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Analysis Note on Major Regional, Political, Security, and Diplomatic Trends September / October 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout September and October, events across West and Central Africa highlighted the mounting pressures confronting political and security institutions, as well as the varied responses of states seeking to contain them. In the central Sahel, major attacks against Malian military positions and the reorganization of Niger's military leadership following the late-August mutiny raised renewed questions about military effectiveness, cohesion, and the role of external security partners. These challenges unfolded against a broader regional security environment in which neighboring states, including Senegal, Benin, and Nigeria, continued to strengthen their responses to threats emanating from or developing along the Sahelian borderlands.

On the political front, institutional arrangements governing competition and participation remained contested in several countries. Restrictions affecting opposition parties in Guinea-Bissau, administrative pressures on political organizations in Cameroon, and disputes over electoral institutions in Côte d'Ivoire illustrated different ways in which political competition can become constrained.

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Meanwhile, in Senegal and The Gambia, economic pressures and public grievances increasingly intersected with political competition. These developments also underscored an important distinction: public mobilization, parliamentary scrutiny, and opposition activity can strengthen institutional accountability when political systems provide credible avenues for expressing and addressing grievances.

At the regional level, political divisions persisted alongside efforts to maintain practical cooperation. The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) pursued further diplomatic and institutional coordination, while neighboring governments sought ways to manage shared security challenges despite unresolved tensions. Algeria's renewed engagement with Mali also illustrated the continuing strategic importance of relationships extending beyond the AES itself. Taken together, the region's fragility appears to depend not only on the pressures confronting states and societies, but also on whether the responses adopted by governments and regional institutions alleviate existing vulnerabilities or create new ones.

MAJOR CROSS-CUTTING REGIONAL TRENDS

Beyond the specific developments observed in each country, five major dynamics characterized the evolution of regional fragility during September.

Military vulnerabilities under sustained insurgent pressure in the central Sahel.

Military effectiveness and institutional cohesion came under different kinds of pressure across the three AES countries. In Mali, the September 10 attack against the military camp at Dioura, followed by reported assaults on military installations around Sévaré and Kona, highlighted the ability of jihadist fighters to challenge defended positions despite ongoing operations and Russian support. In Niger, the dismissal of senior commanders and arrests following the late-August mutiny raised questions about cohesion within the armed forces. The reported intervention of Russian Africa Corps personnel to help protect the ruling authorities also highlighted the importance of Russian assistance for regime security, alongside its counterinsurgency role.

Burkina Faso, meanwhile, emphasized military self-sufficiency as a response to persistent insecurity. The authorities announced the delivery of locally produced armored vehicles and claimed that nearly 300 had been manufactured over the preceding ten months. Although increased equipment production could strengthen operational capabilities, its effects on territorial security remain to be demonstrated. Across the three AES countries, events exposed three distinct dimensions of military vulnerability—force protection, command cohesion, and capability generation—that require different forms of adaptation and different measures of progress.

Political competition confronts growing institutional and administrative pressure.

In Guinea-Bissau, restrictions on opposition activity culminated in the intervention of security forces at the headquarters of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), raising concerns about political participation ahead of planned elections. In Cameroon, administrative disputes affecting the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC) preceded the resignations of Maurice Kamto and Mamadou Mota from party leadership positions. In Côte d'Ivoire, disagreements surrounding the replacement of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), alongside judicial proceedings involving an opposition leader, sustained concerns over the credibility of political institutions. Restrictions on opposition organizations and independent media in Guinea, as well as controversies surrounding political expression in Chad, reflected other forms of institutional pressure.

Despite important differences among the political systems, these administrative and institutional measures raise a common question about the capacity of institutions to accommodate legitimate political competition. Administrative rules, electoral procedures, and judicial processes can provide essential safeguards when applied credibly and consistently. Where they are perceived as instruments for restricting participation or disadvantaging opponents, however, they can deepen mistrust and weaken established channels for resolving disputes. The concern is therefore not political competition itself, but whether the institutions governing it remain sufficiently credible and accessible to competing actors.

The regionalization of insecurity forces neighboring states to adapt.

Security pressures in the central Sahel continued to shape the responses of neighboring countries, although threats and security conditions differed across national borders. Senegal announced stronger measures along its eastern border with Mali and reinforced gendarmerie capabilities, while Benin invested in additional security resources. Northwestern Nigeria also confronted armed groups and criminal networks operating near its frontier with Niger, including suspected Lakurawa elements.

These differing security conditions do not amount to a uniform southward progression of violence. Rather, they reveal different forms of exposure, from prospective border threats to established insurgent violence and criminalized local economies. Armed actors exploit mobility corridors, economic networks, and relationships with communities in different ways. Heightened investment in border security is therefore not, by itself, evidence of worsening local security conditions; in some cases, it may reflect a preventive adaptation to changes elsewhere in the region.

Economic grievances test political accountability.

Economic and service delivery pressures increasingly intersected with political competition. In Senegal, fiscal constraints and negotiations with international creditors generated parliamentary debate and public mobilization over living costs, alongside continuing political realignment. In The Gambia, prolonged electricity shortages provoked protests amid growing political competition ahead of President Adama Barrow's contested third-term bid.

Protests and parliamentary scrutiny are not inherently signs of fragility. They often provide channels for political accountability. Their implications for stability will depend on whether authorities respond to grievances while preserving meaningful opportunities for peaceful political competition.

Regional divisions persist amid practical interdependence.

Political divisions between the AES and the wider West African regional order remained pronounced despite continuing efforts to preserve practical cooperation. The AES countries coordinated diplomatic positions, advanced common administrative initiatives, and discussed a proposed framework for cooperation among border regions that has yet to become operational. Meanwhile, Togo and Benin pursued selective engagement with their Sahelian neighbors despite persistent political tensions. Algeria's renewed diplomatic contacts with Mali and recent security engagement with Niger further illustrated the wider regional interests at stake.

These developments suggest neither decisive reconciliation nor an uninterrupted process of fragmentation. Rather, they expose the tension between political estrangement and unavoidable interdependence. Trade routes, shared communities, and transnational security threats continue to connect states regardless of their political disagreements. Claims of national sovereignty and the construction of new institutional arrangements cannot eliminate these relationships or the need to manage them. The question is whether selective cooperation can develop into effective mechanisms for addressing shared vulnerabilities despite enduring political mistrust.

MAJOR POLITICAL TRENDS

Senegal : Political realignment amid mounting fiscal and institutional pressures

Senegal's political realignment reached a new phase as President Bassirou Diomaye Faye sought to consolidate his political base while navigating increasingly difficult economic choices. His new party, Kiiraay, continued to attract elected officials from the former ruling Alliance for the Republic (APR), including several mayors from the Fatick region, traditionally associated with former president Macky Sall. This expansion occurred amid a widening political divide between Faye and Ousmane Sonko, whose Pastef party retains a parliamentary majority. With local elections initially expected in January 2027, questions about the electoral timetable have acquired particular significance. Opposition figures have expressed concern that a postponement could provide Kiiraay additional time to establish its territorial organization, while the presidential camp has defended the possibility of adjusting the calendar.

These political reconfigurations unfolded against mounting fiscal pressures. On September 1, Senegal reached a staff-level agreement with the International Monetary Fund on a proposed $2.2 billion financing program, subject to further approval and measures to restore debt sustainability.

During his September 8 policy address to the National Assembly, Prime Minister Ahmadou Alhaminou Mohamed Lô faced questions from deputies across the political spectrum about the consequences of fiscal adjustment and the government's approach to managing public debt. Earlier, on September 5, the "empty baskets" march in Dakar had mobilized citizens protesting rising living costs. The government has sought to reassure households that fiscal reforms will preserve essential social protections, while also pursuing administrative restructuring and expenditure controls.

The convergence of political realignment, parliamentary scrutiny, and public mobilization places Senegal's institutions under considerable pressure. Yet the process also demonstrates the availability of channels through which political actors and citizens can contest government decisions. The challenge for the authorities will be to reconcile fiscal adjustment with demands for accountability and social protection, while ensuring that competition between the emerging political blocs remains governed by credible and predictable institutional procedures.

Guinea-Bissau: Constitutional reform amid restrictions on political participation

Following the August 30 referendum organized by the military authorities, the National Electoral Commission announced the approval of a new constitution that could substantially reshape the political system by strengthening presidential authority. The changes empower the president to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and government while reducing the National People's Assembly from 102 to 65 seats. They mark a departure from the power-sharing arrangements established in the 1990s to limit the concentration of executive authority, historically a recurring source of political conflict and military intervention. The military-led authorities have presented the reforms as a means of overcoming institutional instability, while the opposition PAIGC has challenged the legitimacy of the referendum and the conditions under which it was conducted.

These constitutional changes unfolded alongside restrictions on political participation ahead of presidential and legislative elections. On September 14, the military authorities ordered political parties to relocate headquarters situated within 500 meters of designated public institutions, citing security and public-order concerns. The measure affected the PAIGC, whose headquarters were subsequently occupied by security forces on September 23.

The party challenged the decision and accused the authorities of using administrative measures to obstruct opposition activity. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Ilídio Vieira Té, who also leads the newly formed Popular Guinean Party, maintained that he would keep his governmental responsibilities separate from partisan electoral activities.

The significance of these reforms and restrictions extends beyond the immediate dispute over political participation. Constitutional reforms that concentrate executive authority, combined with restrictions affecting opposition organizations and changes to electoral oversight, raise broader questions about the institutional checks that will govern political competition after the transition. Guinea-Bissau's recurring political crises have long reflected tensions among executive authority, parliamentary oversight, and military influence. The central test is therefore not simply whether elections are organized, but whether the resulting political arrangements can accommodate meaningful competition and provide credible safeguards against renewed concentration of power. Calls by civil-society organizations for inclusive dialogue offer one avenue for addressing these concerns, although their influence on the transition remains uncertain.

Cameroon : Opposition reorganization under administrative pressure

Cameroon's opposition entered a period of reorganization following the resignation of Maurice Kamto as president of the MRC on September 8. Mamadou Mota, the party's first vice president, also relinquished his leadership position. Both remained members of the MRC, presenting their decisions as measures intended to protect the party's interests amid continuing administrative and judicial disputes.

The resignations followed the government's refusal in August to recognize the outcome of the MRC's December 2025 party convention, which had returned Kamto to its leadership. The decision reinforced uncertainty surrounding the party's recognized leadership and its ability to participate in forthcoming legislative and municipal elections.

Mota explicitly cited persistent administrative pressure in explaining his withdrawal. With Balbine Tiriane Noah assuming interim leadership pending a new party convention, the MRC sought to preserve its organizational continuity while reducing disputes centered on its most prominent figures.

The resignations illustrate how administrative recognition can shape opposition organization independently of electoral support. Kamto and Mota's withdrawal may reduce immediate friction, but it does not settle the party's legal standing ahead of the anticipated 2027 elections.

Côte d'Ivoire: Electoral reform and the judicial dimensions of political competition

Following the government's dissolution of the CEI in May, Côte d'Ivoire entered September without a settled institutional framework for future elections. The appointment of Lassana Sylla as liquidator on September 1 advanced the dissolution process, but the composition, autonomy, and timetable of a successor electoral administration remained unresolved. The government has presented the reform as an opportunity to improve confidence in electoral administration following longstanding criticism of the CEI. Opposition parties, however, have expressed concern about the absence of a clearly established replacement framework and the implications for revising the electoral register.

Political tensions were further heightened by proceedings involving Justin Koné Katinan, a senior official of Laurent Gbagbo's African Peoples' Party–Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI). On September 7, the ruling Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) filed a complaint following Katinan's public allegations linking the party to illicit gold mining and associated criminal activities.

Prosecutors subsequently distinguished this complaint from a separate investigation into Katinan's alleged involvement in unrest during the 2025 elections, which led to his detention and referral to the antiterrorism section of the Abidjan court. Government representatives emphasized that the initial complaint came from the RHDP rather than the executive, while opposition figures and civil-society actors raised concerns about the implications of the proceedings for political expression and competition.

The two disputes test different institutional safeguards: whether a replacement for the CEI can command confidence across political parties, and whether judicial proceedings involving opposition figures can address legitimate complaints without unduly restricting political expression. The consistency and independence of these processes will matter as much as their formal procedural compliance.

The Gambia: Electoral competition amid growing demands for public accountability

In The Gambia, mounting dissatisfaction with electricity provision became an important source of political mobilization. Prolonged power outages, in some areas lasting up to two days, triggered demonstrations on September 7 and 8 in Banjul and other communities. Protesters criticized the government's handling of the electricity crisis, while some demonstrations involved barricades, property damage, and confrontations with security forces. Authorities subsequently restricted unauthorized gatherings and arrested several individuals suspected of involvement in violent incidents.

President Adama Barrow responded with a televised address acknowledging public hardship and promising improvements to electricity provision by the end of October. The crisis exposed weaknesses in the country's energy system, including the consequences of shifting away from power supplied by the Turkish company Karpowership toward regional electricity imports. These arrangements had offered potential cost advantages but left supply vulnerable to infrastructure constraints and fluctuations in regional hydropower generation.

The protests also occurred amid intensifying preparations for the December 5 presidential election. Barrow's pursuit of a third term remains controversial, particularly given his earlier commitments to democratic reform and the failure of proposed constitutional amendments to establish presidential term limits. September witnessed further political realignment as the president's coalition expanded through agreements with opposition formations, including APP-Sobeyaa, while the United Democratic Party (UDP) pursued its own alliance-building efforts. The shifting coalitions reflected continuing political competition within a system still confronting questions about the institutional safeguards intended to prevent excessive concentration of executive power.

The electricity crisis has become a test of government responsiveness during a presidential contest already marked by controversy over executive tenure. The authorities' handling of public grievances will help determine whether political competition remains an effective avenue for accountability.

Guinea and Chad: Different limits on political contestation

In Guinea, the authorities continued to restrict political expression even as President Mamadi Doumbouya emphasized the country's economic ambitions and international partnerships. On September 17, the High Authority for Communication prohibited the broadcasting of France 24 following its description of Doumbouya as a president who had come to power through a coup. The decision followed the withdrawal of accreditation from a Jeune Afrique correspondent. Meanwhile, opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo and his party reported that his passport had been revoked, preventing him from traveling to New York during the United Nations General Assembly. Taken with previous restrictions affecting opposition organizations, these events reinforced concerns about the space available for political dissent. The contrast between the government's international economic outreach and restrictions on domestic political competition raises questions about the inclusiveness of Guinea's institutional trajectory.

In Chad, a different combination of political accommodation and restrictions prevailed. The August presidential pardon of former prime minister Succès Masra and other opposition figures offered the possibility of easing political tensions, but their convictions remained in effect, leaving questions about their political rights unresolved. The limits of political expression were further illustrated when five minors were questioned by police following the circulation of a video criticizing President Mahamat Idriss Déby and government performance. Prosecutors argued that some statements could constitute incitement and opened an inquiry into whether adults had encouraged the children, while civil-society representatives criticized the response as disproportionate. These developments highlight the distinction between selective gestures of political accommodation and broader institutional guarantees for dissent. The question for Chad is whether such gestures can develop into more durable opportunities for political participation and accountability.

MAJOR SECURITY TRENDS

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Mali: Sustained insurgent pressure tests military effectiveness and Russian support

On September 10, fighters affiliated with Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) attacked the military camp at Dioura, in the Mopti region, reportedly overrunning the installation and seizing weapons and equipment. Estimates of Malian military fatalities varied considerably, with some reports suggesting more than 100 soldiers killed, while JNIM claimed additional casualties and prisoners. Subsequent attacks around the military installations at Sévaré and Kona reportedly involved drones and mortars, illustrating the continued ability of insurgent forces to threaten defended positions and important military infrastructure.

The Malian armed forces responded with strikes against suspected insurgent logistical bases north of Dioura and near Mondoro under Operation Dougoukoloko. Their longer-term effects, including whether they have reduced threats to defended military installations, remain difficult to assess independently.

The September attacks nevertheless exposed vulnerabilities in force protection and raised further questions about the effectiveness of cooperation with Russia's Africa Corps. Russian support remains an important component of Bamako's military strategy, but its presence has not prevented significant losses. At the same time, the Malian conflict extends beyond military engagements with JNIM. A September Amnesty International report documented evidence of serious abuses against civilians by Malian forces and Wagner Group personnel during operations conducted between 2023 and 2025. Separately, refugee accounts published by Amnesty described displacement and abuses associated with jihadist violence and military operations.

Niger: Military reorganization amid continuing counterterrorism challenges

In Niger, the aftermath of the August 28–29 mutiny dominated security developments. The attempt by disaffected soldiers to challenge the authorities in Niamey prompted a significant reorganization of the military hierarchy, including the removal of Chief of Staff General Moussa Salaou Barmou and his replacement by Brigadier General Mamane Sani Kiaou, an officer with operational experience in Tillabéry and Diffa. The authorities also arrested military personnel suspected of involvement in the mutiny and initiated measures intended to restore discipline and confidence within the armed forces.

The reported involvement of Russian Africa Corps personnel in helping loyalist forces regain control during the mutiny highlighted the regime-security dimension of Niger's partnership with Moscow. This support complements Russia's role in counterterrorism operations, although the balance between these functions remains difficult to establish. Meanwhile, Nigerien forces continued operations against armed groups in several regions. In Dosso, Operation Damissa targeted suspected militant refuges and logistical sites, while operations around Diffa and Bosso reportedly led to arrests of Boko Haram suspects and the seizure of supplies and equipment. The military also described efforts to provide medical assistance and other support to communities affected by insecurity.

The operational effects of the post-mutiny reorganization remain unclear. Appointing experienced commanders may support field operations, but activity in Dosso and Diffa provides little evidence yet of improvements in planning, logistical support, or frontline effectiveness.

Burkina Faso: Military self-sufficiency confronts persistent territorial insecurity

As Captain Ibrahim Traoré's government prepared to commemorate the fourth anniversary of his accession to power, Burkina Faso highlighted efforts to expand domestic military production, including the delivery of locally produced Nanga armored vehicles. Traoré claimed that nearly 300 armored vehicles had been manufactured over the preceding ten months for the armed forces and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP). Although the scale of production has not been independently established, the initiative reflects the government's ambition to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers and strengthen its capacity to equip forces operating in difficult terrain.

These efforts unfolded amid continuing insecurity in areas affected by jihadist activity, including communities and economic corridors associated with gold mining. The mining sector provides armed organizations with opportunities to exploit local economic networks, extract resources, and sustain logistical activities. Its vulnerability also exposes surrounding populations to coercion and disrupts livelihoods. The government maintains that it has recovered control over much of the national territory, citing a figure exceeding 74 percent.

Domestic defense production could strengthen Burkina Faso's operational autonomy, but equipment reliability, maintenance, and integration into military operations will determine its practical value. Along vulnerable mining corridors, a more informative measure of territorial recovery would be whether communities can travel safely and maintain economic activity. Neither equipment deliveries nor official estimates of territorial control establish those outcomes on their own.

Nigeria: Differentiated armed threats sustain pressure across multiple security theaters

Nigeria faced distinct but overlapping security challenges with armed violence in the northwest presenting a different operational problem from the longstanding insurgency in the northeast.

In Sokoto State, troops participating in Operation Fansan Yamma reported rescuing 23 kidnapped civilians during operations on September 20, including six people freed following an attack on Sabon Gari and seventeen others rescued along the Isa–Shinkafi corridor. In a separate intelligence-led operation near Illela, soldiers arrested four suspected members of Lakurawa who were reportedly transporting stolen cattle. These incidents illustrate the interconnections among armed violence, kidnappings, livestock theft, and cross-border mobility in communities adjoining Niger.

In the northeast, the military continued operations against Boko Haram factions and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). On September 17, troops under Operation Hadin Kai repelled attacks against forward military positions at Gajiram and Mairari in Borno State, with the army reporting the recovery of weapons and ammunition. The preceding day, two members of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), including a commander, reportedly surrendered to government forces. These events demonstrate both the persistence of insurgent capabilities and the continuing ability of security forces to disrupt attacks and encourage defections. They also highlight the importance of distinguishing among armed organizations whose objectives, territorial networks, and relationships with local communities differ.

Nigeria's operations against drug-trafficking networks, including the discovery of clandestine methamphetamine production facilities, revealed another set of demands on specialized law-enforcement institutions. These networks should not be conflated with jihadist organizations. Taken alongside hostage-rescue operations in Sokoto and the defense of military positions in Borno, the investigations underscore the different capabilities required for counterinsurgency, rural security, and combating organized crime. The geographical and organizational diversity of these threats complicates the allocation of security resources and the coordination of operations across jurisdictions.

Senegal and Benin: Preventive security and adaptation along the Sahelian frontier

In Senegal, the government paid increasing attention to security along its eastern frontier with Mali. During his September 8 policy address, Prime Minister Lô announced plans to reinforce border security and accelerate measures intended to strengthen national defense capabilities. Later in the month, gendarmerie units in Kédougou received additional investigative and forensic equipment to support their operations. These initiatives reflect an increasingly preventive security posture toward threats associated with the neighboring Sahel. They do not, however, establish that militant groups have secured a territorial presence inside Senegal.

Benin confronted a more immediate security problem in its northern departments, even as recent reporting suggested a decline in terrorism-related fatalities. The government maintained operations under its Mirador security framework and pursued new international partnerships to strengthen investigative and counterterrorism capabilities. On September 24, the United States supported the modernization of the Republican Police's counterterrorism investigation facilities, providing forensic and analytical equipment. At the same time, insecurity hampered education in exposed northern communities. Authorities announced measures to relocate schools and teachers from threatened localities, including areas near the borders with Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso, despite progress in reopening other previously affected schools.

The distinction between these responses matters operationally. In Senegal, the value of strengthened capabilities lies principally in early warning and preventing militant entrenchment without unnecessarily disrupting border communities. In Benin, the challenge is to consolidate security improvements in areas where threats already interfere with schooling, mobility, and livelihoods. Assessing progress through deployments or equipment alone would obscure these different objectives and their consequences for civilian security.

Cameroon and the Lake Chad basin: Civilian protection amid persistent insurgent violence

During the night of September 16–17, armed assailants attacked Madegoua, near Makary in Cameroon's Far North region, killing at least fourteen civilians, according to the Ministry of Defense. Other reporting placed the toll at approximately fifteen. The ministry attributed the attack to ISWAP, although responsibility has not been independently established. Local accounts also raised the possibility of retaliation linked to cooperation between residents and security forces, a motive that remained unconfirmed.

Cameroonian authorities announced additional security operations following the killings, including the pursuit of suspected assailants. Across the wider Lake Chad basin, military forces continued to confront armed organizations operating through difficult border terrain, while displacement, disrupted livelihoods, and restricted access to services sustained significant humanitarian needs. Operations by Nigerian and other regional forces have disrupted insurgent activity, but they have not eliminated the capacity of armed groups to threaten isolated communities.

The Madegoua attack exposed a specific problem of security coverage: armed assailants were reportedly able to operate near an established military presence without encountering effective resistance. Subsequent operations may disrupt those responsible, but the immediate challenge is to ensure that vulnerable communities can obtain timely warning and rapid assistance. More reliable protection of exposed villages would provide a stronger indication of improved security than additional military operations alone.

MAJOR DIPLOMATIC TRENDS

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AES: Diplomatic coordination amid questions over institutional added value

The AES continued its efforts to present a coherent diplomatic and institutional identity. On September 21, foreign ministers and diplomatic representatives from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger coordinated their positions ahead of the United Nations General Assembly, seeking to present a common approach to sovereignty, security, and regional cooperation. These efforts accompanied new administrative initiatives, including the launch of enrollment for the AES biometric identity card in Niger's Agadez region on September 15. The three governments also discussed a proposed framework for cooperation among border regions, intended to facilitate information-sharing, security coordination, and cross-border mobility.

While these announcements signal a desire to give the AES a more distinct institutional identity, their practical significance remains uncertain. Regional identification systems, cross-border cooperation, and freedom of movement were already established objectives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), raising questions about the added value of developing parallel arrangements following the three countries' withdrawal. Beyond the initial administrative rollout, much of the agenda remained at the level of diplomatic coordination or proposals. Building separate institutions may serve the governments' political priorities, but it could also require resources and attention that are urgently needed to address persistent insecurity. The more consequential test will be whether these initiatives produce measurable improvements in security, mobility, and cooperation, including with neighboring states outside the AES.

Benin and Togo: Pragmatic engagement despite persistent tensions with the AES

Benin and Togo pursued different approaches to maintaining relations with the AES countries. In Benin, President Romuald Wadagni's efforts to restore dialogue with neighboring governments encountered renewed difficulties following allegations of Beninese involvement in Niger's late-August mutiny. Cotonou rejected these accusations and reaffirmed its opposition to any effort to destabilize Niger, emphasizing its preference for normalization rather than diplomatic confrontation. Benin also used its September presidency of the African Union Peace and Security Council to promote regional cooperation and conflict prevention.

Togo, meanwhile, presented itself as a partner of the AES countries. Foreign Minister Robert Dussey emphasized that the security of the coastal states was closely connected to developments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. On September 23, Togolese and Malian authorities signed a cooperation agreement covering personal-data protection and related digital-governance issues. Its implementation remains to be seen, but it provides a concrete example of bilateral engagement despite regional political divisions. Given their interconnectedness, neighboring governments are seeking to preserve channels of cooperation while managing the consequences of the AES–ECOWAS divide.

Chad: Diplomatic recalibration and the renewed importance of economic partnerships

Chad continued to adjust its external relationships, particularly through renewed economic engagement with France. On September 21, President Mahamat Idriss Déby appointed Ahmat Kogri as foreign minister, replacing Abdoulaye Sabre Fadoul. The appointment of a former intelligence chief and presidential adviser came as N'Djamena sought to strengthen diplomatic channels and attract international support for its development priorities.

The September 25 France–Chad Business Forum in Paris brought together officials, businesses, and potential investors to explore opportunities under Chad's Connexion 2030 development plan, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and agriculture. These initiatives suggest an effort to preserve the economic benefits of longstanding partnerships while redefining their political and security dimensions. Their significance will depend on whether renewed engagement produces concrete investments and lasting institutional cooperation.

Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire: Strengthening bilateral relations while seeking regional institutional reform

Guinea pursued an active regional diplomatic agenda, notably through President Mamadi Doumbouya's September 11–14 visit to Côte d'Ivoire. Discussions with President Alassane Ouattara focused on expanding economic and commercial relations, as well as cooperation in security, intelligence, and the management of cross-border threats. The visit reinforced Guinea's efforts to strengthen relations with neighboring states and attract support for its economic ambitions.

Conakry also continued to advocate reform of regional institutions. On September 14, Foreign Minister Morissanda Kouyaté called for changes to the governing structures and protocols of ECOWAS and the African Union. Unlike the AES countries, which have withdrawn from ECOWAS, Guinea has sought to challenge existing regional arrangements while maintaining engagement with them. This approach illustrates an alternative response to dissatisfaction with regional governance, although the practical prospects for institutional reform remain unclear.

Mali and Niger: benefit from improved relations and increasing support from Algeria

Algeria's evolving role in the Sahel became more visible in September as it pursued renewed diplomatic engagement with Mali following months of strained relations. On September 14, Algerian Prime Minister Sifi Ghrieb visited Bamako for discussions with his Malian counterpart, Abdoulaye Maïga, and President Assimi Goïta. Building on Maïga's August visit to Algiers, the meeting sought to restore bilateral dialogue and expand cooperation on shared economic and security interests.

The diplomatic rapprochement followed Algeria's unusual deployment of four Su-30 fighter aircraft to Niamey on August 30, at the request of Nigerien authorities following the attempted mutiny. The deployment signaled Algeria's willingness to provide direct military support to a neighboring government facing an internal security challenge. These moves suggest a more active Algerian approach to protecting its interests across the Sahel. Whether this engagement produces durable security cooperation or overcomes longstanding differences with neighboring governments remains uncertain.

WEAK SIGNALS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAGILITY

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Guinea-Bissau: The risk of transitional restrictions becoming entrenched political exclusion

The cumulative restrictions affecting Guinea-Bissau's opposition raise the possibility that measures introduced during the military-led transition could become enduring features of political competition. Calls by civil-society organizations for inclusive dialogue offer a potential avenue for de-escalation, but whether authorities will engage with these proposals remains an open question. The important signal to monitor is whether political parties regain the ability to organize, campaign, and contest elections meaningfully, or whether restrictions introduced during the transition become embedded in the country's political institutions.

Senegal: Uncertainty over the electoral calendar amid political realignment

The absence of a clearly established timetable for Senegal's next local elections introduces uncertainty into an increasingly competitive political environment. Proposals to postpone the vote have generated differing interpretations, with some political actors emphasizing administrative and legal considerations and others questioning whether a delay could favor the consolidation of new political alliances. The significance of this uncertainty lies less in the existence of competing political strategies than in whether decisions concerning the electoral calendar are made transparently and through procedures accepted as legitimate by the principal actors.

Cameroon: Opposition adaptation to persistent administrative constraints

The reorganization of the MRC suggests that administrative pressures may increasingly influence how opposition parties structure their leadership and prepare for elections. A September 17 court decision declining jurisdiction over an urgent application concerning the party's leadership did not resolve the underlying dispute. The party's next convention and the authorities' response to its leadership arrangements will offer indications of whether opposition adaptation can preserve meaningful electoral participation or whether administrative constraints will stifle political competition.

Côte d'Ivoire: Electoral reform and uncertainty over institutional responsibilities

With Côte d'Ivoire's Independent Electoral Commission dissolved and no replacement fully established, the division of electoral responsibilities remains contested. The government's proposal to distribute these functions among three bodies contrasts with opposition calls for a more unified and independent authority. Pending decisions will determine who oversees voter registration, how electoral institutions coordinate, and whether preparations can proceed on schedule. Delays or unclear mandates could prolong political mistrust even if the reforms are intended to remedy shortcomings in the previous system.

The Gambia: Service-delivery grievances and the responsiveness of political institutions

President Barrow's commitment to improve electricity supply by the end of October provides a concrete near-term measure of government responsiveness. Sustained outages, or renewed restrictions on peaceful demonstrations over service delivery, would suggest that public grievances remain unresolved even as electoral competition intensifies.

WEAK SIGNALS OF SECURITY FRAGILITY

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Niger: Military reorganization and the consolidation of authority within the junta

The arrests and command changes following Niger's late-August mutiny may strengthen the junta leadership's control without improving cohesion across the armed forces. Appointing trusted commanders could marginalize other officers, although the extent of any factional consolidation remains unclear. The resulting distribution of authority will matter for relations between the ruling leadership and units deployed against insurgent groups.

Mali: Insurgent attacks against strategic military infrastructure

The attacks around Sévaré and Kona raise questions about the capacity of jihadist forces to threaten military infrastructure through the combined use of drones, mortars, and other assault methods. The reported targeting of aviation facilities is particularly consequential given the importance of air mobility, surveillance, and fire support to Malian counterinsurgency operations. These methods are not necessarily new, and isolated attacks do not establish a decisive shift in insurgent capabilities. However, repeated threats to defended installations could compel the armed forces to devote additional resources to protecting bases and equipment, potentially reducing their freedom to conduct operations elsewhere. The frequency, coordination, and effects of subsequent attacks will help clarify whether a more sustained operational challenge is emerging.

Benin: Civilian vulnerability despite improvements in reported security outcomes

The contrast between declining reported terrorism-related fatalities and continued disruption to education in northern Benin reveals an important dimension of civilian insecurity. The government's decision to relocate schools from threatened localities demonstrates that some communities remain exposed even as other previously closed establishments have reopened. Improvements in security may be uneven across territories and public services.

Changes in civilian mobility, school attendance, and the ability of communities to maintain ordinary economic activities may therefore provide a more complete indication of whether the security situation is stabilizing. Persistent disruption despite fewer fatalities would warrant particular attention.

Cameroon: Threats to community cooperation in the Far North

The circumstances surrounding the attack at Madegoua raise concerns about the vulnerability of communities that cooperate with security forces. Local reports suggested that the killings may have been connected to the recovery of ammunition by a community vigilance committee, although this possible retaliatory motive remains unconfirmed. Regardless of the precise circumstances, attacks of this nature can undermine confidence in local protection arrangements, particularly where residents fear exposure to armed-group reprisals. A weakening of community cooperation would have implications beyond the immediate locality, potentially affecting the intelligence and early-warning relationships on which security operations depend. The response of security forces and the protection afforded to exposed communities will be important developments to monitor.

Northwestern Nigeria: The evolving relationship between militant activity and criminal economies

Operations against suspected Lakurawa members in Sokoto State, including the interception of individuals reportedly transporting stolen livestock, draw attention to the possible connections between militant activity and established criminal economies in the northwest. Livestock theft, kidnapping, smuggling, and control over local commercial routes provide opportunities for armed organizations to obtain resources and establish relationships with other networks. These interactions do not necessarily indicate formal alliances among jihadist organizations and criminal groups, whose objectives and organizational structures remain distinct. The emerging concern is whether opportunistic economic relationships develop into more durable arrangements that strengthen armed groups' mobility, financing, or local influence. Further evidence of sustained cooperation, rather than individual incidents, would be needed to establish such a shift.

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In response to these vulnerabilities, several initiatives and institutional mechanisms offer opportunities to strengthen resilience. Their potential depends on implementation, credible public engagement, and demonstrable improvements in political accountability or civilian security.

Strengthen parliamentary oversight of fiscal adjustment in Senegal.

The country's parliamentary scrutiny of fiscal policy provides a channel for examining public debt, the distributional consequences of adjustment measures, and protections for vulnerable households. Greater transparency concerning fiscal choices, sustained legislative oversight, and meaningful consultation with affected communities could help reconcile economic stabilization with public confidence. These institutions offer a source of resilience when scrutiny can influence policy decisions and ensure that competing economic priorities receive public consideration.

Connect security investments to the restoration of civilian services in Benin.

Current investments in counterterrorism investigations, forensic capabilities, and intelligence cooperation offer opportunities to identify and disrupt threats before they produce further violence. Their contribution to resilience will depend on whether improved security capabilities help protect transport routes, schools, and essential services in threatened northern communities. Linking security operations with locally adapted civilian-protection measures and community engagement could strengthen the recovery of ordinary economic and social activities.

Strengthen the credibility of Chad's proposed reconciliation process.

The September 15 proposal by Chadian civil-society organizations to establish a National Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission offers a potential mechanism for addressing unresolved grievances and abuses. However, the initiative has not been institutionalized or made operational. Chad's experience with earlier political dialogues and reconciliation commitments, which have often produced limited substantive change, warrants caution. Giving this proposal practical significance would require meaningful participation by victims and civil society, institutional independence, and credible provisions for accountability and reparations. Without such safeguards, another announced reconciliation mechanism could reinforce public skepticism rather than restore confidence.

Advance accountability and reparations through transitional justice in The Gambia.

The September 8 launch of a 24-month, $930,000 U.S.-funded forensic investigation project, implemented through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), offers an opportunity to strengthen the investigative capacity needed to pursue accountability for crimes committed under Yahya Jammeh. This initiative was complemented on September 18 by an agreement to return approximately $2.5 million in recovered corruption proceeds from the United States to The Gambia's Victims Reparation Fund. Together, these developments could strengthen two essential components of transitional justice: credible judicial investigations and meaningful reparations for victims. Their contribution to institutional resilience will depend on effective implementation, the independence of judicial processes, and the transparent administration of reparations.

Safeguard the humanitarian benefits of local mediation in Mali.

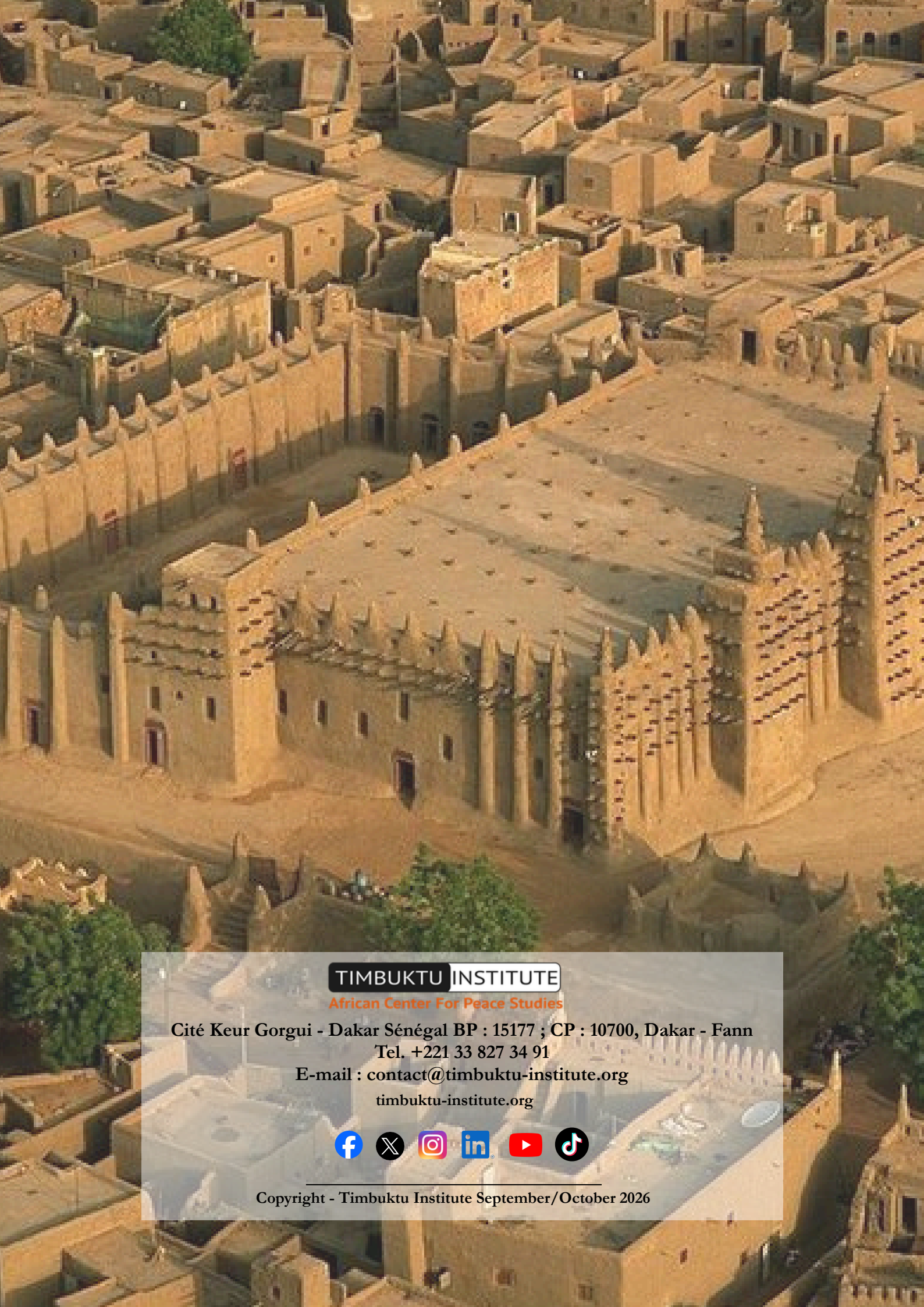
The provisional agreement reached on August 31 to lift the JNIM blockade of Léré illustrates the potential of locally negotiated arrangements to alleviate immediate civilian suffering. Following months of restricted movement and shortages, community mediation offered a possible route toward restoring access and economic activity. Yet such arrangements remain vulnerable where armed groups retain the capacity to reimpose restrictions and where effective guarantees for implementation are absent. Maintaining humanitarian access, monitoring the agreement's implementation, and protecting the interests of affected communities are essential. Local mediation can provide valuable relief, but its immediate humanitarian benefits should not be confused with a durable political or security settlement.

Summary

September exposed a recurring gap between governments' efforts to consolidate state authority and their ability to deliver effective security and accountable governance. Across the central Sahel, sustained insurgent pressure, internal military tensions, and investments in defense capabilities revealed different dimensions of this challenge. Major attacks against defended military positions in Mali exposed continuing operational vulnerabilities, while Niger's post-mutiny reorganization raised questions about the relationship between regime consolidation and military cohesion. Burkina Faso's efforts to expand domestic military production similarly demonstrated that greater autonomy in producing military equipment does not necessarily translate into improved territorial security. Beyond the central Sahel, neighboring states faced different levels and forms of exposure, underscoring the importance of distinguishing preventive security measures from responses to established insurgent violence and civilian insecurity.

Political developments revealed contrasting approaches to managing competition and dissent. Constitutional changes and restrictions on opposition activity in Guinea-Bissau, administrative pressures in Cameroon, and uncertainty surrounding electoral administration in Côte d'Ivoire raised concerns about the institutional safeguards governing political participation. In Senegal and The Gambia, meanwhile, parliamentary scrutiny, public mobilization, and electoral competition remained avenues for demanding accountability amid economic and service-delivery pressures. Public mobilization and political competition should not be interpreted uniformly as signs of fragility. Their consequences depend on whether political institutions accommodate competing interests, protect participation, and respond credibly to public grievances.

Regional diplomacy combined persistent political divisions with selective efforts to preserve cooperation across them. The AES governments continued to promote common institutions and diplomatic positions, although the practical value of arrangements that partly duplicate existing ECOWAS mechanisms remains uncertain. At the same time, engagement by neighboring states demonstrated the continuing need for cooperation across political divisions. Several initiatives also offered potential sources of resilience, including strengthened parliamentary oversight in Senegal, investments in civilian security in Benin, transitional justice efforts in The Gambia, and local humanitarian mediation in Mali. These measures differ considerably in their implementation and demonstrated effects. Looking ahead, the region's trajectory will depend less on announcements of institutional reform, military capacity, or diplomatic coordination than on whether these efforts produce measurable improvements in civilian protection, political accountability, and cooperation across borders.



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