

# Top challenges to media free expression in West Africa

Constant acts of physical attacks arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists and other rights activists in West Africa by state security forces continue to chip away the modest but steady gains in the Freedom of Expression (FOE) environment in the region.



Image by 123RF

[The latest analysis](#) of the freedom of expression situation in West Africa by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) for the third quarter of the year (July-September, 2016) reveals a decline in the number of violations from 45 during the same period in 2015 to 25 this year.

The decline in the incidents of free expression violations is a positive development that gives reason for hope and lends credence to the impact of work by free expression advocacy organisations working in the region. The positive development is, however, negated by continued intolerance on the part of state security officials towards press freedom and citizens' right to freely express themselves.

In the latest report for example, state security officials were the perpetrators of 80% (20 out of the 25) of the violations predominantly in the form of physical attacks, and arbitrary arrests and detentions. During the period, the police in Mali shot and killed a demonstrator. Similarly, the police in Sierra Leone also killed a demonstrator. In both instances, the police opted to use live ammunition to dispel peaceful demonstrators resulting in the casualties.

Another major challenge to freedom of expression in the region – apart from the continued abuses by security forces – is the unending phenomenon of impunity for crimes against journalists and other free expression activists. Crimes committed against journalists and other free expression activists almost always go unpunished, a phenomenon that tends to embolden perpetrators and potential perpetrators of free expression violations.

The latest analysis is part of the MFWA's routine quarterly FOE trends analysis focusing on the West Africa region. The analyses are published each quarter as the West Africa Free Expression Monitor. The current edition of the Monitor featuring all the incidents of violations; presentation of the incidents per country and per perpetrators; as well as a comparison of the situation with trends during the same period in 2015; and recommendation for improving the situation [can be found here](#).

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