



Freedom of Expression Situation in West Africa

June 2026 Overview

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Introduction

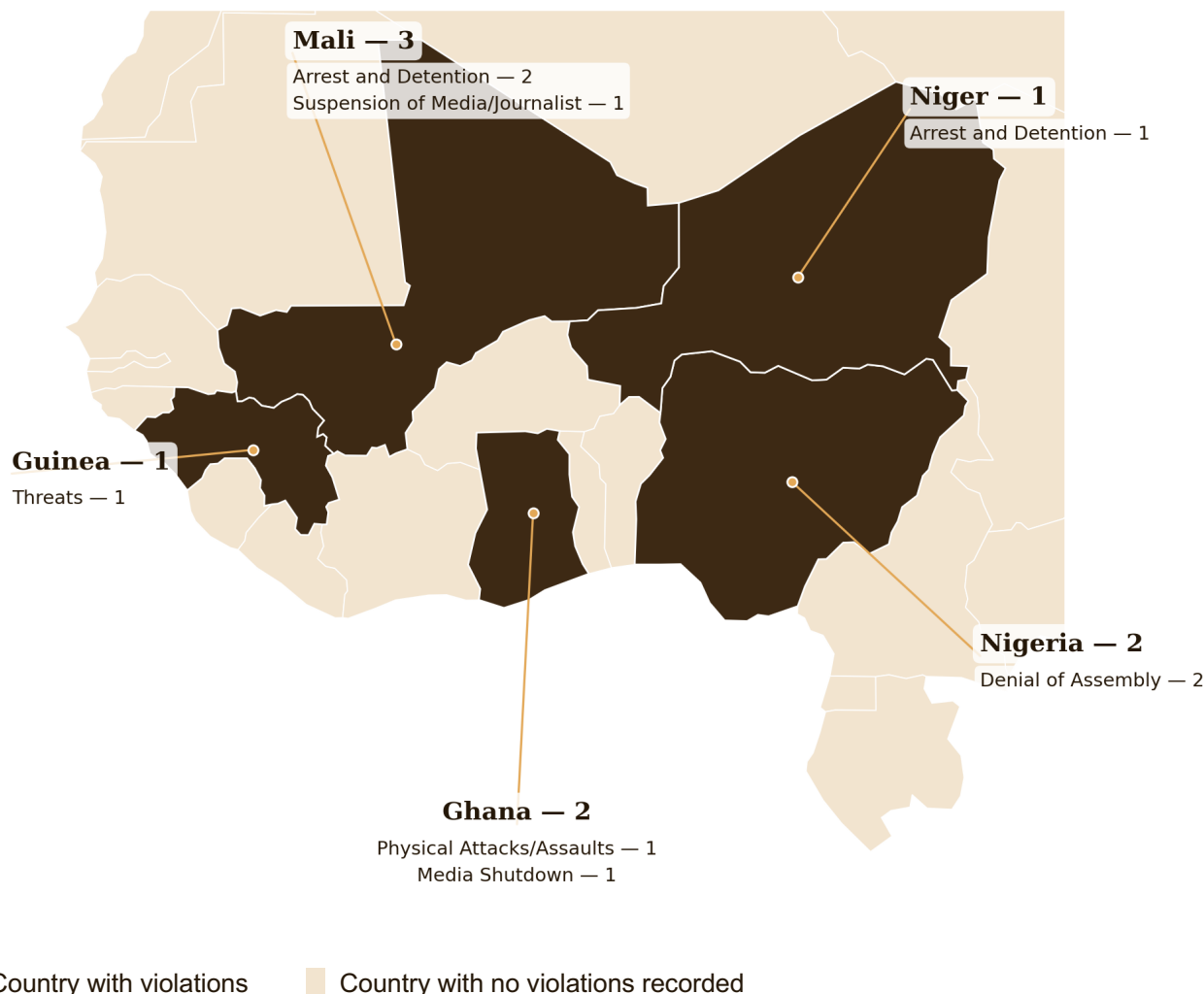
Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists in West Africa in June 2026 received a significant boost as the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice on June 22 ruled in favour of Nigerian journalist Jide Oyekunle. The Court found the Nigerian police liable for assault on the journalist following his arrest and treatment during his coverage of the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Abuja. The landmark ruling by the regional Court is a testament to how regional and international human-rights mechanisms bolster protections for press freedom and the safety of journalists, beyond national constitutional arrangements. June also witnessed a considerable reduction in the recorded incidents of freedom of expression violations by nearly half (nine), compared with the number recorded in May (16).

Despite these gains, however, the use of legal, regulatory, and coercive measures by both state and non-state actors to suppress independent journalism and dissent persisted, posing a significant threat to democratic governance. For instance, two news editors in Mali were remanded in custody for sharing their opinions and concerns over some national issues, while the call-in segment of a popular radio programme in Mali that allowed citizens to phone in and express their views on national issues was suspended for two months. In Nigeria, two separate peaceful citizens' protests aimed at expressing concerns about poor governance turned violent, leading to assaults on some protesters, ultimately halting the protests.

This June 2026 report is produced with support from the 11th Hour Project of The Schmidt Family Foundation to draw attention to the freedom of expression situation in West Africa. The report is compiled from data gathered through daily monitoring of the freedom of expression environment in the 16 countries by MFWA's monitors, correspondents, and national partners.

The Numbers. The Perpetrators. The Trends.

Freedom of Expression Violations by Country — June 2026



In June, nine freedom of expression violations were recorded across five countries in the region. These violations included arrests and detentions, denial of assembly, physical attacks or assaults, threats, media shutdowns, and media suspensions. Mali recorded three (3) violations, Ghana, and Nigeria both recorded two (2) violations, while Guinea and Niger each reported one (1) violation.

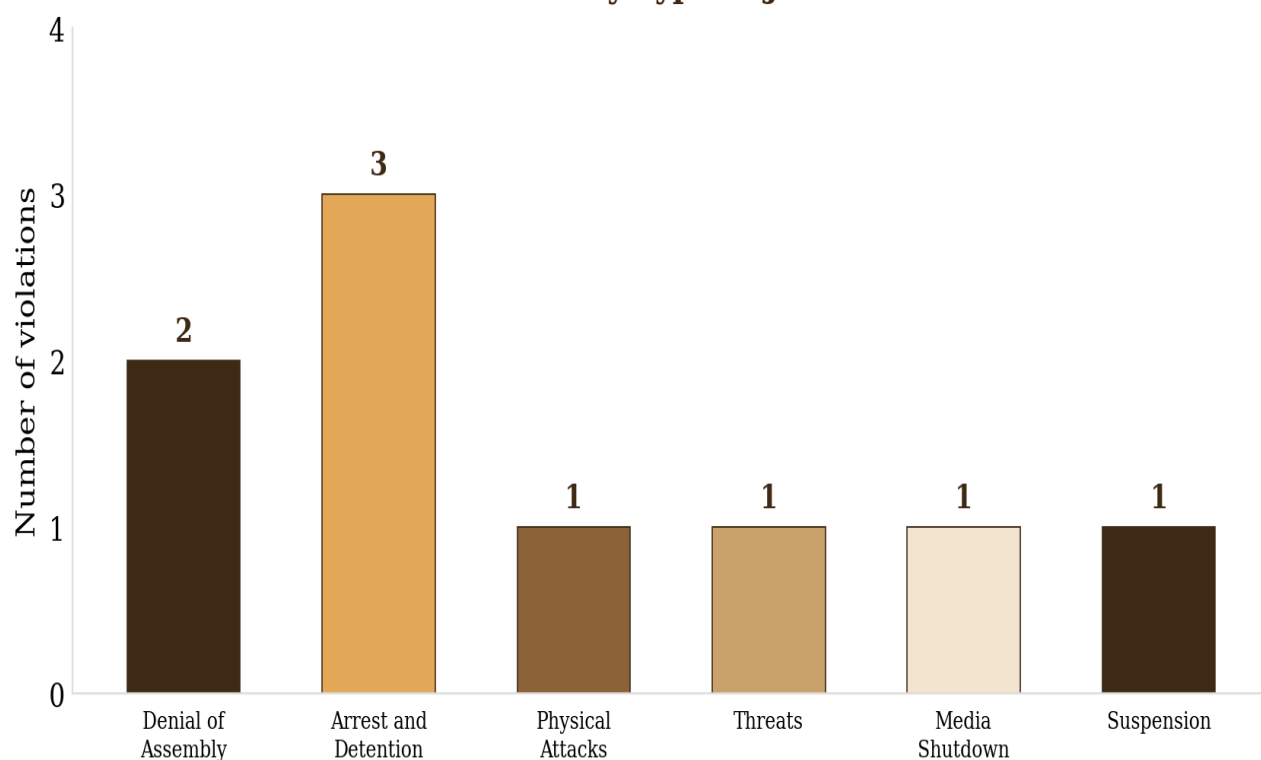
Security agencies accounted for nearly half the number of perpetrators of the documented violations, with the others being political actors, regulatory bodies, and state officials. Victims of the violations were journalists, media organisations, political actors, and citizens who had exercised their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Table 1: Violations by Country and Type

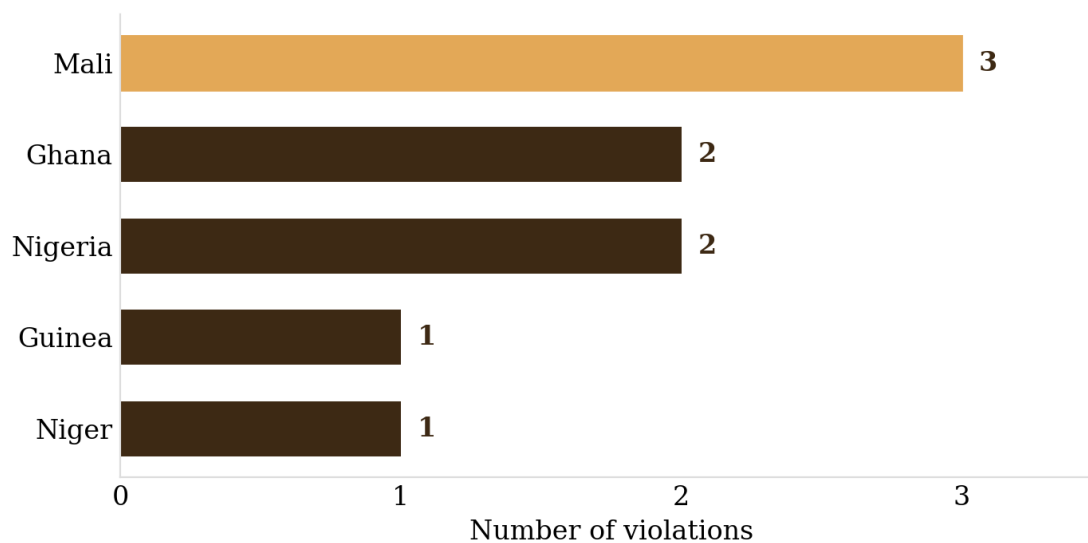
Country	Denial of Assembly	Arrest and Detention	Physical Attacks/Assaults	Threats	Media Shutdown	Suspension of Media/Journalist	Total
Mali	–	2	–	–	–	1	3
Ghana	–	–	1	–	1	–	2
Nigeria	2	–	–	–	–	–	2
Guinea	–	–	–	1	–	–	1
Niger	–	1	–	–	–	–	1
Total	2	3	1	1	1	1	9

Total: 9 violations across 5 countries — June 2026

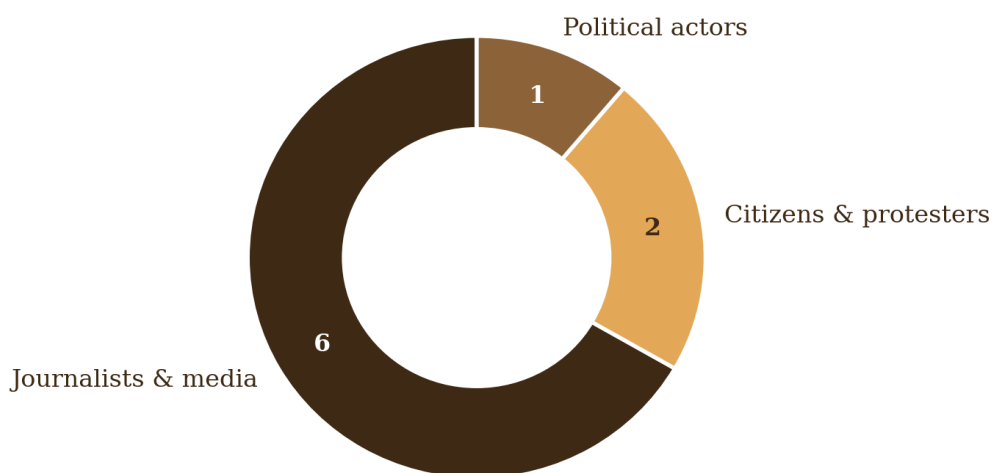
Violations by Type – June 2026



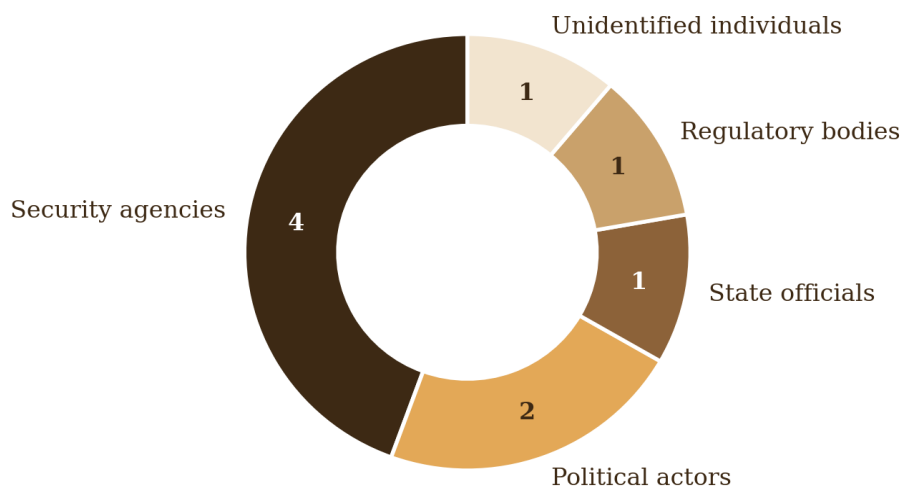
Violations by Country – June 2026



Victims by Category – June 2026



Perpetrators by Category – June 2026



Country Cases

Mali: Suppression of journalistic expression and public debate



Editor-in-Chief of 22 Septembre newspaper **Chahana Takiou** (Left); **Abdramane Keïta** (right), Editor-in-Chief of *Le Témoign* newspaper

In Mali, two news editors were [remanded](#) by the National Cybercrime Unit after being brought before the National Cybercrime Unit Court. Chahana Takiou, an editor-in-chief of the bi-weekly newspaper *22 Septembre* and Abdramane Keïta, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Témoign*, were remanded in custody after making a public statement over some national issues.

On June 9, Takiou was arrested, brought before the court, charged, and remanded after he made remarks about the increasing use of cybercrime laws against journalists in Mali during a panel discussion at the Pan-African Media Forum in Bamako. Takiou cited [the case](#) of Youssouf Sissoko, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *L'Alternance*, who was [sentenced](#) to two years' imprisonment by the National Cybercrime Court for publishing an article by Sambou Sissoko, a political analyst living in exile. Takiou was charged with undermining the state's credibility through the judicial system and remanded to prison in Bamako pending trial on July 27, 2026.

On that same day, another editor-in-chief, Abdramane Keïta, of *Le Témoign*, was summoned for making statements regarded as false information likely to threaten national security and undermine the credibility of the state. Keïta stated on a television programme that Kidal, a major city in Northern Mali, was being controlled by Iyad Ag Ghali, Leader of the Jihadist armed group. After Keïta presented himself at the

office of the Cybercrime Unit, he was charged with “a crime of a regionalist nature that tends to undermine national unity and the credibility of the state” and “publishing and disseminating false information through an information system.” He was remanded, with his trial scheduled for August 17, 2026.

Also in Mali, the country’s High Authority for Communication (HAC) on June 25, 2026, [suspended](#) private radio station Radio Klédu’s daily call-in programme, “Allô Klédu,” for two months. HAC said it had concerns about the programme’s content, as well as the moderation of the conversations by the interim director and the show’s host. According to HAC, the programme had become a platform for disseminating statements that undermine public order, national security, and the credibility of public institutions. It also criticised the station’s management for failing to exercise adequate editorial rigour and impartiality in moderating callers’ contributions.

Nigeria: Wave of attacks on peaceful protesters



#BringBackOurChildren protest | Credit: The Eagle Online

On June 2, 2026, a #BringBackOurChildren protest demanding the release of pupils and teachers who were abducted from a school in Oyo State in May 2026 [was disrupted](#) by thugs. The thugs, who were armed, were allegedly members of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). NANS, led by its National President, Akinteye Babatunde Afeez, and the Special Adviser to the Governor on Student Matters, Victor Olojede, attacked protesters even

after Afeez had, before the protest, told NANS to participate to show solidarity. Gunshots were heard; some protesters were assaulted, others had their belongings stolen, while some had their vehicles vandalised. The protesters had no choice but to flee for their lives, bringing the protest to an abrupt halt.

In a similar development, the Nigerian Police Force, during the commemoration of Democracy Day, on June 12, 2026, [fired tear gas](#) at a group of protesters in Abuja who were voicing their concerns about rising insecurity and economic hardship in the country. The protesters had planned to present their demands to government



Protesters running from tear gas | Credit: Arise

officials, including President Tinubu, who were at Eagle Square, Abuja, for the celebrations. Unfortunately, as the protesters approached the square, they were met with tear gas by the police officers. Many protesters dispersed, while others experienced respiratory distress from exposure to the tear gas.

Ghana: Ruling party officials shut down radio station, assault producer



Bernard Mireku Nyanpong, Producer, Obaatanpa Radio

On June 25, officials of the Awutu Senya East Constituency, a constituency under Ghana's ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), [raided](#) Obaatanpa Radio based in the Central Region of Ghana. The action followed a remark made by the radio station's morning show host on the violence between the members of the various factions within the party in the constituency. The host had called out the Central Regional Chairman of the NDC for his failure to address the growing divisions. The Regional Chairman, together with some party officials, including the Municipal Chief Executive of Awutu Senya East, stormed the radio station seeking the show's host, producer, and the station's management. They then verbally assaulted the producer and proceeded to shut down production and lock down the station for three hours until the police intervened.

Guinea: Journalist threatened, forced into exile following investigative report



Guinean Journalist, Ibrahima Sory Barry

Guinean journalist and publishing director of the online news portal *Vérité 224*, Ibrahima Sory Barry, has gone into exile following death [threats](#) against himself and his family. In June 2026, Barry worked as a fixer for Canadian journalist Isabelle Hachey, who was in Guinea for an investigation into the unresolved 2007 death of Rachele Wrathmall, the former wife of Guinean opposition politician Rafiou Sow, a case in which Sow has remained a suspect. After the investigative report went viral

following its June 6 YouTube release, two unidentified men came looking for Barry at his home. He started receiving threats via text messages from an anonymous number, warning him that he was a “dead man” and threatening to “finish” his wife and children.

Niger: Political activist arrested for calling public outcry over social challenges

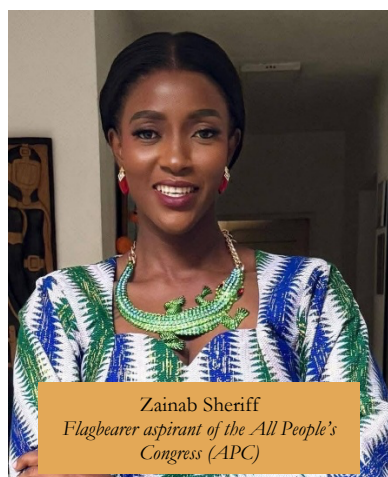


Nassirou Bodo, a political activist critical of the government, was [arrested](#) by the Judicial Police on June 2, 2026. A day earlier, he had made a post on Facebook calling on Nigeriens to speak out against what he described as “social violence perpetrated by the state against the population and the brutality of the authorities,” as well as the “unjust evictions” of people living near Niamey International Airport. The Facebook post highlighted limited access to water and electricity, as well as the forced eviction of residents living near Niamey International Airport without any relocation measures. The evictions, which started in May 2026, were initiated for security reasons, following terrorist attacks on Military Base 101 and the airport in January 2026. Bodo was placed in pretrial detention on June 3, 2026, after being presented before the prosecution. According to some local media outlets, Bodo was charged with “disseminating information likely to disrupt public order.” He has since been detained at the Niamey Civil Prison pending trial.

Positive Freedom of Expression-related Developments

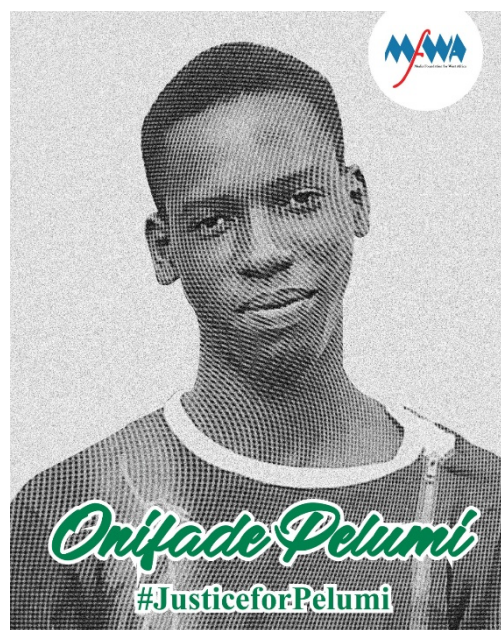
Judicial rulings strengthen freedom of expression protections

On June 22, 2026, the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice [ordered](#) the Nigerian government to pay ten million Naira (about US\$7,283.90) in damages to journalist Jide Oyekunle for violating the journalist's rights during his coverage of the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Abuja. Oyekunle was assaulted, unlawfully detained, and had his phone seized by the police. The Court found that the police's actions unlawfully suppressed his reporting and violated his rights to freedom of expression, liberty, dignity, and property as stipulated under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.



Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the High Court in Freetown, on June 18, 2026, [ruled](#) that an appeal by Zainab Sheriff, a flagbearer aspirant for the ruling All People's Congress (APC), would be heard on July 2, 2026. Sheriff was declared wanted and arrested in February. She faced multiple bail denials until she was sentenced in April 2026 for incitement and use of threatening language. Her lawyers argued that the charges against her lacked clarity and that her remarks were political expressions rather than incitement to violence. They also contended that her sentence was excessive for a first-time offender.

In a related development in Nigeria, a DNA report [presented](#) before the Lagos Coroner's Court on June 23, 2026, finally resolved the uncertainty that surrounded the disappearance of journalist Pelumi Onifade. It's been nearly six years since Onifade of Gboa TV disappeared while covering the #EndSARS protests in 2020. He was attacked by security officers and carried away. About a week later, an unidentified male body suspected to be that of Pelumi Onifade was deposited at the Ikorodu General Hospital mortuary in Lagos. The body was retained as unidentified with the mortuary tag '1385' while investigations continued. Questions surrounding Onifade's disappearance led to a suit at the Federal High Court



in Lagos against the police and Lagos State authorities, seeking an independent investigation into Onifade's death. The court proceedings were repeatedly frustrated by the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital's (LASUTH) prolonged non-compliance with court directives, delays in producing forensic and medical reports, and conflicting explanations regarding DNA evidence, all of which significantly prolonged the family's wait for answers. Finally, in June 2026, the Lagos State DNA and Forensic Centre presented a sealed report to a Coroner's Court in Lagos confirming that the previously unidentified body, tagged "1385" and deposited at the Ikorodu General Hospital's mortuary, was that of Onifade.

Persisting disquieting cases of freedom of expression



Nigerien journalists Oumarou Kané, Youssouf Sériba, and Ibro Chaibou remain in [detention](#) seven months after they were arrested. The three journalists were among seven individuals: six journalists and a driver, who were arrested on October 30, 2025, by the Judicial Police for leaking an official invitation to a government press briefing. They were charged with “disseminating data likely to disturb public order”, an offense under Niger’s cybercrime law. While the other

four individuals were released provisionally on November 1, 2025, Kané, Sériba, and Chaibou were ordered to remain in custody at Kollo prison as investigations continue. This decision followed a hearing at the High Court on November 3, 2025. They have been in custody for the past seven months, awaiting the judicial police to complete their investigations. Meanwhile, there has been no transparency about the findings of the investigations.

Key Trends and Implications

a) Rising proxy attacks on families of exiled journalists

In June, the MFWA observed a growing trend of proxy attacks against family members of exiled journalists. Over the last couple of years, this tactic has been deployed by perpetrators to silence independent reporting, pressure journalists into self-censorship from afar, and deter them from doing their work. For instance, despite fervent calls by both local and international civil society organisations, the 75-year-old father of exiled Guinean journalist [Babila Keita](#) remains in the grip of the security apparatus since he was [abducted](#) in September 2025, while his son remains in exile. The evolution of transnational repression in West Africa, especially in the Sahelian countries and Guinea, where the loved ones of individuals are targeted as a way to silence them, creates a wider chilling effect, further shrinking the civic space.

b) Criminalisation of critical expression under broadly framed laws

The June cases highlight the increasing use of broadly framed cybercrime, national security, public order, and national unity laws to criminalise criticism, public commentary, and public-interest expression. The remand in prison of newspaper editors, Chahana Takiou and Abdramane Keïta in Mali, alongside the prosecution of journalist Youssouf Sissoko, demonstrates how such broadly framed laws are weaponised against journalistic and public-interest expression, encouraging self-censorship among journalists and further chilling the civic space.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The continued use of legal, regulatory, and coercive measures by both state and non-state actors to suppress independent journalism and dissent poses a significant threat to democratic governance and the fundamental right to freedom of expression in West Africa. Although the number of documented freedom of expression violations declined considerably in June compared to previous months, the persistence of arrests, threats, attacks, media interference, and restrictions on peaceful assembly demonstrates the fragility of press freedom and the civic space in the region.

To promote a more enabling environment for media freedom and civic participation, the MFWA urges the judiciary in Mali to uphold due process and avoid prolonged pre-trial detention in cases involving freedom of expression, and security agencies to respect journalists' right to participate in public debate without intimidation or arbitrary arrest.

We also call on the media regulatory body in Mali, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), to ensure that regulatory actions against media outlets are transparent, proportionate, and consistent with international standards, resorting to programme suspensions only as a last resort. Media organisations should also strengthen their editorial oversight and uphold the principles of accuracy, verification, fairness, and professional ethics.

Authorities in Nigeria should protect the right to peaceful assembly by ensuring that security agencies facilitate rather than obstruct lawful protests. Attacks on protesters by security personnel and non-state actors should be promptly investigated, perpetrators held accountable, and victims provided with effective remedies. The government should also conclude the coroner's inquest into the death of journalist Pelumi Onifade through a thorough, independent, and transparent investigation, to ensure accountability for those responsible.

The Nigerien authorities should expedite investigations into the three detained journalists, ensure transparency in judicial proceedings, and either bring them promptly before a competent court or release them if there is insufficient evidence to justify their continued detention.



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