



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION MONITOR - WEST AFRICA

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Executive Summary

Freedom of expression and press freedom are central to democratic governance in West Africa. However, in the region these rights continue to face challenges of physical attacks, threats, intimidation and legal harassment, driven by political instability, state control and purported security concerns. In the second quarter of 2026, these challenges remained evident across the region, affecting journalists, media outlets, activists and other civic actors who were simply exercising their rights.

This report presents an overview of violations of freedom of expression recorded in 11 West African countries during the second quarter of 2026 (April–June). A total of 44 incidents were documented — a 37.5% increase from the 32 recorded in the previous quarter. Arrests and detentions were the most prevalent form of violation, accounting for 17 cases, followed by incidents of suspension and denial of the right to expression through protest. Other incidents included destruction of equipment, abduction and the closure of a newsroom.

Mauritania recorded the highest number of violations during the period under review. Its violations tripled, surging from three incidents in Q1 to nine in Q2. Ghana's violations also rose, from three in Q1 to seven in Q2. Other countries that recorded significant numbers of violations included Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Findings from the monitoring conducted over the three-month period show that arrests and detentions remain the primary tool used to push back or deter critical voices. The continued resort to physical attacks, abductions, threats and the suspension of media outlets and journalists also points to a broader climate of insecurity for media workers and civic actors, which instils fear and forces some into self-censorship. Unfortunately, the apparent lack of redress also emboldens perpetrators, who know they will not be held accountable. For instance, out of the 44 violations cited, only five received some level of redress.

The report therefore calls on governments, media regulators, news media organisations and their leadership, ECOWAS and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to take proactive and reparative steps to ensure accountability for freedom of expression violations, while taking measures to mitigate or minimise their occurrence.

1.0 Introduction



Freedom of expression and press freedom remain under sustained pressure across West Africa. Journalists, media houses, civil society actors and other civic voices continue to face arrests, physical attacks, intimidation, unlawful suspensions and other forms of violation in the course of their work or during civic participation.

As part of the Media Foundation for West Africa's (MFWA's) advocacy against threats to freedom of expression in the region, the organisation tracks and analyses freedom of expression violations in West Africa on a daily basis. The findings are compiled into quarterly reports that build a comparative picture of how patterns of repression evolve over time and across countries.

This report presents the findings of MFWA's monitoring for the second quarter of 2026 (April–June 2026). The findings cover violations recorded across eleven West African countries. It builds directly on the Q1 2026 monitoring report (January–March), allowing for a comparative reading of how the frequency, type, geographic spread and perpetrator profile of violations shifted between the two quarters.

The analysis draws on three layers of data collected by MFWA's country monitors and partners: the type and frequency of violations recorded per country, the category of actor responsible for each violation, and the profile of individuals and groups affected.

2.0 Methodology

This report is based on data collected through the Media Foundation for West Africa's (MFWA) daily monitoring of freedom of expression developments across the West African region. Monitoring is conducted by MFWA's country-based correspondents and partner organisations in the various countries in the region. To build a comprehensive and reliable dataset, the process draws on multiple sources, including firsthand reports from national correspondents and monitors, verified media accounts, and information from local and international human rights organisations active in the region.

Reported incidents are validated and then published on the MFWA website as freedom of expression Alerts. These Alerts provide detailed and timely documentation of violations, including the nature of the incident, the identity of victims and alleged perpetrators, and any follow-up or redress actions taken or needed. The MFWA compiles and analyses all Alerts issued over a quarter to produce the quarterly reports, named The Freedom of Expression Monitor (or the Monitor).

In addition to cataloguing violations, the Monitor identifies emerging trends, thematic patterns and country-specific developments that help stakeholders better understand the dynamics of freedom of expression in the region. It also highlights significant developments affecting media freedom and civic space, such as legal reforms, court rulings, policy measures or advocacy actions. These insights offer essential context for assessing the broader environment for freedom of expression, and the challenges and opportunities for progress.

A methodological clarification worth highlighting is that the violation-type and victim-profile datasets use different units of count. The former counts incidents, while the latter counts the number of people or entities affected by each incident. Consequently, a single incident could affect more than one person.

The Monitor is designed as an advocacy tool to promote freedom of expression and press freedom both online and offline, defend civil liberties, and ensure that violations are documented and challenged. It is intended to inform the work of civil society actors, policymakers, international organisations, researchers and others seeking to create a more open, free and safe environment for expression as a foundation for good governance in West Africa. This edition of the Monitor presents findings from daily monitoring conducted during the second quarter of 2026.

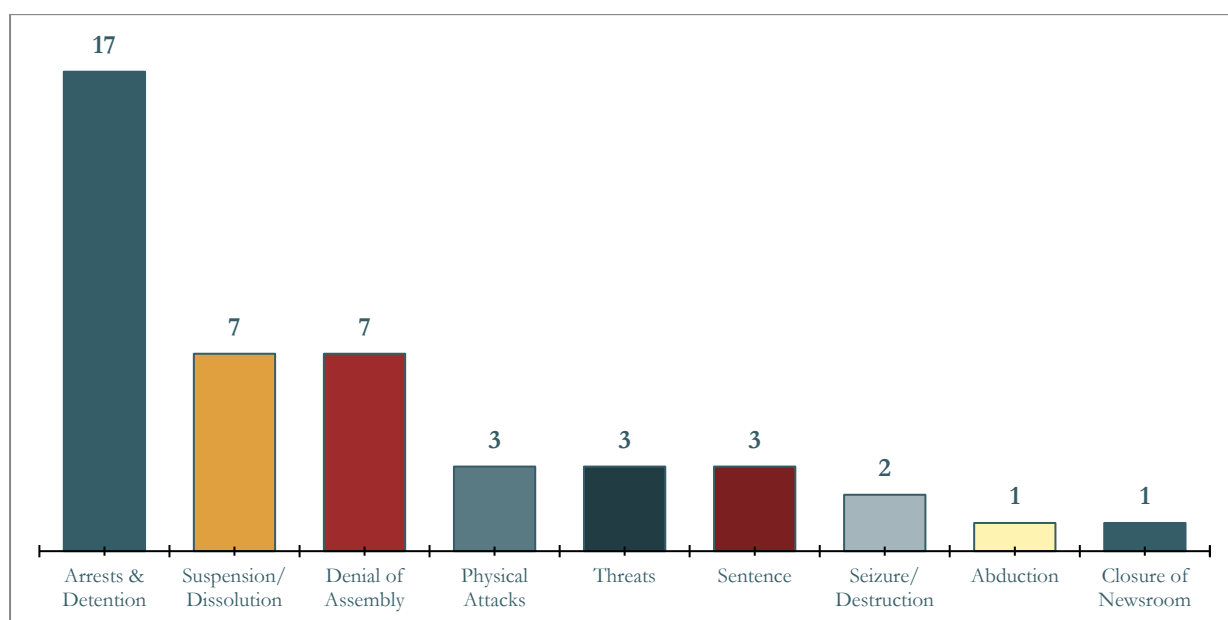
3.0 Findings

The findings of the daily monitoring of the freedom of expression landscape across West Africa in the second quarter of 2026 are presented in this Monitor. The findings cover all developments (positive and negative) concerning freedom of expression (FOE), including environmental activism and expression through protest, documented over the three-month period. The details are presented under sections covering incidents of violations, the countries affected, comparative analyses against Q1, perpetrators, victims, redress and key trends. The report ends with a series of recommendations to relevant stakeholders on measures to improve the FOE situation in West Africa.

3.1 Incidents of Violations

In the second quarter of 2026 (April–June), a total of 44 freedom of expression violations were recorded. These were made up of nine different types of violation. Arrests and detentions — having ranked as the most common violation in the first quarter of 2026 (Q1) — remained the most dominant violation in the second quarter (Q2), accounting for 17 incidents. The other violations recorded in the quarter took the form of suspension of news media organisations, journalists and associations; denial of assembly; sentence or conviction; physical attacks; threats; seizure/destruction of equipment; invasion of a media house / forceful shutdown of a newsroom; and abduction. Figure 1 below presents the distribution of recorded violations by type and frequency.

Figure 1: Frequency and category of violations recorded



Notes: 1) Suspension/Dissolution covers the suspension of journalists and media outlets and/or the dissolution of a group, including political parties and student groups. 2) Seizure/Destruction covers the seizure and/or destruction of equipment or property belonging to a journalist, media outlet, activist or individual as a result of their reporting, activism or expression.

Summaries of the specific incidents of freedom of expression abuses can be found [here](#).

3.2 Countries and Types of Violations

The 44 violations recorded in the second quarter of 2026 occurred across eleven countries in the region. Mauritania recorded the highest number of violations, with a total of nine, largely driven by multiple cases of arrest. The violations recorded in the eleven countries are presented in Table 1 below, which also features the different categories of violations recorded in each country. The map that follows shades each country by the number of violations recorded.

Table 1: Frequency and types of violations per country

Country	Arrests & Detention	Physical Attacks	Suspension/ Dissolution	Abduction	Threats	Denial of Assembly	Closure of Newsroom	Sentence	Seizure/ Destruction	Total
Burkina Faso	3		1			2				6
Côte d'Ivoire	1									1
Ghana	4	1			1		1			7
Guinea			3		1					4
Mali	2		2	1						5
Mauritania	4					2		2	1	9
Niger			1							1
Nigeria	1	2			1	2			1	7
Sierra Leone								1		1
The Gambia	1					1				2
Togo	1									1
Total	17	3	7	1	3	7	1	3	2	44

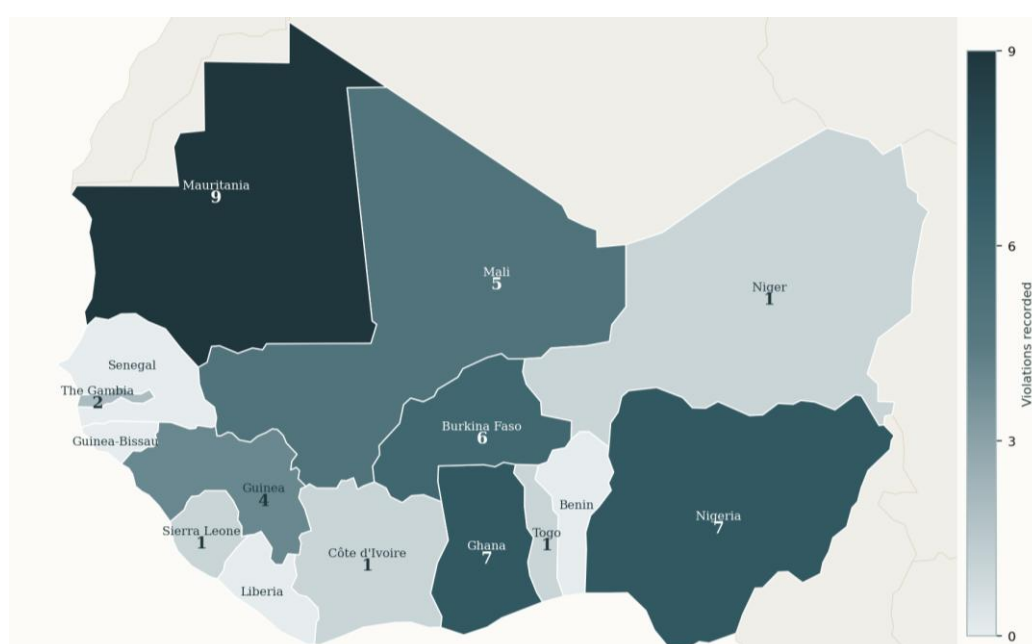
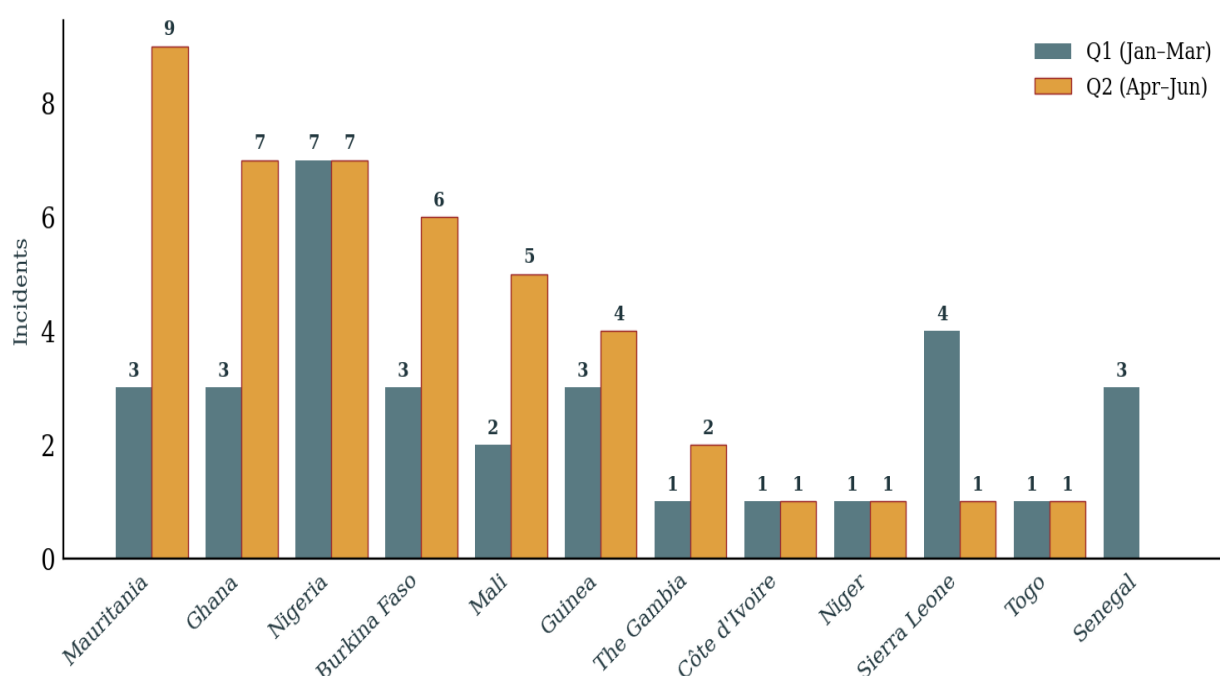


Figure: Violations recorded per country (darker = more violations)

3.3 Comparative Analysis of Incidents (Q1 vs Q2)

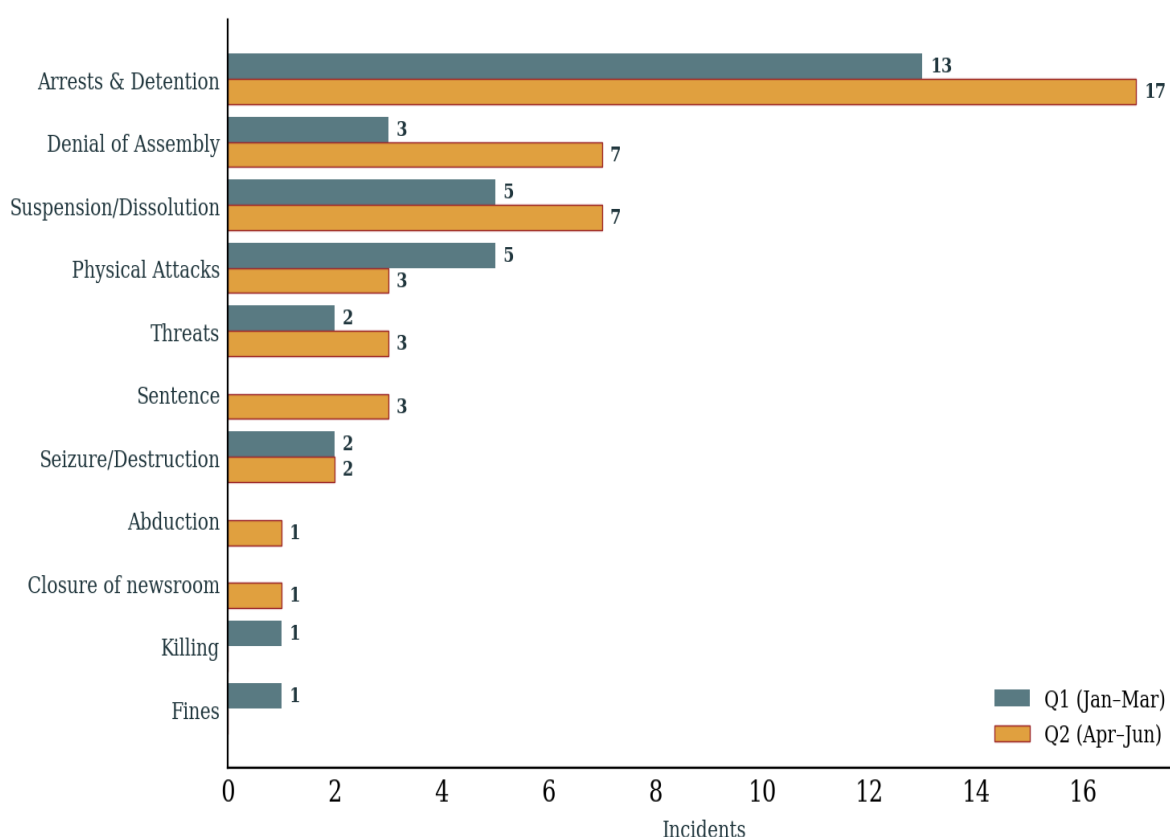
Total recorded violations rose from 32 in the first quarter (Q1) to 44 in the second quarter (Q2), a 37.5% increase, indicating that the overall civic and press-freedom environment in the region deteriorated further. Figure 2 below presents a comparative analysis of the frequency of violation incidents recorded per country across Q1 and Q2 of 2026; for every country, the figure shows the number of incidents in the first quarter alongside the number in the second. The incidents recorded in Mauritania soared from three in Q1 to nine in Q2. Ghana's violations jumped from three in Q1 to seven in Q2, a 133% increase, driven almost entirely by a rise in arrests (four in Q2 versus one arrest/detention case in Q1). Mali's violations increased from two in Q1 to five in Q2, with the addition of an abduction and continued media suspensions. This makes the shift in Mauritania, Ghana and Mali the most notable negative movement between the two quarters.

Figure 2: Country-based comparison of incidents recorded in Q1 and Q2 of 2026

3.4 Comparative Analysis of Types (Q1 vs Q2)

Comparing Q1 and Q2 in terms of the types of violation cited in each quarter, some categories recurred in both quarters while others did not: some categories cited in Q1 did not recur in Q2, and some recorded in Q2 did not occur in Q1. Figure 3 below presents a comparison of the types of violation recorded in Q1 and Q2, highlighting changes in their frequencies across the two quarters. Arrests and detentions increased from 13 cases in Q1 to 17 in Q2, remaining the most common form of freedom of expression violation across the two quarters and suggesting a greater reliance on deprivation of liberty to suppress civic and media freedoms. Denial of assembly and the suspension of media outlets, journalists and associations also increased — rising from three to seven cases and from four to seven cases respectively — indicating growing restrictions on civic space and media operations.

Figure 3: Frequency of FOE violation types recorded in Q1 and Q2



Notes: For comparability across quarters, Q1 categories are aligned to Q2's where they describe the same conduct — for example, Q1 “Intimidation” is shown here as “Threats”, and Q1 “Destruction of property” as “Seizure/Destruction”; Q1 “Suspension” and “Dissolution” are combined to match Q2’s “Suspension/Dissolution”. Categories that occurred in only one quarter (e.g. Killing and Fines in Q1; Abduction, Sentence and Closure of a newsroom in Q2) are shown with a zero value in the quarter where they did not occur.

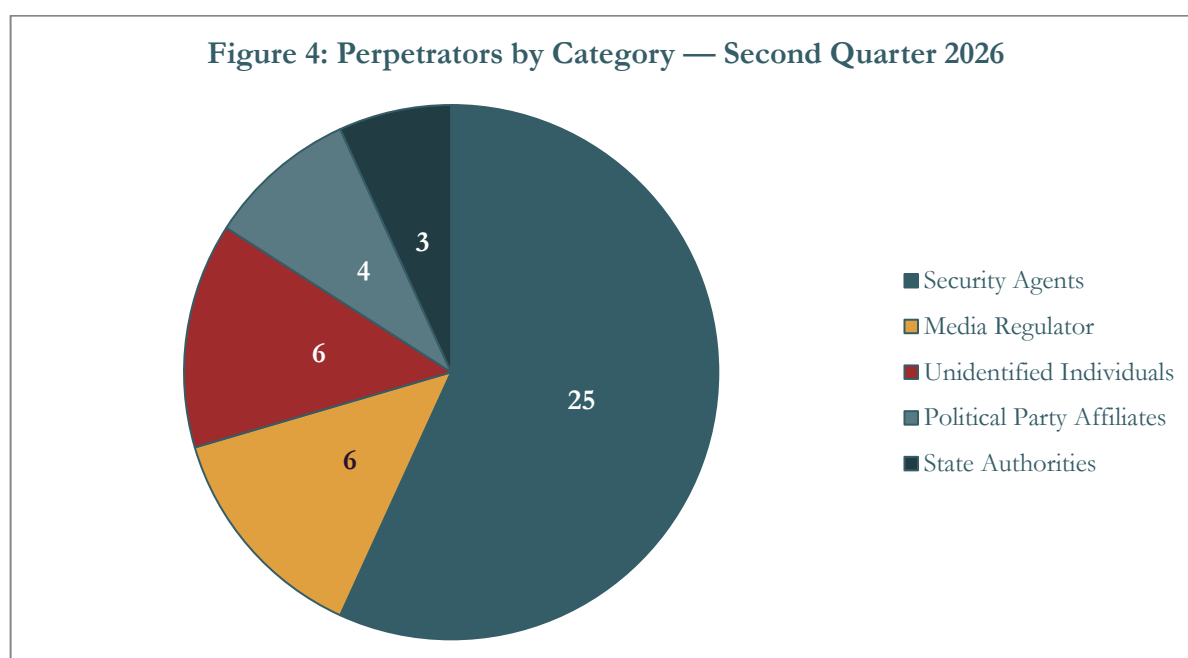
3.5 Perpetrators of Violations

The 44 violations recorded were carried out by five categories of perpetrator: security agents, state authorities, media regulators, political party affiliates, and citizens or unidentified individuals. The data show that security agents alone were responsible for more than half of the 44 recorded cases. In Mauritania and Burkina Faso, the perpetrators were security officers, while in Ghana and Nigeria the perpetrators included political party affiliates and unidentified individuals. Overall, the data reveal that the suppression of expression is largely systemic — rooted in state institutions but also reinforced by partisan and societal hostility. Table 2 below presents statistics on the state and non-state actors responsible for the violations cited in each country.

Table 2: Countries and perpetrators of violations

Country	Security Agents	State Authorities	Media Regulator	Political Party Affiliates	Unidentified Individuals	Total
Burkina Faso	6					6
Côte d'Ivoire	1					1
Ghana	4			3		7
Guinea			3		1	4
Mali	2		2		1	5
Mauritania	7	2				9
Niger			1			1
Nigeria	2			1	4	7
Sierra Leone		1				1
The Gambia	2					2
Togo	1					1
Total	25	3	6	4	6	44

Figure 4: Perpetrators by category



3.6 Victims of Violations

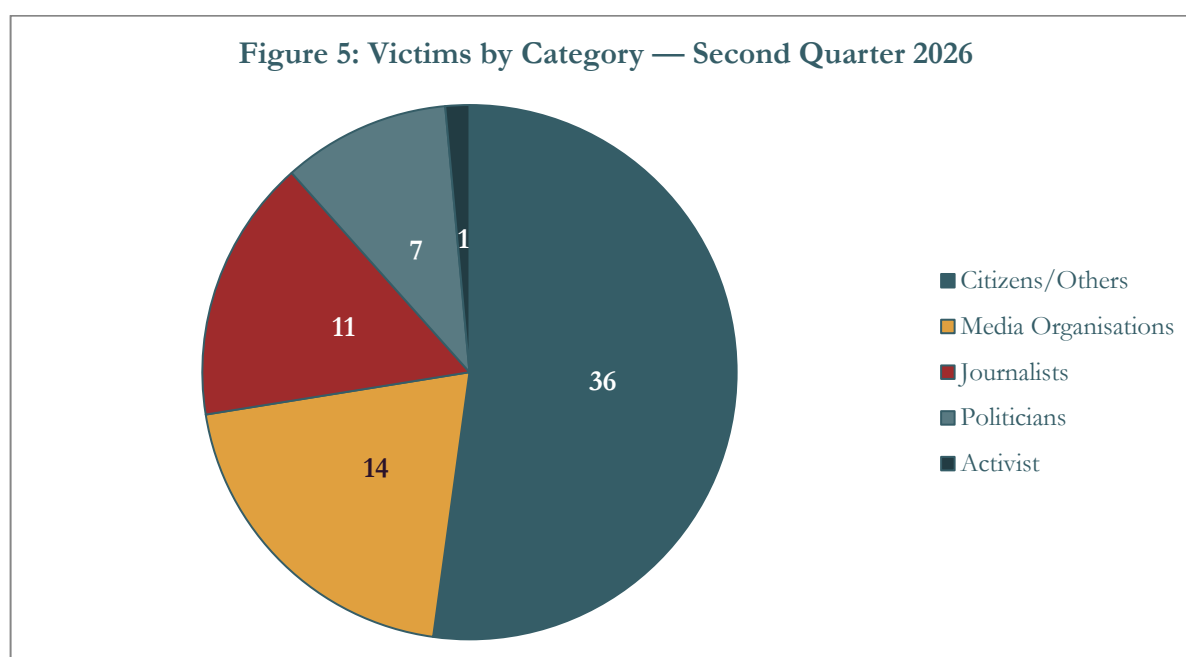
The 44 violations cited directly affected journalists, media organisations and a number of individuals whose affiliations could not be established — mainly members of the general public who were denied the right to assemble in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Nigeria and The Gambia. However, since the monitoring could not capture the exact number of people affected by each denial of assembly, each such incident is counted as having directly affected one victim for the

purposes of this analysis; the same logic is used for mass arrests. It is therefore worth noting that the number of direct victims cited in this report is not absolute. The data presented in Table 3 cover quantifiable victims who directly suffered freedom of expression violations, as well as the mass denials of assembly and arrests, which were quantified as one per incident.

Table 3: Victims of freedom of expression violations recorded

Country	Journalists	Activist	Politicians	Media Organisations	Citizens/Others	Total
Burkina Faso					6	6
Côte d'Ivoire			1		1	2
Ghana	2		2	1	2	7
Guinea	4			1		5
Mali	2		1	3		6
Mauritania	1		2		6	9
Niger				9		9
Nigeria	2				5	7
Sierra Leone			1			1
The Gambia					16	16
Togo		1				1
Total	11	1	7	14	36	69

Figure 5: Victims by category



3.7 Redress of Violations

Some violations recorded in the second quarter of 2026 (April–June) received redress, while others saw notable progress toward it. However, out of the 44 FOE violations recorded, only five — representing 11% of the violations — received remedial action. In addition to the five, other violations recorded in previous quarters were also redressed during the second quarter. Brief highlights are presented below.

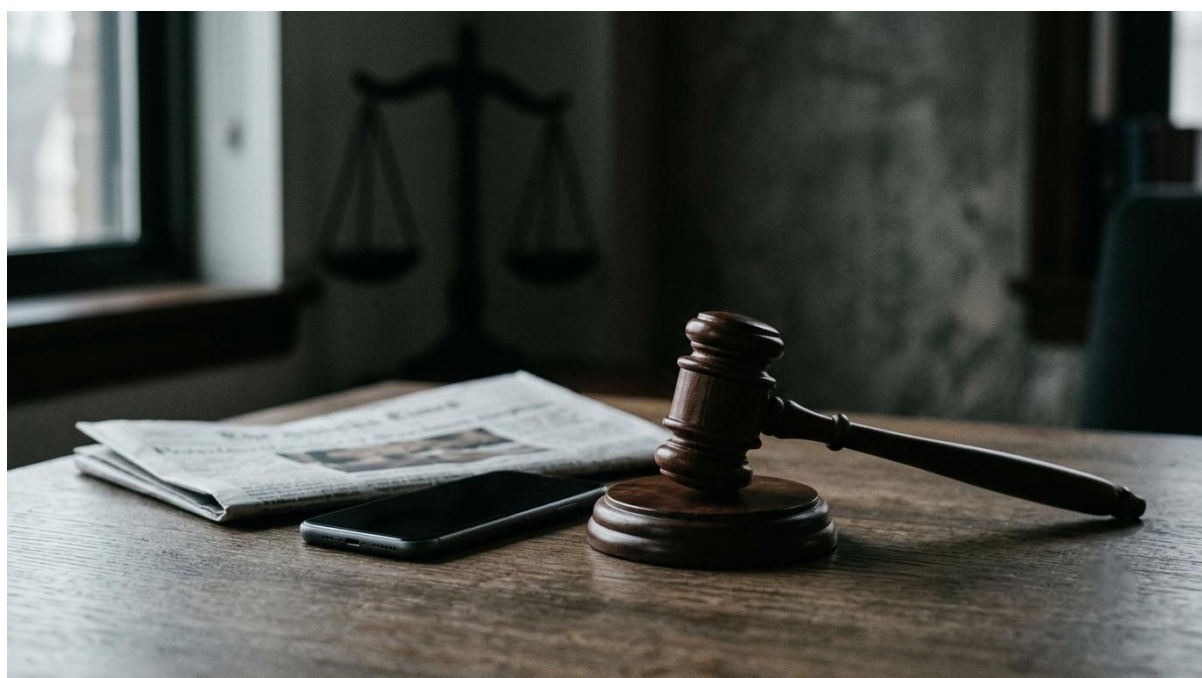
1. On April 30, Guinea’s media regulator, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), lifted the suspensions imposed on three television stations — KABACK TV, Africa 24 and Télé 24’s programme “Guinea Today.” The regulator also lifted the suspension on journalists André Gaston Morel, Aboubacar Diallo and Sékou Bah after administrative appeals and formal apologies from the media organisations and journalists.
2. On May 4, 2026, Rivers State Police announced the arrest of 13 suspects whom they linked to the attack on investigative journalist Allwell Ene of Megalectrics Media Group and other criminal activities in the area. Ene was attacked on April 13, 2026 in Port Harcourt’s Garrison Junction area while filming reported harassment of commuters and residents by local men. More than 15 men surrounded him, beat him, tore his clothes, stole his phone and money, and injured his face in public view when he identified himself as a journalist.
3. On May 21, 2026, an Accra High Court granted bail of GH¢100,000 (about US\$8,521.52) with two sureties to opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) Bono Regional Chairman Kwame Baffoe (also known as Abronye DC), who had been re-arrested on May 13, one month after his initial April arrest, for public criticism of a judge. He was charged with offensive conduct conducive to a breach of the peace under Section 207(1) of the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), and publication of false news under Section 208(1).
4. Also in Ghana, an NPP communications officer, Abubakar Yakubu (also known as Baba Amando), who was arrested on April 13, 2026 over a Facebook post containing AI-generated or digitally altered images depicting President John Dramani Mahama and two ministers in LGBTQ+ pride-themed outfits, was granted bail on April 17, 2026 by the High Court of Ghana (General Jurisdiction 2).
5. Another redress recorded in Ghana related to TikTok content creator Mahama Aminat (also known as Bawumia Ba). Aminat was arrested on May 20, 2026 in the Ashanti Region after her TikTok videos containing insulting remarks, threats to life and incitement to harm the President and First Lady went viral. On May 22, 2026 she was granted bail of GH¢1 million (about US\$86,000) with two sureties by the Accra Circuit Court 2.

Redress of violations from previous quarters

1. The ECOWAS Community Court of Justice ordered the Nigerian government to pay ten million naira (about US\$7,283.90) in damages for violating the rights of journalist Jide Oyekunle during his coverage of a 2024 protest. In August 2024, Oyekunle — a photojournalist with Daily Independent and Chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists’ FCT Chapter — was physically assaulted, unlawfully detained, and had his phone seized by police while covering the #EndBadGovernance protest in Abuja.

2. Zada Hassane Badjé, head of Canal 3 station in Dosso and publishing director of Toubal Info, was released on May 6, 2026 after roughly eight months in detention at Niamey Civil Prison. He was arrested on August 25, 2025 over a leaked WhatsApp audio recording in which he made remarks deemed insulting to President Abdourahamane Tiani. He had been sentenced in September to 30 months in prison plus a fine of about CFA two million (about US\$3,500).
3. Gazali Abdou Tasawa, a Hausa-language correspondent for the German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW), was granted provisional release on May 8, 2026 after 105 days in detention in Niamey, Niger. Tasawa was arrested on January 23, 2026 and placed in detention at Niamey civil prison following a brief police interrogation.

3.8 Other Developments



In addition to the violations and redress measures documented during the quarter under review, other notable developments — mainly updates on violations cited in previous Monitors — are also worth highlighting. In particular, the monitoring documented four positive outcomes from different court rulings; however, an incident was also recorded in which an activist was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. The highlights are below.

On June 17, 2026, the Court of Appeal in Abuja struck out another appeal filed by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) seeking to overturn a Federal High Court judgment restraining it from imposing monetary fines on broadcast stations.

Also in Nigeria, a Federal High Court in Ibadan, on April 15, 2026, ordered the University of Ibadan (UI) to reinstate three students — Aduwo Ayodele, Gbadegesin Olamide Iyanuoluwa and Linus Nice Adaoma. The three had been suspended for protesting a May 2024 tuition-fee increase. During the protest, university security handed the students to Operation Burst officers, who profiled them as suspected cultists and took them to a military facility. The university then charged them with misconduct; Ayodele and Gbadegesin were handed a four-semester

rustication, and Linus was barred from taking her oath as a Students' Representative Council member.

Another positive development from Nigeria concerned the case of Pelumi Onifade, a Gboah TV reporter who disappeared on October 24, 2020 after being arrested by the Lagos State Task Force while covering the #EndSARS protests. Onifade's body could not initially be found; a body discovered days later at Ikorodu General Hospital was not formally confirmed as his. Six years after his death, and following legal battles over the whereabouts of his body, the Lagos State DNA and Forensic Centre presented a sealed report to a Coroner's Court in Lagos on June 23, 2026 confirming that a previously unidentified body — tagged "1385" and deposited at the Ikorodu General Hospital mortuary on November 3, 2020 — was that of Pelumi Onifade. The investigating magistrate said genetic analysis matched the body with a sample provided by the deceased's mother, Adebose Onifade.

In Ghana, journalists Bridget Otoo and Vanessa Edotom Boateng and activist George Gyening Anyang won a court case on May 14, 2026 against Ghana's Inspector General of Police and Attorney General over assaults they suffered during the September 2023 #OccupyJulorbiHouse protest. The Accra High Court's Human Rights Division ruled that the police's conduct was "unconstitutional." The court awarded the three GHC100,000 (about US\$8,521.52) in compensatory damages, GHC50,000 (about US\$4,260.76) in general damages, and GHC30,000 (about US\$2,556.46) in legal costs, and ordered the police to publish a formal apology in the Daily Graphic, a national newspaper.

On the downside, digital activist Ibrahim Zigui, a member of the opposition PPA-CI party in Côte d'Ivoire, was sentenced on May 18, 2026 to five years' imprisonment and a fine of about CFA 20 million (about US\$35,500) after being found guilty of "inciting insurrection" and "disorderly conduct." He was arrested on September 1, 2025 after posting a video urging Ivorians to protest ahead of the Constitutional Council's release of the final candidate list for the October 2025 presidential election. In March 2026 he issued a public apology to the Constitutional Council, calling his earlier remarks "inappropriate" and "disrespectful"; his lawyer said he plans to appeal the "excessively harsh" sentence.

Beyond the courtroom developments, another issue worth noting is the narrowing of civic space, particularly in Burkina Faso. During the quarter under review, authorities suspended students' associations; arrested some student leaders; arrested a religious leader who is also the vice-president of the Sunni Movement for criticising a bill on religious freedom; and closed down a mosque belonging to the Sunni Movement. These developments continue to instil fear in the populace and force many into self-censorship.

4.0 Conclusion & Recommendations



The rise in incidents of violations against the right to expression, as noted in the comparative analysis of the Q1 and Q2 findings (a 37.5% increase), together with the low number of remedial actions taken, are worrying findings that need urgent attention. Equally concerning is the dominance of state security agents in perpetrating such violations: of the 44 cases reported, state security agents accounted for 25, representing 56% of all documented violations. This may partly explain the limited action taken by authorities, as violations committed by these actors are hardly subject to appropriate sanction or pursued to their logical conclusion. These findings are consistent with trends highlighted in previous quarterly reports, in which state security agents are constantly cited among the primary perpetrators of violations against freedom of expression and the press.

These findings point to persistent challenges that limit the expression landscape and impact the work of journalists, activists, human rights defenders and other civic actors across the region. They also emphasise the need for authorities, regional bodies and other stakeholders to take concrete action to improve the civic environment. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed.

To Government and State Institutions

- We call on governments in the region to hold security and law enforcement agencies fully accountable for violations committed against media practitioners, civil society actors or citizens exercising their right to expression. In line with this, we also call on governments to continuously build the capacity of security agents to appreciate the work of the media in democratic societies and to collaborate with them.
- Ensure that perpetrators of freedom of expression rights violations (both state and non-state actors) are appropriately dealt with, and that victims are adequately compensated.

- We specifically call on the government of Burkina Faso to lift the suspension on the General Union of Burkinabè Students (UGEB) and to reopen the Sunni Movement's main mosque for worship.

To Media Regulatory Bodies

- We call on media regulatory bodies in the region to prioritise dialogue over the suspension of media outlets, as such sanctions end up denying people the right to access information and the right to expression through media platforms.
- We in particular call on the media regulator (HAC) in Mali to lift the suspension of Radio Klédu's "Allô Klédu" programme and of the Saudi-owned channels Al Arabiya and Al Hadath.
- Similarly, we call on Niger's media regulatory authority, the National Communications Observatory (ONC), to lift the suspension of the nine French international media outlets across the country (France 24, Radio France Internationale (RFI), France Afrique Media, LSI Africa, Agence France-Presse (AFP), TV5 Monde, TF1 Info, Jeune Afrique, and Mediapart).

To ECOWAS and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

- We call on ECOWAS and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to strengthen their oversight mechanisms to ensure Member States comply with established human rights instruments.
- They should hold governments accountable for persistent or systemic violations and executive overreach.

To Journalists and Media Organisations

- We call on journalists and media organisations to continue to uphold the highest ethical and professional standards in their work at all times. Maintaining professionalism strengthens public trust and fortifies the media's credibility as a pillar of democracy.
- Media owners and managers should provide legal and psychosocial support to journalists and media workers who are attacked as a result of their work, to help them pursue justice.
- They should also support and sustain collective advocacy for the respect of press freedom and freedom of expression.

To the General Public

- We call on citizens, including social-media content creators, to exercise their right to free expression with decorum and respect — and specifically to refrain from unsubstantiated allegations, attacks on personalities, and threats of violence or harm against individuals or institutions.



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