previous years, the phenomenon persists, with Senegal remaining a key country of departure.¹²⁹ This trend highlights the need for stronger ownership and implementation of the African Union Revised Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018-2030) and its Action Plan, which guides nine thematic areas, including migration governance, labour migration and education, diaspora engagement, border governance, irregular migration and forced displacement, internal migration, migration and trade, and other cross-cutting issues.

4.2. Key Resilient Factors

- Efforts to strengthen the WYPS agenda across West Africa and the Sahel continue to provide critical resilience mechanisms for governance, peacebuilding, and social cohesion in the region. The adoption and implementation of

¹²⁹ Communities in Northern Senegal Unite to Address Irregular Migration Through Local Opportunities. Available at: <https://rodakar.iom.int/news/communities-north-ern-senegal-unite-address-irregular-migration-through-local-opportunities>. Assessed (06/01/2026)

new WYPS National Action Plans (NAPs) across several countries in West Africa and the Sahel constitute an important factor for consolidating gains and reducing the vulnerabilities faced by women and youth. These NAPs are being developed through strong collaboration among international, regional, and national actors, including UN agencies, ECOWAS, WANEP, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC), State institutions, and Civil Society Organisations, thereby contributing to the harmonisation of priorities and the strengthening of accountability mechanisms. Notably, beyond addressing core priorities for women and youth, the new NAPs increasingly integrate strategies to respond to emerging challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and violent extremism.

- Initiatives led by the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and UNOWAS through the WYPS Programme continue to reinforce national efforts. Regional and country-level capacity-building workshops have supported State and Non-State actors in advancing WYPS objectives, strengthening institutional readiness, and consolidating achievements in policy implementation, prevention, and community-level engagement. Recommendations emerging from these workshops further enhance resilience by providing guidance tailored to young people's evolving needs. In addition, the adoption of the AU Convention to End Violence Against Women and Girls (AUCEVAWG) on 14 February 2025, during the 38th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, marks a significant milestone in strengthening access to justice and reintegration programmes for survivors. Effective implementation and monitoring of this Convention will be essential to ensure tangible impact on the lives of millions of women and girls affected by Gender-Based Violence (GBV).
- Across the region, State, CSO and youth-led initiatives continue to promote the active participation of women and youth in national and continental peace architectures, thereby strengthening community and national resilience in conflict prevention and peaceful dispute resolution. An example is WANEP's WYPS platform, which has engaged over 500 women community mediators and 2,000 young

peacebuilders (including Youth4Peace, Peace Clubs, and PeaceWay initiatives) across 15 countries in West Africa. Their contributions to dialogue facilitation, conflict mediation, and advocacy at local and national levels remain significant.

4.3. Recommendations

- AU, ECOWAS, AES, and the UN should strengthen and accelerate the adoption of gender responsive policies across West Africa and the Sahel. These efforts must integrate gender perspectives into national laws, development planning, and humanitarian action while addressing structural inequalities that heighten the vulnerability of women, girls, displaced persons, and people with disabilities in contexts of conflict, climate shocks, and displacement.
- Governments and regional bodies may consider establishing robust monitoring mechanisms, allocating adequate resources and strengthening accountability systems. Embedding principles of gender equity and equality into policy frameworks will help reduce GBV, expand access to essential services, and foster inclusive peacebuilding and resilience. There is also a need to embed women's leadership and participation across all peace and security interventions, from counterterrorism strategies to transitional governance and security sector reforms, as a core security investment.
- There is a need for AU and ECOWAS to leverage the regionalised Continental Result Framework (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 the YPS Agenda. It is also imperative that regional actors consider providing technical support for the WYPS Agendas.
- Localise the WPS agenda through community-centred approaches that enhance support for the development of localised action plans that are culturally and linguistically adapted, co-created with local community women's groups. Additionally, the inclusion of women, especially at the local community level, is imperative and must be grounded in the recognition and capitalisation of their local knowledge and agency.

Shift from protection-only to prosperity-based prevention by promoting youth and women’s skills development and economic empowerment as a pillar of peacebuilding, and by prioritising land rights, access to finance, vocational training, and entrepreneurship during transitions as well as in post-conflict recovery and reintegration programs. There is a need to recognise and support social protection systems and climate-responsive economic policies that build women’s resilience to multiple forms of insecurity.

- Support data-driven accountability and visibility with mandates and resources for the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis in early warning, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assessments and to elevate the visibility of women-led peacebuilding success stories, such as those mentioned in this briefing, by creating mechanisms for replication and scaling.

- Governments and regional institutions should consider earmarking adequate and predictable resources within national and regional budgets and establish transparent financial tracking systems. Priority should be given to activities that directly advance the strategic pillars of the WYPS agendas: participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration. Sustainable financing will enhance accountability, address implementation gaps, and enable measurable progress in key areas such as women’s and youth participation in decision-making, reduction of GBV, expansion of livelihood opportunities, and inclusive peacebuilding processes.

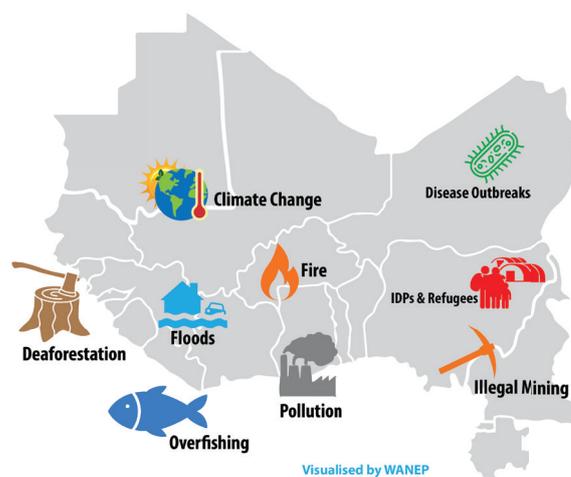
5.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

The multidimensional impacts of climate change constituted a major driver of human insecurity in West Africa during the reporting period. Climate-related risks, including floods, droughts, and rising temperatures, exacerbated pressures on critical resources such as food, water, land, and fisheries, intensifying competition over scarce resources, deepening food insecurity, and driving internal displacements within affected communities. In the Sahel region, approximately four million people were displaced by the end of 2025, driven by climate change, food insecurity, and conflict.¹³⁰ This represents a two-thirds increase in displacement over the past five years, with Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger emerging as the epicentre of compounded humanitarian crises.¹³¹

Between June and August 2025, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) projected 47.4 million people across West Africa to experience high levels of acute food and nutrition insecurity, underscoring the scale of the region’s food crisis.¹³² This deterioration

was accompanied by severe nutritional impacts on children, with 16.5 million under the age of five affected by acute malnutrition, including 4.3 million suffering from its severe form.¹³³ In the year ahead, humanitarian needs in West and Central Africa are projected to reach critical levels, with more than 42 million people expected to require life-saving assistance and protection to ensure basic survival and safety.¹³⁴

Key Incidents Related to Environmental Security in West Africa



¹³⁰ United Nations News (2025). In Africa’s Sahel, conflicts and climate change force millions from homes. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166076> (Accessed on 15 December 2025).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Humanitarian Action (2025). Global Humanitarian Overview 2026: West and Central Africa. Available at: <https://humanitarianaction.info/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2026/article/west-and-central-africa-4> (Accessed 20 December 2025).

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

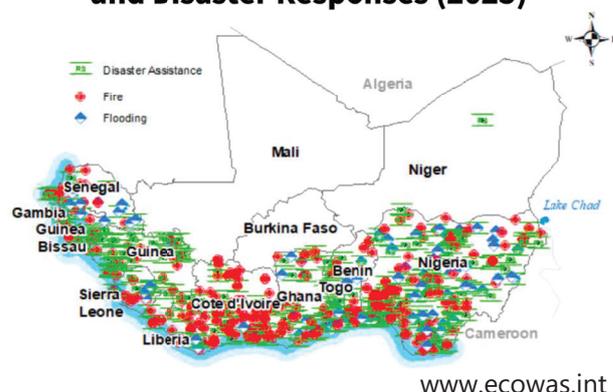
Notable floods were also recorded in Nigeria, Guinea, Niger, Mali, Ghana, and Burkina Faso, disrupting food systems and exacerbating food insecurity. Nigeria experienced the most severe flooding during the period under review. In north-central Nigeria, for instance, flooding inundated rice paddies before the harvest, reducing anticipated yields and undermining farmers' livelihoods.¹³⁵ Rather than harvesting crops, affected communities were forced to prioritise procuring new seedlings amid deep uncertainty about future production. In Benue State, widely regarded as Nigeria's agricultural backbone, the disruption of established planting and harvesting cycles was particularly acute, exposing primary food producers themselves to heightened food insecurity and vulnerability to hunger. Official reports recorded 600 fatalities and 1.3 million IDPs because of floods in 2025,¹³⁶ highlighting their impact on human security. There was also the destruction of critical infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems, which further exacerbated agricultural losses and weakened rural economies. Flooding also affected an estimated 35,000 people in Guinea, 14,000 in Niger, 14,000 in Mali, and about 3,000 each in Ghana and Burkina Faso¹³⁷, underscoring the escalating challenges posed by climate-induced risks to human security across West Africa.

The ECOWAS Early Warning System (ECOWARN) spatial mapping of environmental incidents and response patterns across West Africa in 2025 indicates a pronounced geographic concentration along the coastal and southern belt. High-density clusters are evident in Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and particularly southern Nigeria. This distribution aligns closely with the region's most densely populated and ecologically stressed coastal zones, where rapid urbanisation, land-use pressures, and climate-related hazards intersect.

The observed clustering suggests that environmental risks and associated response demands are disproportionately borne by coastal communities already facing heightened climate vulnerability, including exposure to flooding, coastal erosion, and resource degradation. The spatial pattern underscores the need for targeted investments in prevention, adaptation, and response in the coastal corridor, alongside strengthened cross-border

environmental governance and early warning capacities to manage transboundary environmental pressures concentrated in this zone.

Spatial Distribution of Environmental Events and Disaster Responses (2025)



The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30), held in Belém, Brazil, from 10th to 22nd November 2025, aimed to accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement, scale up climate finance, and elevate the strategic importance of the Amazon. Its main outcomes, including the adoption of the “Belém political package,” commitments to operationalise loss and damage funding, and the launch of initiatives such as the Global Implementation Accelerator, marked a shift from norm-setting to delivery, with renewed pledges to mobilise climate finance and advance adaptation efforts, particularly for vulnerable regions. The outcomes have particular relevance for West Africa, where climate vulnerability is acute, and adaptation needs far outstrip available resources. The commitment to triple adaptation finance to \$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 directly addresses a longstanding gap in support for highly exposed regions like the Sahel and coastal states.¹³⁸ For West Africa, this signals a potential increase in funding for climate-resilient infrastructure, drought-proof agriculture, flood-mitigation, and water-security interventions, which are critical given rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and recurrent extreme events.

The 59 non-prescriptive Global Goal on Adaptation indicators likewise offer a framework for guiding national and regional planning.¹³⁹ By aligning national climate strategies with indicators for food systems, water resources, public health, and livelihoods, West African Governments can better monitor progress and attract targeted support from

¹³⁶ OCHA (2025). West and Central Africa 20205 Monitoring of Flood Situation – As of 21 August 2025. Reliefweb.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2025). COP30 Outcomes for Africa. Available at: <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2025/cop30-outcomes-africa/> (Accessed 20 December 2026).

¹³⁹ Ibid.

multilateral and bilateral partners. However, the deferred financing timeline and the challenge of mobilising commitments into action mean that tangible impacts on resilience may only materialise gradually. In the short term, West Africa will need to integrate COP30 frameworks with regional mechanisms, such as the African Development Bank's climate adaptation programmes and ECOWAS climate strategies, to channel early adaptation investments, institutional capacity building, and locally grounded resilience actions. In 2026, the region's ability to leverage these instruments will be a determining factor in reducing climatic vulnerability and reinforcing adaptive capacity.

The parties, as highlighted by the previous Conference of the Parties, further emphasised phasing out fossil fuels. Moreover, the establishment of the Brazil-led Tropical Rainforest Forever Trust (TFFF), capitalised with an initial US\$6.6 billion,¹⁴⁰ represents a strategic financing mechanism aimed at sustaining tropical rainforest conservation, thereby benefiting West African rainforest ecosystems in mitigating climate impacts. Another key outcome of COP30 on Loss and Damage was the completion of the third review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM), the longest-standing institutional framework within the loss and damage architecture. This review is significant given the WIM's core mandate to advance knowledge generation, strengthen dialogue and coordination among stakeholders, and catalyse action and support to address climate-induced losses and damages. Consequently, in Belém, the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) launched its inaugural call for proposals amounting to USD 250 million,¹⁴¹ marking an important transition from political commitments to the initial operationalisation of loss and damage finance.

The commitment to triple climate adaptation finance annually by 2035 is pivotal for scaling up adaptation mechanisms and strengthening resilience to the adverse effects of climate change in vulnerable contexts, particularly in West Africa. This challenge is further compounded by the region's large rural and agrarian population, which remains largely dependent on forest resources, especially firewood and charcoal, for energy needs and on subsistence agriculture for livelihoods. At the same time,

recurrent energy volatility continues to undermine energy security and drive fuel price instability across countries in the region.¹⁴² These dynamics in West Africa and across the continent more broadly, coupled with a lack of consensus on a binding roadmap, pose significant challenges to a transition away from fossil fuels.

5.1. Key Outlook in 2026

5.1.1. Persistent gaps in response mechanisms, inadequate international financial support to climate adaptation systems, and evolving climate effects

- Although COP30 reaffirmed a commitment to triple adaptation finance by 2035, the delayed timeline and the withdrawal of U.S. climate finance and technical support weaken the prospects for rapid scaling of resilience investments in West Africa and the Sahel. Developed countries' retreat from prior climate funding pledges has widened the adaptation finance gap, with global needs estimated at \$310- \$365 billion annually by the mid-2030s, yet actual flows remain far lower.¹⁴³ The reduction in external adaptation financing risks undermines country and regional plans to address acute climate impacts, including food insecurity, flooding, and livelihood loss. In this context, regional mechanisms and multilateral development banks become increasingly important. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has integrated climate resilience across its strategies, with nearly 98 per cent of new operations climate-informed and a significant portion of its \$5.5 billion annual climate finance directed toward adaptation.¹⁴⁴ Initiatives like the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program and Sahel basin resilience projects are already mobilising resources for climate-smart agriculture, water management, and ecosystem restoration.¹⁴⁵ In 2026, the outlook for resilience will depend on how well African regional and national frameworks, supported by institutions like AfDB, the World Bank, ECOWAS, and The Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), can complement slower global climate finance flows with locally anchored adaptation actions, enhanced domestic budgetary allocations, and innovative financing instruments to protect livelihoods and strengthen food systems.

¹⁴⁰ UN News (2025). Belém delivers climate finance boost and a pledge to plan fossil fuel transition. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166433> (Accessed 20 December 2025).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² WANEP (2025). West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2025. Available at: www.wanep.org (Accessed 27 December 2025).

¹⁴³ 'Yawning' finance gap for countries to adapt to climate extremes. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/98ad47fb-bfdc-41a1-a0e7-8f845ab7ce6a?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 27 December 2025).

¹⁴⁴ The African Development Bank Group's Climate Action and Financing. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/en/cop30/focus-africa/african-development-bank-groups-climate-action-and-financing?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 27 December 2025).

¹⁴⁵ Flagship climate initiatives and Funds. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/en/cop30/flagship-climate-initiatives-and-funds?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Accessed 27 December 2025).

5.2. Key Resilient Factors

- The 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 to establish integrated, peaceful, and prosperous communities supported by strong institutions, respecting fundamental freedoms, and working towards inclusive, sustainable development. The African Union's Common African Position on the Climate Change, Peace, and Security Nexus (CAP-CPS) is also anchored in unifying Africa's voices, integrating climate into peace efforts, and securing sustainable financing, recognising climate change as a "risk multiplier" that worsens instability, food insecurity, and migration. Key aspects include a focus on prevention, building resilience (particularly for women and youth), enhancing early warning systems, promoting conflict-sensitive financing, and strengthening continental frameworks such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to address climate-driven security threats in Africa.
- At the United Nations level, the UN Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSP) for 2018–2030 is designed as an integrated response to the region's protracted and multidimensional humanitarian and security crises. It prioritises six interlinked pillars: cross-border cooperation, climate action, crisis prevention, women and youth empowerment, economic revitalisation, and renewable energy, thereby recognising the structural drivers of fragility. Collectively, these priorities aim to coordinate international and regional interventions to strengthen peace and security outcomes in the Sahel, while advancing alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
- The Alliance for Sahel (AES) countries have also adopted a range of national climate policy frameworks, 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). Collectively, these strategies are anchored in enhancing the resilience of ecosystems, social systems, and production chains in highly vulnerable areas. Their implementation is oriented toward mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change by addressing intensifying droughts, extreme weather events, and shifting rainfall patterns, with a particular emphasis on strengthening

climate-resilient agricultural practices, improving water resource management, and scaling up community-based adaptation initiatives.

- The outcomes of COP30 included an agreement to triple climate adaptation finance to USD 1.3 trillion annually by 2035, the launch of the inaugural USD 250 million call for proposals under the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), and the establishment of the Brazil-led Tropical Rainforest Forever Trust (TFFF), capitalised with an initial USD 6.6 billion. Collectively, these initiatives signal a strategic effort to scale financial support for climate-vulnerable regions, to strengthen resilience to escalating climate impacts. In addition, the Global Goal on Adaptation provides a coordinating framework for enhanced multilateral cooperation, reinforcing national, regional, and continental adaptation efforts, particularly across African countries confronting intensifying climate risks.

5.3. Recommendation

- ECOWAS should intensify collaboration with the African Union to accelerate the finalisation of the Common African Position on the Climate Change, Peace, and Security Nexus (CAP-CPS) and strategically deploy it as a coordination and policy-alignment instrument. This framework should be leveraged to systematically align West African adaptation, loss and damage, and nature-based resilience priorities with the eligibility criteria, access modalities, and fiduciary standards of multilateral climate finance mechanisms, including global adaptation finance commitments, the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), and the Tropical Rainforest Forever Trust (TFFF). Such alignment would enhance the mobilisation and effective utilisation of financial and technical support, strengthen national and regional climate adaptation systems, and bolster resilience to the escalating climate-induced risks across West Africa.

6.0 CONCLUSION

West Africa's governance, peace, and security portfolio in 2025 portrayed a confluence of efforts by stakeholders to enhance resilience, continued democratic governance decline, the expansion of organised crime and violent extremism, and escalating environmental insecurity driven by climate change. Persistent challenges to democratic governance stability, especially military coups, manipulation of electoral processes, political exclusion, and constraints on civil liberties, contributed to shrinking political spaces and dwindling trust, as well as fractured social cohesion in states across the region.

In parallel, the intensification of organised crime and violent extremism, particularly in fragile and border communities, reflects both adaptive threat dynamics and the limited capacity of state institutions to safeguard human security and State stability. These security pressures are further compounded by climate-induced risks, including resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and climate-related displacement, which increasingly function as threat multipliers for conflict and instability.

Despite sustained efforts by key stakeholders to advance the women, peace, and security agenda through participation, representation, and protection, progress remained constrained by limited opportunities for women's meaningful inclusion in decision-making and persistent sexual and gender-based violence, particularly rape. Together, these dynamics underscore the urgent need to create trusted spaces for enhanced coordination and cooperation among community, national, regional, and international actors as the vital core of peacebuilding efforts, to reinforce existing norms and strengthen resilience against the complex governance, peace, and security challenges of 2026 and beyond.

WEST AFRICA PEACE AND SECURITY OUTLOOK 2026



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