

The CIVICUS Monitor Tool is a research tool built by civil society. It aims to share reliable, up-to-date data on the state of civil society freedoms in all countries. Based on a constant analysis of multiple streams of data on civic space, each country is assigned a rating ranging between 0- 100, as follows:



OPEN (81—100) : The state both enables and safeguards the enjoyment of civic space for all people

NARROWED (61 –80) : While individuals and Civil Society Organizations are generally allowed to express their rights, violations occur.

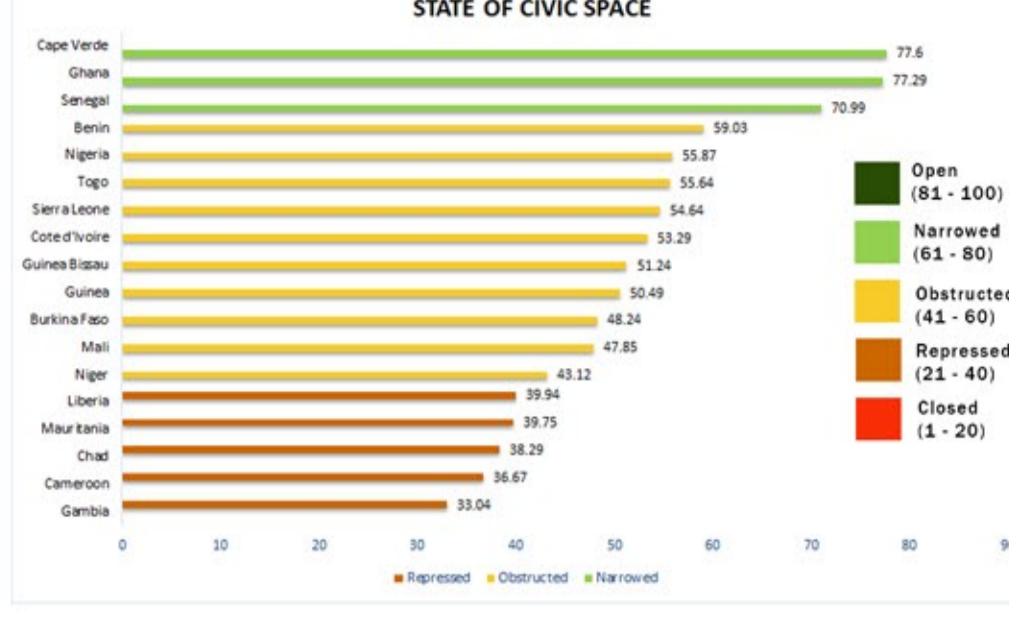
OBSTRUCTED (41—60) : Civic space is heavily contested by power holders, who impose a combination of legal and practical constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights

REPRESSED (21—40) : Civic space is heavily constrained. Active individuals and civil society members who criticize power holders risk surveillance, harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, injury and death

CLOSED (0—20) : There is complete closure - in law and in practice - of civic space. An atmosphere of fear and violence prevails, where state and powerful non-state actors are routinely



CIVIC SPACE STATUS IN WEST AFRICA



In the last few months, the Civicus Monitor Update has reported on series of protests and strikes against austerity measures in West Africa. Gambia is currently at the bottom of the ratings whereas Cape Verde is the only country in the 'Open' category followed by Senegal and Ghana in the 'Narrowed' category according to the ratings. Most countries are however in the 'Obstructed' category with a couple of 'Repressed' outliers such as Cameroon, Mauritania and Chad. Issues regarding this trend has been identified as criminal defamation (and press offenses being criminalised), with excessive violence towards protesters in (Togo, Guinea, Niger and Mali).

HIGHLIGHTS

West Africans have continued to demand transparency, accountability and good governance from their governments

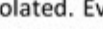
- On 26-29 March the protection of victims of Trafficking in Persons (TIPs), training was organised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), for 42 Sierra Leone government and civil society representatives to improve the delivery of quality assistance to victims of trafficking. This training was held in response to the sexual exploitation or forced labour among young boys and girls in Sierra Leone. These victims are being lured from rural destinations into staying with family members in big towns and cities, and promised that they will be taken care of, only to find themselves forced to beg in the streets. Sanusi Savage, the IOM Head of Office in Sierra Leone in her speech noted that "Migrant assistance is IOM's priority, and we will continue to provide needed capacity building support to Government and other partners to enable them render the required assistance to victims of trafficking in persons."



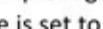
GOVERNANCE

One of the main pillars of democracy, elections, is a constant cause for tension in West Africa.

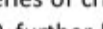
- The Movement for Democratic Alternation (MADEM-G15), the second political force in the Parliament of Guinea-Bissau with 27 deputies, and the Social Renewal Party (PRS), the third with 21 parliamentarians, refused to participate in the work of the new Parliament until a new election of the table of the Popular National Assembly (ANP) is made. In an interview with DW Africa, spokesman of the MADEM-G15, Djibril Baldé said "Our position is that we will not change the name and we will go to court, since all the rules, all the legal provisions of the Parliament have been violated. Even unconstitutional acts have been practiced, such as violation of the right to vote secret, which the law reserves for deputies".



- Mauritania has set its first round of the next presidential elections to succeed President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on 22 June who is stepping down after completing his second and final term in office. If there is no outright winner, a runoff vote is set to be held on 6 July under a presidential decree. Candidates on the other hand have been given until 8 May to file their bid to contest during the next presidential elections. Several major figures have already declared their intentions to run including minister Mohamed Ould Cheikh, a close associate of the current president.



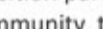
- A civil society organisation, the Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA), which served as a key election observation group in the 2019 elections, have stated that the nation needed a new electoral law to enhance the integrity of elections going forward. The CTA, which presented its report on the 2019 general elections indicated that some forces beyond the control of INEC were responsible for the series of crisis the electoral body ran into during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. The CTA further believes that the attempt to rebuild electoral credibility must start with the law. The incoming National Assembly must work in collaboration with INEC, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to firm up the electoral laws. They added "We are prepared to make our technical contributions in this regard for there is the need to give INEC more powers to reflect the presumed independence of the body."



ELECTION

Civil society across the region engages in various advocacy efforts both directed towards policy changes as well as for the direct benefits of citizens.

- Over 15,000 people rallied in Mali's Capital, Bamako, to protest the president's failure to stem a surge of intercommunal violence in the country. The demonstration was organised by muslim religious leaders, civil society groups and opposition parties including organisations representing the majority-muslim herding community two weeks after the massacre of over 153 people in a Fulani village.



- Hundreds of Cameroonian women gathered in Yaounde on 18 April to call on government to stop killings in the anglophone regions of Cameroon. This gathering was organised by Elizabeth Mankaa and brought together over 700 women from various cultural associations at Yaounde. Prime minister Joseph Dion Ngute appealed the military is joining the fight and called for separatist to surrender. Daniel Mukete a political analyst has criticised that the government cannot declare war and deploy heavily armed troops and expect separatists to disarm. Mukete has however pleaded with the government to enable the conditions for an inclusive dialogue to be set and allow people to freely express their minds.



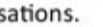
- In ENUGU- NO, less than 63 Women's Organisations, Activists, Scholars, Civil Society and Human Rights Organisations in Nigeria have threatened to take legal action against violation of rights of over 100 women who were allegedly assaulted, humiliated and sexually harassed at a night club in Abuja. They have demanded that the federal authorities particularly the Police and the FCT Minister, investigate all the allegations of abuse, ill-treatment and violence including rape and other forms of sexual assaults, to which these women were subjected, and where the agents are found culpable, prosecute them before a competent court without delay. The government has however been challenged to provide psychosocial support and compensation for the victims.



- Bloggers in Mauritania staged a protest in front of the civil prison in the capital city of Nouakchott demanding the release of their colleagues Abdel Rahman Ould Weddi and Sheikh Ould Gedo who were arrested on charges of false news in March. The protesters described the arrests as blatant violation of the law and freedom of opinion and expression. They called on human rights organisations, parties and social forces to stand together with the detained bloggers.



- The president of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio has declared a national emergency on rape and sexual violence following a public outcry over the high number of rapes of young girls in the West African country. According to the country's police, there were over 8,500 reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence in 2018. In the first half of 2012 official police statistics, 632 cases were recorded. Bio has authorized that perpetrators of sexual violence be charged with aggravated assault and face up to life imprisonment if found guilty. He also envisions that all public hospitals provide free medical services for rape and other sexual assault victims in his country. Notwithstanding these other published reports have advice that the success of this vision can only be effective if he involve and learn from civil society organisations.



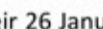
ADVOCACY



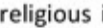
CIVIL SOCIETY ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Spaces for group action, citizen engagement and organization are fundamental to good governance and ensuring democracy. The ability of citizens and organisations to actively engage with government depends on the availability of such avenues for their engagement both online and offline.

- On April 5, the Ministry of Territorial Administration issued a press release banning demonstrations between April 6 and 13 planned by Cameroon's major opposition, Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC) party. The Minister accused the MRC of destabilising the country and of an act of provocation, having chosen to organise demonstrations on April 6, a date which marks the anniversary of a 1984 coup attempt to oust President Biya. The ban on MRC demonstrations comes as the party's leader, Maurice Kamto, alongside other supporters went to court to hear the verdict on a habeas corpus request after being arrested in their 26 January protest.

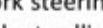


- The Malian authorities has issued a decree to prohibit the intended civic march of the National council of civil society (CNCS) on 2 April. A march that was intended not only to pay tribute to victims of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in northern Mali but also to challenge the government for the security of people and their property. The CNCSC immediately animated at a press conference denouncing the violation of freedom of demonstration at a time when the whole nation ought to stand in tribute with victims of atrocities. The president Boureima Allaye Toure, has pledged to call his members to march together with the religious if authorised.

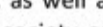


Leadership initiatives continues to play a pivotal role in the activities of women and youth across the region.

- The African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), is an initiative supported by the African Union (AU) and the United Nations focusing on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN. The African Women's Network steering committee meeting ended in Monrovia with Liberia's former President calling for a stronger commitment to solidify togetherness. The former president, however, called on all participants of the meeting to leave with a stronger commitment to be able to promote this institution which have been brought together for a common purpose".



- Not fewer than 500 women from across the African continent, including politicians, first ladies, heads of government agencies and diplomats, as well as stakeholders comprising development partners, religious and civil society organisations, women associations and youth groups, are expected to gather next month in Rwanda for the 2019 edition of the African Women in Leadership, AWLO, conference. Rwanda has been chosen as the host country based on its recognition as gender development strides and registered achievements in women empowerment and leadership. The keynote address is said to be delivered by President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia. "The AWLO conference is an annual meeting for strategizing as well as building capacities to advance women's leadership."



- Mimi Mefo, a 29-year old Cameroon has been honoured for her bravery with the freedom of expression award-which celebrates some of the world's greatest journalists, activists, artists and campaigners. In the very repressive and self-censored country of Cameroon, she is one of less than a handful of journalists working without fear or favour from authority despite being arrested and detained. She said the award is not just for her but dedicated to all those in the fight for press freedom and it is a reminder that she must continuously work with objectivity to be a voice for the voiceless.



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West Africa Civil Society E-Directory

Register on the online directory created to map out all Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the region.

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Questions/comments: re-