



# **WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA**

**ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SAHEL  
AND WEST AFRICA.**

**WEEK 1 – MAY 2026**

## *Burkina Faso: Between a press under pressure and concerns in the Sahel*

Timbuktu Institute - Week1 - May 2026

According to several observers, press freedom has declined in Burkina Faso since the 2022 coup. Indeed, according to Ibrahim Traoré, a “patriotic approach” to news coverage is needed at a time when the country is facing growing insecurity and disinformation affecting most countries in the Sahel. According to Reporters Without Borders’ 2026 ranking, the country is ranked 110th out of 180, reflecting a deterioration in access to diverse information and to free and independent journalism.

### *The Atiana Serge Oulon case reignites concerns over press freedom*

The case of journalist Atiana Serge Oulon continues to make headlines across the country. According to the organisation responsible for promoting and defending the freedom to inform and be informed worldwide, the investigative journalist has reportedly been held in a secret prison for several months and has allegedly been subjected to inhuman treatment. As a reminder, the editor-in-chief of the bi-monthly investigative magazine L’Évènement had carried out an investigation into allegations of the embezzlement of 400 million CFA francs allocated to the head of the transition. Abducted from his home in June 2024, press freedom organisations are demanding his release. This case once again raises the issue of working conditions for journalists in Burkina Faso and calls public attention to the state of civil liberties. For their part, the authorities maintain that no journalist is deprived of their liberty in the course of their work. According to Ibrahim Traoré, “everyone is free to say what they want and to express their opinion”. He made this statement during an interview with journalists last April.

### *Sahel: between security imperatives and the shrinking media space*

In the same vein, TV5 Monde is now banned in Burkina Faso; the military authorities accuse the French-language channel of disinformation and glorifying terrorism in its coverage of the country. Some observers see this as a further attempt to muzzle the media. Jeanne Lagarde of Reporters Without Borders sees it as a setback for press freedoms. “In fact, the Sahel is above all a region where patriotic journalism imposed by the authorities has taken precedence over independent journalism, which previously provided reliable, high-quality information. Now, we see that this is no longer the case at all,” says Ms Lagarde. It is important to highlight the growing tensions between security imperatives and respect for fundamental freedoms in several Sahel countries, where the military authorities are tightening their grip on the media landscape in the name of national sovereignty. She also highlights concerns regarding the decline in media pluralism and the weakening of the role of independent media in consolidating democratic governance and public trust.

## *Ivory Coast: electoral reforms, security challenges and women's leadership in the spotlight*

### Timbuktu Institute - Week 1 - May 2026

The week's news was dominated by the dissolution of the Independent Electoral Commission, pending the establishment of a new system. This decision was announced on 6 March following a Cabinet meeting. The Commission had been accused of failing to uphold the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The opposition, for its part, has not failed to express reservations and make recommendations regarding the new body that will replace the IEC. For supporters of Tidjane Thiam, this is a "unilateral decision taken without consultation with the political class", and they criticise the lack of transparency surrounding the structure. They are calling for dialogue with all political actors in order to "define the terms of the electoral system", according to Soumaïla Bredoumy, the PDCI spokesperson.

### *The reform of the CEI reignites the debate on electoral transparency*

In the same vein, the former First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, Simone Gbagbo, is calling for "an independent electoral body, a fair redrawing of electoral boundaries and a consensual review of the electoral roll". Meanwhile, the Pan- African Congress for Justice and Equality of Peoples (COJEP) welcomes the measure and sets out the path towards a "truly independent" electoral body. According to its members, this measure is an "implicit acknowledgement of the crisis of confidence that has surrounded the CEI for several years". Supporters of Charles Blé Goudé believe that the country must establish an independent body to organise free and transparent elections and rectify the shortcomings of the old system.

### *Regional security: tensions along the Abidjan-Bamako axis are causing concern among economic stakeholders*

On the security front, Malians living in Côte d'Ivoire have expressed concern over the persistent terrorist threat in Bamako. The latest attacks on 25 April have indeed heightened fears, particularly regarding security along the Abidjan-Bamako route, a strategic road for both countries. Many lorry drivers are stranded due to the tense security situation. Nevertheless, the route remains passable, despite the adverse impact on trade. According to Diaby Ibrahim: "Arrangements have been made with the relevant authorities to ensure that issues concerning the operation of the Abidjan-Bamako corridor are resolved in advance, so as to avoid finding ourselves in unpleasant situations. In short, we are avoiding being caught off guard by unfortunate situations." This clearly demonstrates a commitment to anticipating and coordinating actions with the relevant authorities in order to further secure the operation of the Abidjan-Bamako corridor and prevent any disruption that might affect the smooth flow of trade and the stability of economic activities.

*The armed forces advocate for the promotion of female leadership based on merit*

On a different note, Côte d'Ivoire celebrated the 5th edition of Women in the Military Day on 7 May. The Ivorian armed forces took this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to equality. This year's theme was 'Law, discipline and merit: promoting equality within the armed forces'. Vice-Admiral N'Guessan Kouamé Célestin, Chief of Staff of the Navy, took part in the ceremony at the Locodjro naval base in the commune of Attécoubé, and was keen to acknowledge the choice of his institution. He also took the opportunity to highlight the low number of women in the ranks of the Navy. It is therefore desirable to place greater emphasis on a merit-based policy for the promotion of women, in order to recognise the contribution of women to the armed forces in general.

## *Togo: The Affectio Affair, Political Tensions and Rapprochement with India*

Timbuktu Institute - Week 1 - May 2026

In Togo, the Affectio case has resurfaced. Honoré Sitsopé Sokpor, known as Affectio, was indeed imprisoned once again on 4 May, just a few months after being placed under judicial supervision. As a reminder, the poet and activist, a critic of the government, was arrested in April for having leaked images of a construction site in the capital, which he allegedly sent to third parties abroad, notably to 'M66' or the '6 June Movement', activist groups within the diaspora. These two groups have been active since 2025 during major protests against the government. His first arrest was linked to a poem deemed inflammatory that he had posted on social media. According to his lawyer, "the prosecutor considered that what he did was serious, given that he is under judicial supervision", although no charges have yet been brought against him. For their part, the opposition and civil society are crying foul and demanding his immediate and unconditional release.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Affectio's arrest has heightened political tensions and concerns about civil liberties. The "Don't Touch My Constitution" front, led by opposition figure Nathaniel Olympio, has called this a "case of persecution." He is demanding the release of all political prisoners and an end to intimidation. ANC leader Jean-Pierre Fabre echoes this sentiment and condemns these arrests, which he deems arbitrary. He expressed surprise at the circumstances of Affectio's arrest: "What is the danger in taking photos? Are we in a classified security zone? Is the site where the phot was taken off-limits? Can you take photos at a public construction site?" He believes the detention is unjustified and amounts to nothing more than harassment. This arrest thus further exacerbates Togo's already tense socio-political climate, while the .security situation in the north of the country remains concerning

## *Lomé and New Delhi strengthen their cooperation on parliamentary governance*

On a different note, on Thursday in Lomé, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Pacôme Adjourouvi, held talks with the Indian Ambassador to Togo, Sayed Razi Haider Fahmi, regarding prospects for bilateral cooperation on democratic governance and strengthening the functioning of parliamentary institutions. Indeed, India is supporting Togo on its path towards parliamentary maturity. Regarded as one of the "largest and oldest parliamentary democracies", Gandhi's country could effectively support Togo in its quest for a parliament worthy of the name. For the Indian authorities, "in a democracy, Parliament remains the expression of the sovereign aspirations of the citizens". His Togolese counterpart appears keen to exchange best parliamentary practices in order to ensure the desired institutional transformation.

## *Chad: The persistent threat of Boko Haram*

### Timbuktu Institute - Week 1 - May 2026

For over a decade, Chad has faced the threat of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region. This vast marshy expanse, straddling Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, has since become a sanctuary for the jihadist group and its rival, ISWAP. Despite a series of military operations carried out by the Chadian authorities, the jihadist group continues to regularly target the armed forces and the local population in the area. On 4 May, Boko Haram attacked the Chadian military base at Barka Tolorom, killing between 24 and 25 soldiers and wounding around 40 others. President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno condemned the attack, describing it as “cowardly” and reaffirming his determination to continue the fight “until the total eradication” of the terrorist threat. The Head of State also declared a 20-day state of emergency and three days of national mourning.

In retaliation, the Chadian army launched air strikes from 8 May on islands in Lake Chad controlled by Boko Haram, notably on Shuwa Island, a tripoint where the borders of Nigeria, Niger and Chad meet. According to Jeune Afrique, fishermen, mostly from the town of Doron Baga and Taraba State, were operating in these waters after paying a fee to Boko Haram for access. According to a representative of a fishermen’s union, around 40 of them are reported missing, likely having drowned as a result of the strikes. The Chadian army has not yet made any official statement on the matter. As a reminder, back in October 2024, Chadian retaliatory strikes on Tilma Island had killed civilians. When called to account, the army had denied these accusations. This is not the first time such a situation has occurred. In October 2024, Chadian retaliatory strikes on Tilma Island had already been accused of killing civilians, accusations which the army had denied at the time. These incidents, if confirmed, illustrate the complexity of the situation in the Lake Chad basin, where jihadists, civilians and military forces coexist in a vast border area that is clearly difficult to control.

### *Opposition leaders in custody*

It appears that the return to the political scene of the opposition coalition, the Group for Consultation among Political Actors (GCAP), was short-lived. After the Supreme Court ruled to dissolve the group, eight leaders of the former GCAP were sentenced on 8 May to eight years in prison by the Special Criminal Chamber of the N’Djamena High Court. The verdict was handed down on Friday during a hearing held directly at Klessoum Remand Centre, where the defendants had been held since their arrest on 25 April. They were found guilty of rebellion, participation in an insurrectionary movement, unlawful assembly and illegal possession of military weapons. These arrests followed the dissolution of their organisation and plans for a march dubbed the “march of indignation and dignity”, scheduled for 2 May but ultimately cancelled following the movement’s dissolution. Against the backdrop of the ongoing shrinking of civic space in Chad, the speed and intransigence with which this fringe of the opposition has been sidelined raise questions. Moreover, it appears to be a new episode in the slide towards authoritarian consolidation initiated by President Déby since his re-election in 2024.

## *Cameroonian opposition: disunity in all its forms?*

### Timbuktu Institute – Week 1 – May 2026

The death of opposition figure Anicet Ekane in Cameroonian gendarmerie custody caused a great stir in the country. He died on 1 December 2025 after 38 days in police custody at the height of the protests against Paul Biya's re-election, and was buried on Saturday 9 May in Bomono, his home village. But beyond the passing of this historic figure of the political opposition, it was the tensions surrounding his funeral – in which his own party, Manidem, refused to participate – that highlighted the divisions within the opposition. Firstly, given the conflict surrounding the organisation of Anicet Ekané's funeral, his sister Mariane Simone Ekané had released audio recordings, purportedly reflecting the deceased's wish that the organisation of his funeral should fall to his party, Manidem (African Movement for New Independence and Democracy), alongside his family. Ultimately, the courts ruled in favour of the deceased's son, Muna Ekane, to the detriment of part of the family, to lead the funeral.

In the wake of this, Maurice Kamto's Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC) announced it would not attend the funeral. Despite the controversy, opposition figure Issa Tchiroma Bakary called for people to attend the funeral. In response, Manidem announced its decision to break the agreement reached with Issa Tchiroma Bakary regarding the October 2025 presidential election. Underlying this imbroglio are suspicions regarding the role of the government, accused by some of doing everything in its power to prevent popular mobilisation around this event, at a time when the authorities had suspended tribute ceremonies for the deceased last March. Furthermore, this episode, in which Issa T. Bakary is viewed as a defection by part of the opposition, is indicative of the tensions within the opposition itself. Meanwhile, the institutional restructuring in Cameroon – of which the reinstatement of the vice- presidency is the most telling sign – appears to be reinforcing the marginalisation of the political opposition.

### *Death of political figures*

In the space of a few months, Paul Biya's regime has lost several of its iconic pillars. Following the deaths of Marcel Niat Njifenji, President of the Senate, and Ayang Luc, President of the Economic and Social Council, the former President of the National Assembly, Cavaye Yeguié Djibril, passed away on 6 May at the age of 86. A pillar of the Biya system and a loyal representative in the north, his passing comes against a backdrop of quiet realignment at the very top of Cameroonian power. This, moreover, confirms the gradual fading away of a generation of political figures who emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Yaya Saïdou Maidadi, a leading opposition figure, died on 7 May. Born into a family with close ties to the government (his father served as a minister under Ahidjo and Biya), he had chosen the path of opposition activism. After joining the SDF (Social Democratic Front) in 1992 and becoming its first national vice- president, he left the party in 2002 following differences with John Fru Ndi, before founding the Alliance of Progressive Forces and then joining the UNDP, where he served as National Secretary for Communication and as a member of the Political Bureau at the time of his death.

## *Mali: Crisis communication and political management in the aftermath of 25 April*

### Timbuktu Institute – Week 1 – May 2026

The transitional President, Assimi Goïta, addressed the nation in a speech broadcast on national television in an effort to stabilise public opinion. This address followed a series of violent attacks that had cast doubt on the state's ability to protect its citizens. The President gave assurances that the situation was under control, seeking to reassure the population and project an image of total control. By addressing the nation directly, he sought to put an end to destabilising rumours and reaffirm the strength of the military command. This speech aimed to restore confidence in the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) and to demonstrate that the state remains operational despite growing pressure from armed groups. He urged Malians not to succumb to the information war, whilst promising a response to any attempt to undermine the integrity of the national territory. By asserting that everything is under control, the government is seeking to prevent panic that could destabilise the domestic situation. However, the effectiveness of this speech is at odds with the reality on the ground. Whilst the President's words reassure the population, they also create an expectation of concrete results.

### *AES response: air strikes by the unified force*

The unified force of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has launched a major counter-offensive in the form of air strikes in northern Mali. Confirmed by the Nigerien authorities, these operations follow the bloody attacks that have struck several parts of Malian territory. This intervention marks an operational turning point for the AES, proving that solidarity between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso is now being translated into concrete military action. The airstrikes targeted convoys of vehicles and logistical positions of the armed groups, using air superiority to locate the enemy in remote desert areas. The intensification of these operations demonstrates a determination to give the armed groups no respite, whilst sending a message about the new regional alliance's capacity to protect its territory. This response is presented as a success demonstrating the alliance's growing technological capabilities in the face of a constantly shifting threat. By striking from the air, the AES seeks to inflict heavy material losses on the armed groups without exposing its ground troops to ambushes. It is a show of force aimed at legitimising the alliance in the eyes of the public by demonstrating its ability to ensure the protection of its member states. However, the regional dimension of these strikes shows that the Malian conflict remains a source of intense diplomatic friction. External accusations highlight the difficulty for Bamako in waging its war whilst maintaining a calm dialogue with the international community.

### *The capture of Tessalit by the FLA*

On the ground, the situation remains complex, as evidenced by the capture of the strategic camp at Tessalit by the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) in early May 2026. Videos have circulated showing rebel fighters occupying this key base near the Algerian border, a historic crossing point and a major security stronghold in the Far North. Meanwhile, the FLA spokesperson has spoken out publicly to affirm the movement's determination to control its ancestral territories and repel the armed forces. The fall of Tessalit, a base equipped with a runway essential for resupply and control of the Malian Sahara, represents a significant logistical setback for the Malian army. This demonstrates that despite massive air strikes by the AES, ground forces retain the will to coordinate and seize territory. This rebel advance weakens the state's line of defence in the north and forces military commanders to rethink their strategy for territorial occupation in the face of highly mobile forces with intimate knowledge of the area. The loss of Tessalit highlights the disconnect between the aerial successes claimed by the government and the reality of territorial control on the ground.

For the FLA, this victory is not merely military, but political: it strengthens their position of strength ahead of any potential talks. Control of such an isolated and strategic base complicates the FAMA's resupply efforts. This shows that the current war is being fought on at least two fronts: technological air superiority for the state and control of the terrain for the rebels, making stabilisation increasingly complex.

### *Centralisation of power: Assimi Goïta also becomes Minister of Defence*

Mali has undergone a major political shift with President Assimi Goïta's decision to appoint himself Minister of Defence. By combining these two roles, he is cutting out the middlemen to directly oversee day-to-day military operations. This move demonstrates his determination to consolidate his power and act more swiftly in the face of threats to the country. It is a clear signal: he is cementing his position as a warlord, where the regime's future now depends heavily on successes on the ground. This decision also allows him to secure the military's loyalty by personally managing the armed forces' budget and strategy in a highly tense climate. Assimi Goïta's self-appointment is a gamble on the centralisation of command. If the situation improves, he will be the nation's saviour; conversely, if failures mount up, he will be solely responsible in the eyes of the army and the people. It is a high-risk strategy to maintain absolute control over the country.

## *Austerity in Niger: a May Day without a parade*

### Timbuktu Institute – Week 1 – May 2026

LabourDay celebrations in Niger weremarked by an exceptional decision from the transitional government: the cancellation of the traditional military and civilian parades. The authorities justified this measure as a necessary response to the 'current challenges', referring to the tense security situation and the need to mobilise resources for the front line. The government opted for low-key ceremonies and awareness-raising messages focusing on national resilience and the sacrifices of workers. This decision reflects a desire to move away from costly celebrations in order to focus the nation's energy on defending territorial integrity. The trade unions, whilst acknowledging this decision, took the opportunity to present their list of grievances, emphasising that the fight for security must not obscure the need to protect purchasing power in an economy under pressure. This imposed austerity underscores the shift towards permanent crisis management, where every public event is re-evaluated. The cancellation of the parade is a strong political signal aimed at creating a climate of "general mobilisation". By removing the festive nature of Labour Day, the transitional government reinforces the idea that the country is in a state of emergency. It is a strategy that serves to legitimise budgetary restrictions and to ask the population to make an extra effort. However, it also reduces the space for public expression available to trade unions, transforming a day of social demands into a day of controlled national solidarity.

## *Popular mobilisation: march in support of the government in Niamey*

The capital, Niamey, was the scene of a large-scale popular demonstration in support of the transitional authorities. This march, organised by several civil society groups, aimed to reaffirm the backing of a section of the population for the government's strategic choices, particularly regarding national sovereignty and the diplomatic break. Demonstrators marched through the main streets to express their opposition to external pressure and their support for the Defence and Security Forces (FDS). This mobilisation comes amid regional tensions, with Niger seeking to consolidate its alliances within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). For the organisers, the aim was to demonstrate that the current government enjoys solid popular legitimacy in the face of international criticism. The march also served as a platform to denounce past economic sanctions and call for a united front around the ideals of the transition, illustrating the strength of patriotic sentiment in the current political debate. These support marches function as tools for internal and external legitimisation. For the government, they serve as proof of national consensus in the eyes of foreign partners. However, in a transitional context, the line between spontaneous support and orchestrated mobilisation is often a fine one. This demonstration proves that the idea of national sovereignty remains a widely shared consensus among the population. This is what allows the people to remain united despite diplomatic tensions.

## *Economic inclusion: financial projects for women and young people*

On a different note, the Nigerien government has announced the launch of two projects designed to transform the country's financial landscape: improving access to financial services for women and young people. These initiatives aim to remove the structural barriers that exclude a large section of the population from the formal economy. By facilitating access to credit, microfinance and financial education, these projects seek to encourage local entrepreneurship and reduce poverty. The strategy is based on the digitalisation of financial services and the establishment of specific guarantee funds for vulnerable groups. The objective is twofold: to stimulate domestic economic growth by drawing on the country's driving forces and to ensure social stability through financial empowerment. In a context where international funding is becoming increasingly scarce and is sometimes redirected, Niger is banking on mobilising local savings and the dynamism of its youth to build a more inclusive economy resilient to external shocks. These projects signal a commitment to transitioning from a subsistence economy to a participatory development economy. Targeting women and young people is a strategic decision, as these groups represent Niger's most significant yet most vulnerable driver of growth. The success of these measures will depend on the state's ability to ensure the sustainability of funding and to overcome bureaucratic obstacles. This is an attempt to build national economic autonomy, in line with the political discourse on sovereignty championed by the transition.

## *Senegal: Between rifts within Pastef and regional security challenges*

Timbuktu Institute – Week 1 – May 2026

On Saturday 9 May, the broad presidential coalition brought together activists and supporters from across the region to pay tribute to President Diomaye Faye. The 'Diomaye Président' coalition gathered in Mbour, the current president's stronghold, to honour him in the presence of his parents, relatives and friends, two years after he came to power.

### *Diomaye Faye's supporters set out their ambitions for 2029*

This large-scale rally is seen as a political test, at a time when tensions appear to be persisting within the ruling party, Pastef, led by Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko. A trial run or a masterstroke? In any case, his supporters believe they have succeeded in mobilising the public and intend to build on this momentum for the upcoming elections. The Minister for Trade and former Managing Director of Nestlé's Africa and Middle East Research and Development Centre, who attended the event, said: "I have never seen, in two years, so many results... We want to tell you that the 'Diomaye-President' coalition is a lever for building this Senegal. That is why, in 2029, the President must seek another five-year term. No president has ever served just one term in Senegal, so we, the Senegalese people, want him to be our candidate in 2029 and for him to win for the development of Senegal." He clearly expressed his willingness to support President Faye's candidacy, despite internal tensions.

### *Internal divisions within Pastef are fuelling political speculation*

These tensions have manifested themselves in a series of dismissals among the "pro-Sonko" faction in recent months. Following the dismissal of the director of SNHLM, it is now the turn of Ousseynou Ly, the former presidential spokesperson, to bear the brunt of these tensions. These dismissals are seen as highly political given the individuals' close ties to the Pastef leader. They reflect the persistent tensions within the state and fuel the idea of an internal political realignment at the expense of figures close to Ousmane Sonko and the Pastef party. Pastef party activists continue to voice criticism against their party colleague – who is also the President of the Republic – and speak of an attempt to 'de-Pastefise' the government. According to some observers, Bassirou is already poised to take over from Sonko. The appointment of Abdoulaye Tine, a lawyer and member of the presidential coalition, to replace Mr Ly, is proof of this. As a reminder, the replacement of Aïda Mbodj by Aminata Touré at the head of the coalition had, according to many analysts, signalled the tone of the internal power struggle that was to follow.

In an interview with three Senegalese journalists, President Faye was keen to clarify his relationship with his Prime Minister: "As long as he is Prime Minister, it means he has my trust. The day that trust no longer exists, I will appoint another Prime Minister." This statement frustrated several leaders, activists and supporters of the ruling party, who took to the streets to express their discontent. This outburst by President Bassirou Diomaye Faye highlights the perceptible fragilities within the majority, where the question of the balance of power between the Head of State and his Prime Minister continues to fuel debate and frustration.

## *Senegal–Mali: Dakar calls for a coordinated regional response to the terrorist threat*

In terms of security, the situation in Mali is a cause for concern for Senegal due to the two countries' shared border and trade relations. For President Faye, "everything that affects Mali concerns us directly", emphasising the historical ties between Dakar and Bamako. He also believes that Senegal must support Mali in its fight against terrorism. "We must strengthen cooperation with Bamako through intelligence-sharing and joint patrols." He thus calls on all ECOWAS countries to take joint and coordinated action. The situation is already having repercussions on transport and trade in general. According to researcher Bakary Sambe, a holistic approach involving African countries directly or indirectly affected by the problem must be adopted in order to resolve the crisis. When questioned by a journalist from Dakaractu, the president of the Timbuktu Institute stated that "at the regional level, the approach proposed in Lomé is precisely what is needed: multilateral coordination involving the AU, ECOWAS, Algeria, Mauritania and neutral actors, or those perceived as such. And as regards external partnerships, we must be clear-sighted without being dogmatic." As a reminder, on 18 April, Lomé hosted a high-level meeting with the foreign ministers of the AES, ECOWAS officials, partners and researchers, with a view to bringing positions closer together.

## *Nigeria: All-out offensives against jihadist groups*

### **Timbuktu Institute - Week 1 - May 2026**

Whilst its neighbour Chad is once again facing bloody jihadist attacks, Nigeria is continuing its counter-terrorism operations as best it can. In this instance, it is going all out. Nevertheless, as we know, these operations sometimes result in incidents that humanitarian and human rights organisations denounce as abuses. On the night of 30 April 2026, around forty Fulani herders were killed in Niger State, in the centre-west of the country. The operation, carried out jointly by Nigerian and Beninese militiamen acting alongside the Nigerian army, targeted members of the Fulani community suspected of being informants for the jihadist group Ansaru. According to witness accounts, men who resisted arrest were shot dead on the spot, bringing the possible death toll to 41, according to a local traditional leader. Ansaru, which emerged in 2020 from a split with Boko Haram and is now affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, has been active on both sides of the Benin-Niger border for the past two years, which would explain the involvement of militiamen from neighbouring Benin. Neither the Nigerian army nor the Beninese army has commented on the incident. According to RFI Hausa, this was reportedly a “pre-emptive raid” carried out after Fulani herders allegedly threatened to disrupt farming activities in the area, in retaliation for the recent killing of two of their own in a neighbouring community, according to a local resident.

And yet, the intensification of pressure by Nigerian armed forces against jihadist groups is not without setbacks. During the night of 7–8 May 2026, fighters from the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP) launched a large-scale coordinated assault on the headquarters of the Nigerian Army’s 27th Brigade in Buni Gari, in the north-east of the country. Attacking simultaneously from three directions (west, south and south-west) in an attempt to encircle the base, the insurgents were repelled by troops from Operation Hadin Kai, who held their positions using indirect fire before forcing the attackers into a disorderly retreat. According to the Nigerian Army’s report, two soldiers were killed and 50 terrorists were neutralised.

## *Defections within the opposition*

With less than two years to go before the Nigerian presidential election in January 2027, the opposition is struggling to get its house in order. Against this backdrop, the African Democratic Congress (ADC) is positioning itself as a credible alternative. And yet, the party has just suffered two significant defections. Peter Obi and Rabiu Kwankwaso, who finished third and fourth respectively in the 2023 election, officially left the Nigerian Democratic Congress (NDC) on 4 May to join the ADC. For his part, Peter Obi justifies his departure by citing what he describes as a “toxic” and “unstable” climate within the ADC, pointing to internal legal proceedings and attempts at destabilisation between rival factions. One of these factions is challenging the legitimacy of the party’s executive in the courts. Tensions with Atiku Abubakar, another opposition heavyweight who has remained in the ADC, are also said to be a factor. Against this backdrop, is this dual defection the precursor to a possible Obi- Kwankwaso ticket for the next presidential election? Be that as it may, it is a clear indication of the realignments and alliances currently taking shape within the opposition, with the aim of challenging the ruling party (APC) in 2027.

## *Benin: A break or the start of a new beginning?*

### **Timbuktu Institute - Week 1 - May 2026**

With the inauguration of the newly elected president, Romuald Wadagni, scheduled for 24 May, a wave of legal controversy appears to be sweeping across Benin. In an appeal filed on 28 April, a lawyer named Précieux Noël Dagan submitted a petition to the Constitutional Court seeking a ruling on the non-convening of the Senate in connection with the forthcoming swearing-in ceremony. Indeed, according to Article 53 of the Constitutional Law amended in December 2025, the oath is administered by the President of the Constitutional Court, in the presence of members of the institution, the National Assembly, as well as the bureaux of the Senate, the Supreme Court and the Court of Auditors. As the Senate has not yet been constituted, the petitioner does not contest the principle of the swearing-in but requests that the legal provisions applicable to the practical impossibility of convening the Senate be formally recognised.

This situation has been the subject of heated debate over several days, with many legal experts and practitioners offering differing interpretations. Drawing on a civil law analogy, the former president of the Constitutional Court, Théodore Holo, argued that “the absence of a family member at a wedding does not invalidate the ceremony if the witnesses and the registrar are present”. A weak argument, according to Nourou-dine Saka Saley, a lawyer and member of the opposition party Les Démocrates (LD), who asserted – drawing on the same analogy – that “if the family were expressly mentioned in the laws of marriage, no marriage would be valid in its absence”. On 5 May, the Constitutional Court put an end to the controversy, ruling that the appeal lodged by the lawyer Précieux Noël Dagan was inadmissible. The high court justified its decision on the grounds that the appellant lacked standing. While it remains to be seen whether the Senate will be in place by the date of the inauguration, it is clear that the Court’s decision, by refraining from ruling on the substance of the matter, has reignited the debate over the legitimacy and coherence of the institutional reform process underway in Benin.

### *The FCBE party joins the presidential camp*

On Saturday 9 May, following a national party council meeting, the Forces Cauris pour un Bénin Émergent (FCBE) announced their decision to join the presidential camp, effective from the date of the inauguration of the newly elected president, Romuald Wadagni. The so-called ‘moderate opposition’ party came second in the April presidential election with just 5.73% of the vote. Furthermore, a few days earlier, its national secretary Paul Hounkpè (a presidential candidate) announced his resignation. Whilst many observers have long pointed out that the label “moderate opposition” was a euphemism for collusion with the presidential camp, does this rallying confirm their claims? According to the FCBE, this new direction is explained by “the hope that the elected President of the Republic inspires in correcting and improving the shortcomings of the outgoing regime.” as well as the governance agreements concluded with majority parties (the Progressive Union Le Renouveau and the Republican Bloc). With the political opposition landscape becoming increasingly sparse, the Democrats party reaffirmed, following an extraordinary National Council meeting held on 9 May, its place within the opposition. In this regard, the party intends to “exercise a constructive and vigilant republican opposition towards the new government”. This thus constitutes a way of limiting the damage for a party weakened by an internal crisis, in a context where the marginalisation of the opposition in Benin’s political arena is more evident than ever.