



# Freedom of Expression Situation in West Africa

An October Overview

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# INTRODUCTION



On October 1, 2025, uniformed officers from Guinea's Gendarmerie Research Unit arrested Guinean journalist Djiba Millimono following a confrontation he had with a pro-regime blogger in Guinea who threatened to get him jailed for criticising the abduction of El Hadj Adama Keïta, father of exiled journalist Mamoudou Babila Keïta. By the end of the day, October 01, 2025, the High Command of the National Gendarmerie had detained Djiba.

This was the first of the freedom of expression violations that the Media Foundation for West Africa recorded in October 2025. This is not just the story of one journalist. It is the story of eight countries, multiple cases of freedom of expression violations, and a threatened civic space. These are not merely isolated incidents but a disturbing pattern of abuse of power and violations perpetrated against journalists, activists and media organisations. These violations silence dissenting voices and intimidate those who inform, mobilise, or hold power to account.

This October 2025 report, put together by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), with support from the 11th Hour Project of The Schmidt Family Foundation, seeks to draw attention to the freedom of expression situation in West Africa, provide evidence for advocacy and litigation, and policy interventions. The report is compiled from data gathered through daily monitoring of the freedom of expression environment in the 16 countries by monitors, correspondents and national partner organisations of the MFWA.

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# FINDINGS



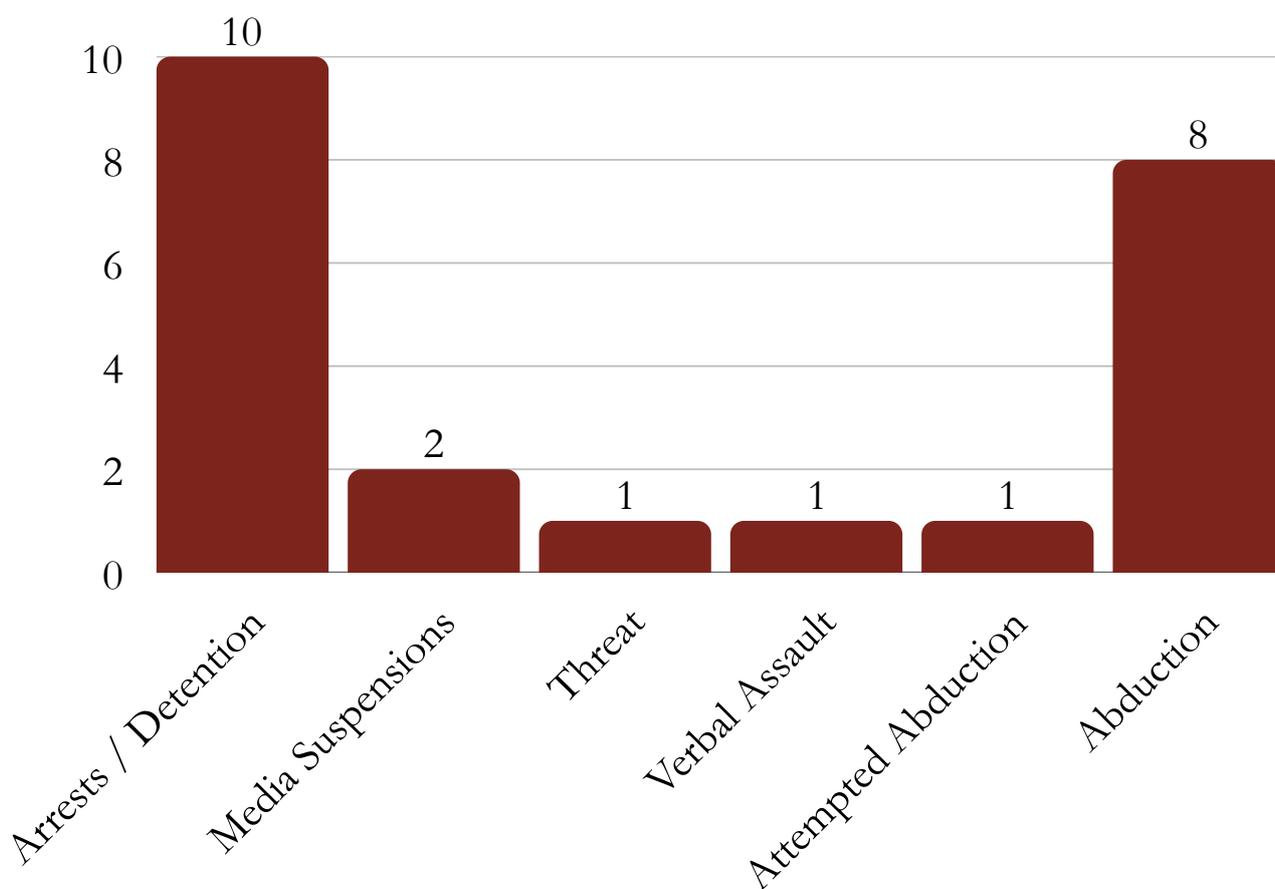
## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

In October 2025, we recorded a disturbing trend of violations towards women. Grace Kumayi Bikoyi, an activist, was detained; media owner Fatou Touray faced verbal assault; Senegalese journalist Maimouna Ndour Faye was arrested. The case of activist Pulchérie Édith Gbalet was alarming. Not only did she narrowly escape abduction, but the threat also extended to those around her. Armed, masked men allegedly searching for Gbalet stormed the home of her associate, Sery Abdul, in Abobo Biabou. They fired shots, ransacked the residence, and detained Abdul and his wife, accusing them of hiding Gbalet. Beyond these violations against women, we also noted the arrest of Mauritanian journalist and IRA communications officer Warda Ahmed Souleymane following a post she made on Facebook.

## **A PATTERN OF REGIONAL EMERGENCY**

The Media Foundation for West Africa's October 2025 monitoring documented multiple freedom of expression violations across eight West African countries: Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Burkina Faso. The breakdown of the violations is as follows: ten cases of arrest and detention, two separate cases of media suspensions, one incident of a threat, one incident of verbal assault, one attempted abduction, and eight abductions.

## Types of violations breakdown:



## THE STORIES OF ARRESTS AND MEDIA SHUTDOWN

### Olivier Allochéme

In June 2025, Olivier Allochéme, editor of L'Événement Précis in Benin, published a Facebook post alleging conflicts and serious misconduct involving former National Assembly Speaker Adrien Houngbédji and President Patrice Talon. Four months later, authorities in Benin said the publication was false and arrested him on October 9. He was placed in pre-trial detention on October 16, 2025 after being questioned by the special prosecutor at the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET). He was in detention for nearly two weeks after which Allochéme appeared briefly before the Court for the Repression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (CRIET), which adjourned his case to January 15, 2026, without substantive discussion. Though in cell, Allochéme issued a public apology, admitting he had shared unverified “reported claims” that violated journalistic ethics, but he still remained in detention.

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## **Burkina Faso's Wave of Arrests and Abductions**

In October 2025, six journalists were arrested and detained. Michel Nana, associate editor of Éditions Le Pays, was taken on October 13, followed by Ousséni Ilboudo, managing editor of L'Observateur Paalga later that day. There were two more arrests on October 14: Zowenmanogo Dieudonné Zoungrana, director of Aujourd'hui au Faso and Lamine Traoré, founder of the online outlet Burkina Yawana. On October 16, Alain Zongo, the editor-in-chief of l'Observateur Paalga was detained by agents of the former National Intelligence Agency. On October 24, Jean-Marie, editor-in-chief of Sidwaya, the state-owned daily was also arrested. For all these cases of arrests, there were no charges filed, nor were there any reasons or judicial communication issued.

Around the same time, six judicial officers were abducted, including four judges of the Ouagadougou Court of Appeal: Urbain Méda, Seydou Sanou, Benoît Zoungrana, and Alban Somé, alongside Deputy Prosecutor General Moussa Dianda, and former Attorney General Jean-Jacques Wendpanga Ouedraogo. A lawyer, Arnaud Sempebré, also went missing within the same period and has been presumed abducted.

## **Grace Koumayi Bikoyi: The Price of Social Media Advocacy**

Grace Koumayi Bikoyi is an outspoken Togolese activist known in Togo for her social media advocacy highlighting poor living conditions, bad governance, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms. On October 03, she attended meetings of the Collective of Associations Against Impunity in Togo (CACIT). No sooner had she rested upon arriving home than plainclothes agents arrived at her home and took her to the National Police for three days, kept in their custody and charged her with “incitement to revolt” and “attempting to undermine state security.” She was remanded to custody.

## **Senegal's Journalists Arrest and Signal Shutdown**

Senegalese journalists Maimouna Ndour Faye and Babacar Fall were arrested in October 2026 in connection with interviews involving Madiambal Diagne, a media owner under an international arrest warrant for alleged embezzlement, fraud, and money laundering. On October 28, police reportedly forced entry into 7TV's premises to arrest Ndour Faye, the station's general manager. The following

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morning, police officers arrested Babacar Fall, Editor-in-Chief of Radio Futurs Médias (RFM) and sports correspondent for RFI, shortly after he concluded a live telephone interview with Diagne. Both journalists now face accusations of endangering state security and undermining judicial authority.

Following the arrests, the state suspended the broadcast signals of 7TV and RFM without explanation. Civil society groups and the Senegal Council of Broadcasters and Press Publishers (CDEPS) have strongly condemned the actions as a serious violation of press freedom and an attempt to silence the media.

### **Côte d’Ivoire’s Media Suspension**

An online news platform, Abidjan.net, was suspended for twenty-six days by Côte d’Ivoire’s National Press Authority (ANP) on October 25, 2025, after the website published estimated presidential election results a day before the election. The website apologised the same day and explained it was due to a display error on its platform dedicated to tracking the 2025 presidential election results. Subsequently, the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) condemned the publication, filed a complaint, and barred Abidjan.net from covering the election.

## **THREATS, INTIMIDATION AND NEAR ABDUCTION**

### **Amadu Lamrana Bah**

Amadu Lamrana Bah, a Sierra Leonean journalist, was threatened after he criticised the Sierra Leonean Police over what he described as unequal and unfair issuance of arrest warrants. His comments followed the arrest warrant issued against opposition-affiliated musician Natasha Beckley, who said she was not invited for questioning before the warrant was issued. Bah compared Beckley’s case with that of Miss Admire Bio, a niece of the President, who had been accused of involvement in the importation of kush (an illicit substance). He noted that in Bio’s case, the police conducted a home search, issued a public statement, and held a press conference, highlighting what he saw as inconsistent policing practices. Following the comparison, Miss Admire Bio demanded an apology from Bah, which he refused. Subsequently, a video circulated on social media in which a voice believed to be that of her husband was heard threatening Bah with violence.

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## **Fatou Touray and Her Team of Journalists**

Chief Executive Officer of Kerr Fatou, a private media outlet in The Gambia, Fatou Touray and her team of journalists were verbally attacked online by militants reportedly supporting the United Democratic Party (UDP). This followed some individuals' dissatisfaction with the outlet's coverage of political events. Touray was called a "barren woman".

While no physical assaults were reported, the verbal harassment highlighted the ongoing pattern of intimidation and threats against Kerr Fatou journalists. The UDP leadership later disowned the attacks and publicly condemned the vilification of the journalists.

## **Pulchérie Édith Gbalet**

In Côte d'Ivoire, activist Pulchérie Édith Gbalet escaped an attempted abduction a few days before the country's October 25, 2025, presidential elections. On October 16, armed, masked men allegedly searching for her attacked the home of her associate, Sery Abdul, in Abobo Biabou. They fired shots, ransacked the residence, and detained Abdul and his wife and accused them of hiding Gbalet, the activist.

Gbalet later posted on Facebook: "My life is in danger." She accused the government of targeting her and affirmed she was safe but in hiding. As a prominent human rights advocate, Gbalet had been vocal against political repression and had recently called for a peaceful demonstration on October 11 despite the official ban on public gatherings. The attempted abduction occurred days before the general election.

## **Rare Light in the Darkness**

October brought one reprieve. On October 6, Burkina Faso released Balai Citoyen activists Rasmané Zinaba and Bassirou Badjo after nearly two years in detention. The two were arrested in February 2024 following the validation of a decree meant for national defence. Their imprisonment had been widely condemned by civil

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society as an abusive attempt to silence dissent. Multiple court orders demanding their release had been ignored. The circumstances of their release remain unknown. But after 23 months behind bars, those activists are free. Their release offers some hope that sustained pressure, civil society mobilisation, and international attention can sometimes force authoritarian hands to open.

## **OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

Paradoxically, in October, Ghana's Madina District Court discontinued the murder case of investigative journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale, nearly seven years after his assassination on January 16, 2019. The Attorney-General determined that available evidence was insufficient to sustain prosecution, leading to the release of the main suspect, Daniel Owusu Koranteng.

Koranteng was arrested and charged in March 2025, briefly raising hopes that justice might finally be served. But that hope was dashed in October 2025. This case had seen repeated delays, inaction, and broken government promises and commitments, only to end up without accountability. Seven years later, there is no justice; only impunity prevails.

Also in October, Warda Ahmed Souleymane, a Mauritanian journalist and communications officer for the Initiative of the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA), had just returned from Banjul, where she attended the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' 85th Ordinary Session, a gathering dedicated to defending the very freedoms she was about to lose. Hours after arriving in Nouakchott on October 31, Mauritanian police arrested her. They charged her over a Facebook post in which she called for nationwide protests to overthrow what she described as President Ould Ghazouani's "oppressive" and "racist" regime. On November 6, she was formally charged with undermining state security and placed in detention at the anti-terrorism brigade.

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# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



When journalists are arrested or media outlets shut down, the damage extends far beyond individual cases. When journalists are attacked or assaulted, the impact could include a halt to corruption investigations. One disturbing effect of freedom of expression is self-censorship. Every arrest makes lots of other journalists, civic actors, including environmental activists, calculate risks differently, pulling back from holding duty bearers accountable. This destroys democracy's core accountability mechanisms, allowing corruption and abuse of power to go unchecked while citizens make critical decisions without essential and accurate information.

In view of the possible ramifications of the violations recorded in October 2025, the MFWA is calling for the release of all journalists and activists detained for their work. The MFWA further calls on governments in West Africa to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for the violations against journalists and activists, uphold press freedom and media independence and end the pattern of arrests of civil society actors.

The Media Foundation for West Africa will continue monitoring, documenting, and amplifying the voices of those silenced. We call on governments, regional bodies, international partners, and civil society to match documentation with action. Freedom of expression is not merely a right enshrined in constitutions and treaties; it is a crucial part of democracy. Without it, everything else suffers.



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