



WEATHER IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

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

WEEK 2 – MAY 2026

Burkina Faso: Tighter security measures, regulation of associations and control of the livestock trade

Timbuktu Institute - Week 2 - May 2026

News reports in Burkina Faso have highlighted the suspension of 247 associations. The government is continuing its fight against the financing of terrorism. According to Jean-Pierre Vogna, Director-General of Territorial Administration, "it is these organisations, these associations, that have failed to implement all the necessary measures to comply with the law".

Between security and civil liberties: the controversy surrounding the dissolution of organisations

This operation follows an initial suspension and dissolution of organisations and associations that were not in compliance, according to the authorities. Now, nearly 1,000 organisations are banned from operating in the country, which has provoked strong reactions from human rights organisations, who see this as an infringement of freedom of association in the name of the fight against terrorism. Amnesty International describes the legislation as "abusive" and condemns it as a "flagrant violation of the right to freedom of association". Similarly, the International Federation for Human Rights has condemned these restrictions on freedom in a press release. "A strong, and independent civil society acts as a safeguard against abuses of power and amplifies the voices of marginalised communities," the statement reads.

Ban on livestock exports: Burkina Faso prioritises supplying the local market

On the eve of Eid al-Adha, the ban on exporting livestock to Burkina Faso came into force. The first trucks were stopped by the fraud control and enforcement brigade. A large-scale operation led to the seizure of around ten trucks that were due to travel to Côte d'Ivoire, according to the brigade. The authorities wish to ensure self-sufficiency for the population and avoid any shortages in the local market. This decision could have adverse consequences for certain traders who were transporting their livestock to neighbouring countries.

Ivory Coast : between political realignment and legal tensions

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In Côte d'Ivoire, the reshaping of the political landscape continues. Within the opposition, political parties are transforming, organising themselves and preparing for the upcoming elections. On 14 and 15 May, the ordinary congress of the African People's Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI) re-elected Laurent Gbagbo, the former president, as head of the political organisation. For Marie-Clémence Adom, director of the party school, "we were keen for him to be re-elected, as stepping down at a time when the party is not at its best would have been seen as a betrayal of the commitment he made to lift Ivorians out of a state of lawlessness". Delegates also took the opportunity to adopt a motion of support for the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The scientific committee further condemned the "terrorist actions instigated by imperialists" in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

PPA-CI: Gbagbo embarks on a delegation of powers, the details of which remain unclear

In another significant development, Gbagbo announced a reorganisation of the party to which he intends to delegate his powers. However, this is "neither a definitive withdrawal nor an immediate succession". He thus maintains an air of uncertainty regarding the party's management and his own level of involvement. Speaking to his supporters who had gathered for the 4th Festival of Rebirth in Songon on 17 May, he clarified his decision: "When I delegate my powers to someone, it does not mean that I am appointing them as my successor, not at all! "For the time being, he has not yet revealed the name of the person who will embody this role, which many see as a clear path to his future succession.

The RHDP tightens internal discipline ahead of the general election

On the government side, President Ouattara has also set about restructuring the Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP). The ruling party intends to bring its activists to heel, as independent candidates for the December parliamentary elections begin to emerge. The party president wishes to introduce further changes to smooth out the rough edges. The Houphouëtists have not ruled out invoking the disciplinary committee against those who refuse to comply.

Justice and the opposition: Assalé Tiémoko under judicial supervision

On the legal front, news reports have highlighted the indictment of opposition figure Assalé Tiémoko. He is notably accused of "spreading false information", "disturbing public order" and "making offensive remarks". He was placed under judicial supervision following his hearing at the Abidjan Public Prosecutor's Office. According to his lawyer, the main condition is a ban on leaving the country, unless expressly authorised by the investigating judge. He is also prohibited from making comments or statements likely to disturb public order or discredit institutions through any means of communication. As a reminder, the former MP and president of the "Aujourd'hui et Demain, la Côte d'Ivoire" (ADCI) movement was taken into police custody last April for disturbing public order.

Togo: Security, diplomacy and the domestic 'front' on civil liberties

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On the security front, Togo is strengthening its border with Burkina Faso to better tackle terrorist attacks. Despite the army's efforts to contain the threat in the Savanes region and the 2026–2027 plan of the Emergency Programme for the Savanes Region (PURS), the population remains concerned due to the proximity to high-risk areas. The same applies to the humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso and internally displaced persons, which threaten the region's stability.

Lomé and Paris strengthen their partnership against interference and terrorism

In the same vein, the Justice Ministers of Togo and France have agreed to strengthen judicial cooperation to better combat terrorism. The French Minister of Justice met with his Togolese counterpart, and discussions focused on judicial cooperation to combat this scourge. For Gérald Darmanin, "in the face of terrorism and interference in particular, France stands shoulder to shoulder with Togo". Lomé and Paris are thus committed to mutual legal assistance to track down criminal and terrorist networks that are increasingly operating across national borders.

Towards a thaw in relations between Togo and Benin following diplomatic tensions?

Meanwhile, President Faure Gnassingbé is reported to have contacted Benin's newly elected president, Romuald Wadagni, to offer his congratulations. This move is seen as a step towards thawing relations between the two countries and reviving the dialogue, which had all but broken down. As a reminder, the Beninese authorities had accused Lomé of attempting to destabilise the country last December.

Political prisoners' hunger strike: fresh controversy in Lomé

Meanwhile, the domestic situation continues to be the subject of much controversy. Opposition rallies denouncing abuses and violations of fundamental freedoms are proof of this. This time, it concerns thirteen detainees who have begun a hunger strike in Lomé. These 'political prisoners' were in fact arrested in 2018 for taking part in demonstrations against the government. The courts had, however, ordered their provisional release under judicial supervision, pending the examination of their appeal to the Court of Cassation. Yet they remain in prison, which has sparked widespread outrage. According to their lawyer, Darius Atsoo, "the decision was handed down by three independent and impartial judges; the Attorney General therefore has no choice but to enforce it".

Chad: Controversy surrounding the airstrikes on Lake Chad

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Within the space of a few weeks, it would appear that, for N'Djamena, border threats have once again become the most pressing concerns. In addition to the security and humanitarian pressures on its border with Sudan, the recent attack (4 May) by the terrorist group Boko Haram has brought its border with Nigeria back to the forefront of concerns. Following this setback, the Chadian army carried out retaliatory air strikes against suspected Boko Haram positions in the Lake Chad region, in north-eastern Nigeria. These operations, presented by N'Djamena as part of the fight against terrorism, are nevertheless causing concern following allegations of around a hundred civilian casualties, according to Agence France-Presse (AFP). "It is crucial that the Nigerian and Chadian authorities conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into these disturbing incidents," said [the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Volker Türk, on 13 May. In response, the Chadian government has [rejected the allegations](#) made by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding possible civilian casualties during strikes against Boko Haram positions in the Lake Chad basin. Government spokesperson Gassim Chérif Mahamat contested "serious accusations aimed at discrediting a professional army on the front line against terrorism". In a regional context marked by security emergencies and sovereignty issues, the fear remains that the political and security considerations at play will override the desire to establish the true responsibilities surrounding these strikes.

An opposition running out of steam?

The recent dissolution of the opposition coalition Groupe de concertation des acteurs politiques (GCAP) and the sentencing of several of its leaders to eight years in prison came as a crushing blow to the political opposition. At a press conference held on 13 May, the opposition party [Les Patriotes denounced this sentencing](#) as "an abuse of the justice system" within a national context of "authoritarian hardening" marked by insecurity, communal tensions and a rollback of civil liberties. It must be said that the dismantling of the GCAP was not followed by any significant upheaval within Chad's political parties. In this sense, is this stand taken by the Patriots proving to be a waste of time? The fact remains that, given the current state of the political landscape, one reality is hard to dispute: the absence of a united opposition capable of providing a significant counterweight to the ruling power.

That said, since the start of the year, it is noteworthy that N'Djamena has been engaged in intense diplomatic activity. Thus, on the sidelines of the Africa Forward summit in Nairobi on 11 and 13 May, President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno was [received by his Kenyan counterpart William Ruto](#) to strengthen cooperative relations between the two countries. Discussions focused on several African issues, notably security, economic and diplomatic matters, as well as the need for greater coordination between African states. Furthermore, the two leaders expressed their desire to give new impetus to their bilateral partnership, emphasising strategic sectors such as agriculture, technology, tourism, environmental protection and investment.

Mali: Renewed attacks, Dogon region in distress

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The centre of the country has once again been rocked. The Bandiagara region was targeted by attacks from armed groups, which struck the town of Gomossogou and the village of Kori-Kori on the same day. The death toll stands at around 50, the majority of whom were young people, according to local authorities. These acts were described as “cowardly and barbaric” by Major-General Oliver Diassana, the regional governor, who strongly condemns these “inhuman acts”. The security situation, already fragile particularly due to the attacks on 25 April, has allowed armed groups to expand further across the territory; the centre has now become a new lever for pressure, in addition to the north, which is increasingly occupied by the attackers. It should also be noted that the Dogon region represents a significant part of Mali’s history; this attack symbolically affects the entire population due to the respect held for the region and the importance it holds for Malian culture. The strategy of striking several locations simultaneously allows armed groups to move quickly whilst maximising damage and, at the same time, destabilising the population as much as possible by instilling fear at a time when the central government is seeking to strengthen its offensive. The recurrence of attacks is becoming another problem in security management, which has already been precarious for many years, posing a new challenge for President Goïta, who now holds the dual roles of President and Minister of Defence.

Addressing the Tuaregs’ demands: a path to peace?

Since the attacks of 25 April, a question has arisen: if the Malian government were to take the Tuareg groups’ demands into account, what would become of the political and security situation?

The crisis afflicting Mali continues to worsen, and recent clashes clearly show that military force alone is no longer enough to restore calm. For many observers, the real way to ensure a climate of peace lies in listening to and addressing the demands of the Tuareg populations in the north. Since the country’s independence, these communities have felt a deep sense of abandonment by the central government. They denounce a historical injustice in the development of the region: whilst the south benefits from the majority of investment, schools and hospitals, the northern regions remain largely marginalised and deprived of basic infrastructure. This gap has fuelled anger within this community, driving certain groups to take up arms. Today, the government’s strategy, which relies primarily on military offensives, is showing its limitations in the face of fighters who know the terrain inside out and who draw on this popular discontent. The current situation therefore demands a crucial choice. It is no longer simply a matter of winning battles on the ground, but of rebuilding a sincere political dialogue and fully integrating the North into the national project.

Resumption of attacks in Mali: President Macron’s position

The recent waves of violent attacks affecting Mali are once again provoking a reaction beyond Africa’s borders, particularly in France. When asked about the rapid deterioration of the security situation in the country, President Emmanuel Macron expressed his views on this crisis. For the French Head of State, these tragic events demonstrate that the Malian transitional authorities did not make the best decision to protect their population by demanding the permanent withdrawal of French military forces. He stated that this choice has now left a security vacuum which armed groups are exploiting to expand. Whilst expressing that the turn of events “broke his heart” for the citizens of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger who face insecurity on a daily basis, the French President expressed his hope that the region’s leaders would reconsider their position. In his view, a return to stability cannot be achieved without a resumption of dialogue and strengthened international cooperation.

The armed groups' strategy: block everything to weaken.

Pressure from armed groups is mounting around the Malian capital, plunging the country into an unprecedented logistical and energy crisis. Over the weekend, fighters from JNIM, affiliated with al-Qaeda, tightened their blockade of Bamako by targeting strategic road links. Around ten coaches and several cars were intercepted and set alight between Ségou and the capital, notably near the town of Zambougou. Although the attackers made the passengers alight before burning the vehicles, the operation sowed terror and paralysed traffic, leaving numerous wrecked vehicles on the roads.

Alongside this transport war, a severe blow has been dealt to the economy and the daily lives of Malians by attacking the country's energy infrastructure. Electrical installations linked to the Manantali hydroelectric dam, located in the Kayes region, have been sabotaged and destroyed. Yet this dam is a vital piece of infrastructure that supplies not only Mali, but also Senegal and Mauritania. Its sabotage immediately plunged several districts of Bamako into darkness, causing massive power cuts that can last for 48 to 72 hours at a stretch. Whilst the state-owned company Énergie du Mali (EDM) referred to a "network incident", regional experts do not rule out a link between these power cuts and the attack.

Faced with this two-pronged offensive paralysing the capital, the central government is attempting to respond with force. Although it remains silent on these road and energy attacks, the Malian army is continuing its operations on other fronts. In particular, it has successfully escorted hundreds of tanker lorries to resupply Bamako, and has carried out further air strikes in the Gao region against terrorist positions. Whilst the situation remains completely deadlocked in the Kidal region, where fresh clashes seem inevitable, this strategy by armed groups targeting basic infrastructure poses a huge challenge for the central government. The latter must now succeed in protecting the country's vital points whilst

Mali - Iyad Ag Ghali: the linchpin of the armed groups

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Iyad Ag Ghali, the leader of the al-Qaeda-linked JNIM group, has become the most wanted man in the Sahel and the greatest threat to the Malian government. In recent months, this rebel leader has changed his tactics in waging his war. Instead of simply fighting the army on the ground, he is now employing a strategy of 'economic blockade'. By cutting off main roads and destroying key infrastructure such as power lines, he seeks to deprive the capital of food, fuel and energy. His aim is to make life unbearable for residents in order to weaken the country from within. Behind these physical attacks, Iyad Ag Ghali's objective is purely political: he wants to isolate the current regime in power in Bamako and bring about its downfall. According to regional experts, even if he succeeded in bringing down the government, this Tuareg leader would probably not lead the country in an official and visible capacity. He would no doubt prefer to remain in the shadows to control the situation from a distance. For the government, this threat is extremely serious. It is no longer confined to the military front, but is playing out directly in the daily lives of Malians, forcing the authorities to urgently find new solutions to protect the heart of the country.

Coordinated attacks are putting the government and its Russian allies to the test

The security situation in Mali is becoming increasingly critical, according to analyses by the Mediterranean Foundation for Strategic Studies (FMES). The major offensive led by JNIM groups and FLA rebels marked a real turning point. By striking several key cities across the country simultaneously – such as Bamako, Kati, Gao, Sévaré – and even regaining control of Kidal, these armed groups have proven that they can circumvent security measures. For the government, the loss of Kidal is a severe blow: it undermines the official narrative promising to regain full control of the territory and highlights the limitations of the current strategy. This situation greatly undermines the security model chosen by the ruling regime, which relies heavily on assistance from its Russian partners such as the Africa Corps. The simultaneous attacks reveal that this external military support is not enough to halt the attackers' advance. Whilst a direct military capture of the capital, Bamako, remains unlikely in the short term, the threat has shifted to the daily lives of residents. JNIM is now implementing a strategy of economic strangulation around the capital to demoralise the population. For the government, this combination of military and economic pressure represents a huge challenge, as the threat now risks spreading far beyond Mali's borders.

A geopolitical crisis threatening to destabilise the region

The Malian conflict is no longer merely an internal affair; it is now at the heart of a major geopolitical crisis that is reshaping the balance of power across West Africa. Long regarded by the international community as a zone of instability, the Sahel region is now bearing the full brunt of the deteriorating security situation in Mali. The increase in attacks and the change in strategy by armed groups no longer threaten only Bamako, but also jeopardise the stability of neighbouring countries. This situation is causing immense concern, not only on the African continent, but also as far afield as Europe, which fears the long-term consequences of this security vacuum. The spread of the crisis highlights the limitations of current alliances. Terrorist groups and rebel movements are exploiting the instability of the borders to shift the conflict and extend their influence, transforming the Sahel into a lawless zone that is increasingly difficult to control. Faced with a conflict that threatens to engulf the entire region, the very survival of Sahelian states will now depend on their ability to stem this situation before it becomes completely uncontrollable.

Malian refugees torn by despair

The unfolding crisis is now having dramatic humanitarian consequences across borders, particularly in Mauritania, where tens of thousands of Malians have sought refuge. For these families, many of whom are settled in the Mbera camp, daily life is marked by a constant dilemma. On the one hand, there is a deep-seated desire and a fragile hope of one day returning to their homeland. On the other, the reality on the ground and the persistent violence in Mali cast a constant shadow of fear over a new, even more massive exodus, whilst living conditions in the Mauritanian camps are already extremely precarious.

This continuous flow of displaced people is placing a severe strain on Mauritania's reception capacity, as the country must manage this humanitarian emergency with limited resources and often insufficient international aid. The refugees, who have fled the fighting between the Malian army, its allies and armed groups, find themselves stranded, waiting for the security situation to improve. This situation serves as a reminder that the current crisis is not merely a matter of tactical or military issues. It represents an immense humanitarian challenge, for as long as stability is not restored in Mali, thousands of people will remain condemned to a life of exile and uncertainty.

Niger: Between a recommended break with the past and new political and diplomatic horizons

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Niger is in the process of radically reorienting its foreign and domestic policy through bold strategic choices that mark a clear break with the past. The country is now undertaking a major geopolitical shift by distancing itself from its historic partner, France, in favour of fully asserting its independence. To fill this void and tackle shared challenges, the Nigerien authorities are turning to the AES, seen as more supportive and better equipped to address current security threats. This new alliance is viewed by the ruling powers as the true lever for regained independence. Beyond defence issues, this new vision is also reflected domestically in the absolute priority given to food security. Nigerien leaders are aware that a country's sovereignty cannot be complete if it depends on external aid to feed its population. This is one of the reasons why the government is implementing new agricultural strategies to boost local production and protect the country's resources. For Niger and its neighbours in the AES, this comprehensive transition represents a bold challenge: to prove that it is possible to ensure the safety of citizens and develop the national economy by relying primarily on its own strengths and on selected regional partnerships.

At the three borders: tension in Niger, Libya and Chad

The tri-border area, which separates Niger, Libya and Chad, has become one of the most heavily monitored and dangerous places in the region. In this vast desert, coexistence between the various groups is extremely fragile. It is home to an explosive mix: smugglers, gold prospectors, armed gangs and the military. Indeed, each group seeks to control and profit from its territory, creating a constant sense of insecurity for those living in or travelling through the area. For Niger, this crossroads is a real headache. Since the country chose to distance itself from its former Western partners, it has had to monitor this border alone, through which arms and clandestine networks pass. The instability in neighbouring Libya, combined with the rebellion in Chad, makes cooperation very difficult.

Nigeria: Abuja facing challenges on several security fronts

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In Nigeria, May is clearly continuing to be a month of intense security activity. Following the bloody setback suffered by the armed forces at the start of the month, Abuja has been steadily stepping up its military response. It is against this backdrop that Nigeria and the United States have intensified their military cooperation against the Islamic State group in West Africa through new operations carried out in the north-east of the country. On 17 May, joint air strikes targeted jihadist positions around Metele and Dogon Chukwu, in Borno State, near the borders with Niger and Chad. According to Nigerian authorities and the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), these operations resulted in the elimination of around 20 fighters, including senior jihadist leader Abu-Bilal al-Minuki and several of his lieutenants. Abuja, for its part, claims that the United States mainly provided intelligence, without any official deployment of ground troops, although US media reports suggest that a US commando unit took part in the assault. Two days prior to these operations, in the same state of Borno, several dozen children were abducted in the Askira Uba district during an attack attributed to jihadists. According to eyewitness accounts reported by Agence France-Presse (AFP), armed men on motorbikes stormed a school in the village of Mussa, near the Sambisa Forest, known as a stronghold of jihadist groups. Between 35 and 43 primary and nursery school pupils are reported to have been kidnapped in less than half an hour, shortly after a military patrol had passed through the area. On the same day, further child abductions were reported in Oyo State, in the south-west of the country, following coordinated attacks on several schools. Beyond the intensification of military operations, this sequence seems above all to reveal the scale of the security pressure weighing on Abuja, which must contain security threats that are geographically dispersed. Furthermore, this diversity of hotspots of in e security tends, at the same time, to accentuate the fragmentation of the Nigerian state's response capabilities.

Another blunder by the Nigerian armed forces?

One of the week's events was the deadly airstrike carried out on 10 May by the Nigerian army on the weekly market in Tumfa, in Zamfara State. According to several local sources, community leaders and Amnesty International, the bombing reportedly killed between 72 and over 100 people, mostly civilians, and left dozens injured. Witnesses claim that military aircraft first flew over the area before returning several hours later to strike the market at a time when it was particularly busy. For their part, the Nigerian military authorities reject the possibility of a mistake, maintaining that the operation targeted a gathering of terrorist leaders and armed criminal groups, commonly referred to as 'bandits'. The army also claims to have acted on the basis of intelligence indicating a strategic meeting of fighters in the village of Tumfa, considered a stronghold of armed groups involved in kidnappings, looting and attacks on surrounding villages. According to Abuja, the strike is said to have neutralised several members of these groups. Beyond these conflicting accounts, this episode—which is by no means unprecedented—reignites questions about the operational limits of counter-terrorism efforts in Nigeria. Given that the armed forces often cite the difficulty of distinguishing with certainty between military targets and civilian areas in certain environments, the perception among civilians that they are victims of reprisals is unlikely to prevent a potential stalemate.

Benin: A controversial reform in public broadcasting

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The recent inauguration of the new Head of State, Romuald Wadagni, has attracted media attention in recent weeks as it appears to mark a significant moment of political change. However, the central question that remains is how the new administration – which some see as a continuation of the Talon ‘system’ – will handle the pressing issues and reforms initiated by the former president. The decade under the leadership of Head of State Patrice Talon has been a period of intense and diverse reforms, which have been met with both praise and criticism. In this instance, it is the latter sentiment that appears to be the prevailing view regarding one of the most recent reforms. Indeed, on 13 May, the Société de Radio et Télévision du Bénin – the public media service – (SRTB) announced its decision to dismiss 169 staff members. The SRTB justifies these redundancies as part of a wide-ranging plan to modernise public broadcasting, guided by a skills audit designed to align staffing levels with new performance and management requirements. Unsurprisingly, the unions were quick to speak out. The Union of Media Professionals in Benin (LUpmb) has condemned a decision that will “cause emotional distress and create a social situation with unpredictable consequences”. The Platform of Promoters and Actors for Media Development in Benin (Padem-Benin), for its part, expressed its “dismay” at a decision described as “unfair dismissal”. Faced with public criticism, which has reignited the debate over the consensual nature of the reforms undertaken under Talon, government spokesperson Wilfried Hounbédji has sought to absolve the state of responsibility in this matter. However, he acknowledged that the fact that those made redundant had received no prior information enabling them to anticipate the situation is “humanly deplorable”. In truth, it may be that the SRTB’s plan, which is creating a climate of uncertainty in Benin’s broadcasting sector, constitutes a new reform that will be criticised for a time before passing without major incident. As Benin prepares to welcome a new president, could these redundancies foreshadow a more rigorous economic management, against a backdrop of latent social discontent?

Between increased control and judicial rigour

As the government appears to be seeking to tighten its control over extractive resources, operations against illegal gold mining in the gold-bearing areas of the north of the country are becoming increasingly visible. On 11 May, a raid by Beninese security forces on the Koussigou gold site, in the Perma district of Natitingou, led to the arrest of around sixty illegal gold miners. The Koussigou site is located in a gold-bearing area now covered by an official mining licence. In October 2025, the Beninese government granted the Chinese company Xinquan Sarl a ten-year mining licence for a neighbouring site in Kouatèna. However, this intensified monitoring raises questions about the state’s ability to balance security imperatives, the legal framework for mining operations, and the management of local socio-economic dynamics.

Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the Beninese judiciary continues to take a hard line against those considered to be involved, directly or indirectly, in the failed coup of 7 December 2025. It is in this context that the former opposition MP Soumaila Sounon Boké was sentenced on 12 May 2026 to five years’ imprisonment without parole for “glorifying crimes against state security” and “inciting rebellion via electronic means” by the Court for the Suppression of Economic Offences and Terrorism (Criet). He had been arrested on 16 December and placed in pre-trial detention for having published, according to the authorities, the message “It’s party time” in a WhatsApp group a few hours after the coup was announced.

Ultimately, it would not be unreasonable to see in these various dynamics (political, economic, security-related) the manifestation of a desire to simultaneously consolidate the state’s security and economic control. This is in a context where the line between the imperative of stability and the restriction of spaces for dissent seems increasingly blurred.