GDI Government Defence Integrity Index

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL Defence & Security



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DEFENCE GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION RISK IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Policy Brief | June 2026

Situated within a global landscape defined by a new era of militarisation, where rising defence expenditures frequently outpace the development of institutional safeguards, this policy brief explores how opaque defence governance, weak oversight and embedded corruption risks undermine security sector governance and democratisation. Drawing on regional findings from the 2025 Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI), this brief assesses defence corruption risks across 17 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. While military secrecy is often invoked as a prerequisite for national security, the evidence reveals that transparency is, in fact, a strategic enabler of peace and stability.

Key findings:

- Defence spending remains difficult to trace and scrutinise due to aggregated budgets, limited financial transparency, and restricted audit access.
- Parliamentary oversight is weak or ineffective in nearly two-thirds of countries, despite widespread formal mandates.
- Rules in defence governace exist, but implementation lags far behind: legal frameworks average 44/100, while their effectiveness scores just 7/100.
- Corruption risks are not explicitly addressed in the military doctrine of any country assessed.

Regional context: Security challenges and democratic backsliding

Violent extremism and unconstitutional regime changes in Sub-Saharan Africa have exacerbated state fragility and human insecurity across the region. Combined with this intense instability, the secrecy surrounding national defence establishments enables corruption to operate unchecked within the sector. In Sub-Saharan Africa, corruption has hollowed out military effectiveness, enabled the diversion of arms to non-state actors, fuelled grievances that drive violent extremism, and undercut public confidence in state institutions. In fragile environments, the leakage of dangerous weapons can strengthen armed groups and criminal networks, reinforcing cycles of conflict, insecurity, and political instability, including recurring coups.

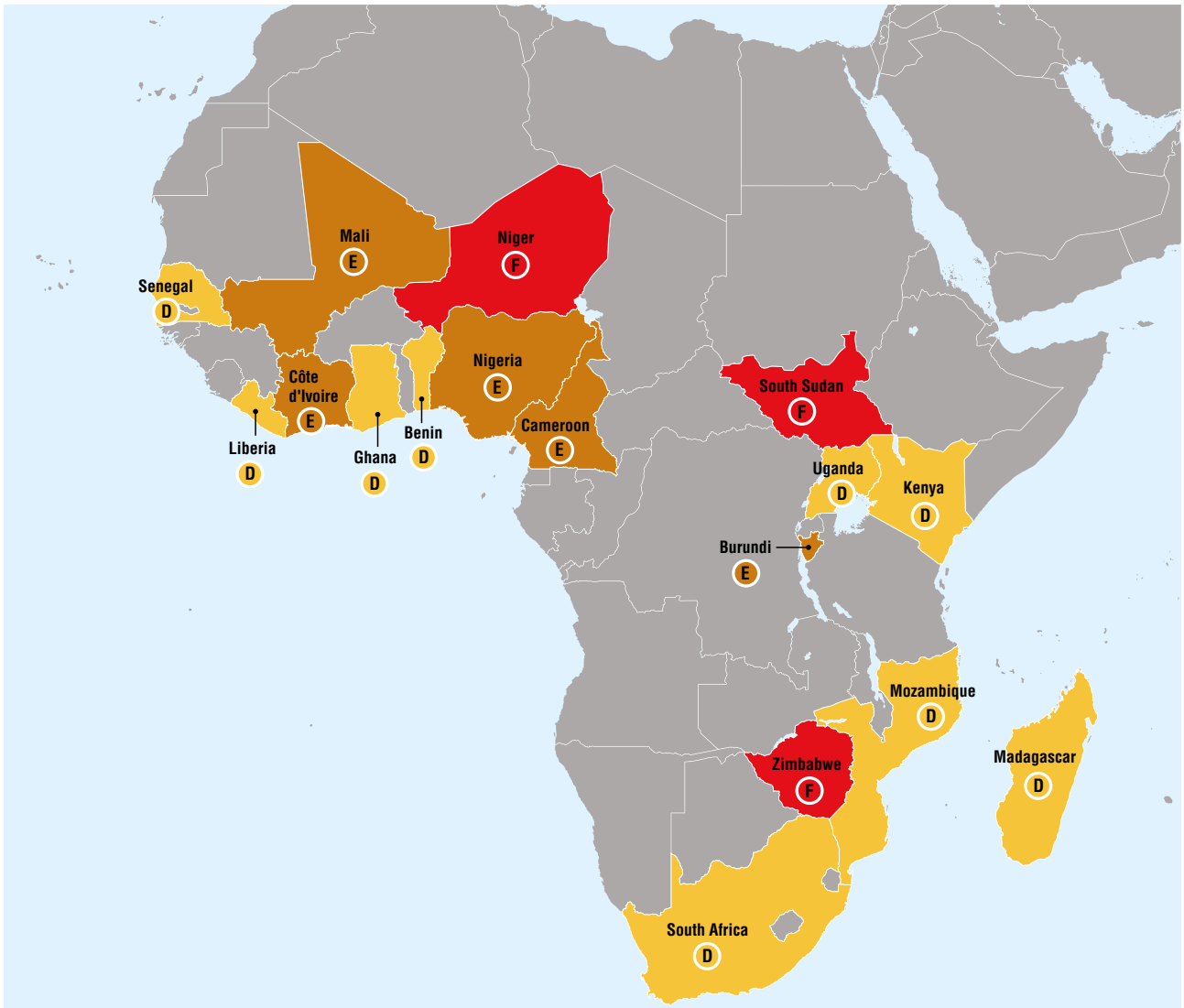
Continuing with Transparency International Defence and Security's (TI-DS) effort to address corruption in the defence sector, this brief provides the first comprehensive update on the state of institutional resilience to corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa since 2020. It leverages the 2025 Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) Sub-Saharan Africa dataset, the only research tool that thoroughly examines the quality of defence sector institutional controls.

Since 2020, the security environment in Sub-Saharan Africa has been shaped by the convergence of violent extremism, armed conflict, organised crime, political instability, weak rule of law, and repeated unconstitutional changes of government. The region faces multiple, overlapping security threats that are placing increasing pressure on defence and security institutions. In response, governments have increasingly relied on military solutions to address internal security challenges, expanding the role and resources of defence establishments.

At the same time, the region's democratic trajectory reflects a complex interplay between institutional resilience and sustained backsliding. While public commitment to democratic governance remains, confidence in democratic performance has declined. In some contexts, this erosion of trust has translated into growing tolerance for military intervention when civilian authorities are viewed as corrupt or incapable of delivering security and public services.

These trends directly shape defence governance. As democratic checks weaken and executive authority expands, defence and security establishments become more insulated from scrutiny, creating conditions in which corruption risks can proliferate and persist.

2025 GDI Scores: Corruption risks in Sub-Saharan Africa



Benin	Burundi	Cameroon	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Kenya	Liberia	Madagascar	Mali
44	17	17	32	33	40	33	33	24

Mozambique	Niger	Nigeria	Senegal	South Africa	South Sudan	Uganda	Zimbabwe
35	9	28	39	48	13	38	14

Scoring rubric with levels of institutional resilience and corruption risk

Range of Scores				Corruption Risk
A	83	– 100	Very robust institutional resilience to corruption	Very low
B	67	– 82	Robust institutional resilience to corruption	Low
C	50	– 66	Modest institutional resilience to corruption	Moderate
D	33	– 49	Weak institutional resilience to corruption	High
E	17	– 32	Very weak institutional resilience to corruption	Very high
F	0	– 16	Limited to no institutional resilience to corruption	Critical

2025 GDI findings: High-priority risk areas in defence sectors across the region

The 2025 GDI findings reveal systemic challenges in three major governance areas:



Financial transparency is weak, particularly in relation to secret spending and off-budget expenditure. Defence budgets are frequently aggregated, audit access is restricted, and oversight of actual expenditures remains limited, reducing the traceability of defence spending. This is reflected in performance concentrated in the lower score ranges, with only two countries exceeding 50/100.



Procurement remains a systemic high-risk area, with around 71% of countries assessed falling within very high or critical risk scoring band. This reflects restricted competition, extensive use of exemptions, and weak oversight. Processes are frequently weakly formalised, enabling discretionary decision-making and limiting transparency across planning, contract awards, and delivery.



Military operations present critical corruption risks. With a regional average score of 12/100, institutional safeguards are weakest in operational contexts, where limited transparency and urgent decision-making create vulnerabilities in logistics, contracting, and resource allocation. The absence of anti-corruption measures in military doctrine, planning, and training further exacerbates these risks.



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Across all areas of governance, four consistent risk patterns were observed in the 2025 GDI findings for the region:

1. **Secrecy and opacity play a central role.** Defence institutions routinely invoke national security to restrict access to budgets, expenditures, and procurement data, often beyond legitimate needs.
   - **In practice, 16 out of 17 countries score 0 on secret spending, indicating near-total opacity in classified defence expenditure.**

2. A **persistent gap exists between legal frameworks and implementation.** While most countries have established anti-corruption laws and oversight mechanisms, enforcement remains weak, with formal provisions rarely translating into consistent accountability.
   - **This gap is stark in access to information: while the average legal framework scores 44/100, effectiveness drops to just 7/100.**

3. **Oversight institutions are systematically constrained.** Parliamentary and audit bodies often lack access to information, technical expertise, and independence, while executive dominance further limits their effectiveness.
   - **In practice, parliamentary oversight is limited or ineffective in 65% of countries, despite 88% having formal mandates on paper.**

4. Corruption risks are reinforced by **governance conditions in high-discretion environments**. Areas involving rapid decision-making, limited transparency, and exceptional procedures—such as operational deployments, emergency spending, and procurement—are particularly exposed, with standard controls frequently bypassed.
   - **No country assessed explicitly addresses corruption risks in its military doctrine, underscoring the absence of systematic safeguards in operational planning and execution.**

Key Drivers Weakening Oversight



Executive Dominance

Centralised executive control weakens parliamentary and audit independence, and limits scrutiny of defence decision-making.



Disrupted Democratic Processes

Coups, transitions, and military-led governments suspend or weaken formal oversight institutions.



Defence Exceptionalism and Secrecy

Security exemptions and over-classification restrict access to defence information and reduce accountability.



Capacity and Resource Constraints

Limited expertise, staffing, and financial autonomy weaken oversight effectiveness.

Key Drivers Enabling Secrecy and Procurement Opacity



Ambiguous National Security Justifications

Broad security exemptions allow authorities to withhold information beyond legitimate needs.



Concentration of Decision-Making Authority

Executive control over classification and procurement limits independent scrutiny.



Fragmented Disclosure

Defence budgets and procurement data are disclosed inconsistently and incompletely.



Normalisation of Exceptional Procedures

Emergency procurement and exceptional measures increasingly operate as standard practice.

Key Drivers Undermining Integrity in Military Operations



Weak Institutionalisation of Corruption Risk Management

Corruption is rarely recognised as an operational threat within military doctrine, planning frameworks, or deployment procedures, resulting in limited prevention and mitigation measures.



Reactive Rather than Anticipatory Risk Management

Corruption risks are rarely integrated into operational planning processes, resulting in responses that occur after vulnerabilities have materialised rather than being identified and mitigated in advance.



Insufficient Operational Integrity Capacity

Anti-corruption and integrity considerations are rarely integrated into routine military education and pre-deployment preparation, leaving personnel ill-equipped to respond to corruption risks in the field.



Reliance on High-Risk Contracting

Operations depend heavily on local contractors, emergency procurement, and complex supply chains, creating opportunities for rent-seeking, favouritism, and diversion of resources.

Risks of inaction

In a context of evolving security threats, shifting regional power dynamics, and rising defence expenditure across Sub-Saharan Africa, strengthening transparency and accountability in the defence sector is a strategic necessity. Without meaningful reforms, governments risk being ill-equipped to respond effectively to increasingly complex security challenges.

Failure to address defence governance weaknesses carries significant consequences.

- At the political level, fragile defence integrity undermines democratic gains by concentrating power within the executive, weakening civilian oversight, and enabling the consolidation of authoritarian practices.
- At the financial level, opaque systems and limited oversight enable the misallocation and diversion of substantial public resources, reducing the funds available for operational readiness and capability development.
- At the operational level, corruption directly affects the effectiveness of security forces.
- Mismanaged procurement, inadequate resource allocation, and compromised command structures can reduce the ability of armed forces to respond to threats, increasing the likelihood of mission failure. This is particularly critical in regions facing acute insecurity.

Policy implications and reform priorities

The findings highlight that strengthening defence governance in Sub-Saharan Africa requires moving beyond formal frameworks towards effective implementation.



Defence oversight

- **Enhance parliamentary scrutiny:** Parliamentary defence committees should be empowered to summon expert witnesses, access relevant documentation, and hold defence officials accountable for their decisions. Parliamentary recommendations should be systematically reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated into policy and practice by Ministries of Defence.
- **Empower audit institutions:** Governments should ensure that audit bodies have access to the necessary information to conduct comprehensive scrutiny of the defence sector. Internal and external audit bodies should have the expertise, independence, and mandate to conduct regular financial and performance audits, while audit recommendations should be systematically considered and acted upon by Ministries of Defence.
- **Improve procurement integrity:** Governments and Ministries of Defence should establish comprehensive procurement assessment of needs based on a national security strategy that guides future acquisitions planning and avoids opportunistic purchases. These assessments of needs and their implementation should be reviewed by external auditors and parliaments.



Access to information and secrecy

- **Reinforce access to information legal frameworks:** Governments should adopt or strengthen comprehensive access-to-information legislation that explicitly applies to the defence sector. These frameworks should define the scope of permissible secrecy, establish disclosure obligations, and include independent appeal mechanisms to ensure accountability.
- **Improve implementation through clear guidance and legal standards:** Governments should adopt practical guidance based on established standards such as the 2014 Tshwane Principles. This includes applying harm and public interest tests to determine whether information should be withheld, and providing training to legal officers and public officials responsible for classification and disclosure decisions.
- **Limit excessive secrecy in defence procurement:** Governments should review and narrow the use of classification in procurement processes, ensuring that secrecy is applied only where strictly necessary and proportionate. Legal provisions allowing national security exemptions should be clearly defined and subject to oversight, with minimum transparency requirements maintained throughout the procurement cycle.

Military operations and integrity framework

- **Integrate corruption risks into military doctrine and planning:** Governments should develop or update military doctrines to explicitly recognise corruption as an operational risk. This includes embedding anti-corruption considerations into operational planning, logistics, and contracting processes to ensure that integrity is treated as a core component of mission effectiveness.
- **Institutionalise comprehensive anti-corruption training for military and civilian personnel:** Implement annual anti-corruption general training for all ranks encompassing different themes identifying corruption, bribery, conflicts of interests and reporting corruption. Implement specific pre-deployment training to military operations and tackling corruption risks associated contracting during in operations
- **Strengthen and operationalise ethical frameworks:** Governments should develop, update, and widely disseminate clear and comprehensive codes of conduct for both military and civilian defence personnel. These frameworks should provide practical guidance on managing corruption risks and be supported by regular training and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Enhance reporting mechanisms and whistleblower protections:** Ministries of Defence should establish secure, confidential, and accessible reporting channels for corruption-related concerns. Robust legal and institutional protections for whistleblowers must be implemented and enforced to prevent retaliation and encourage reporting.



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Transparency International (TI) is the world's leading non-governmental anti-corruption organisation, addressing corruption and corruption risk in its many forms through a network of more than 100 national chapters worldwide.

Transparency International Defence & Security (TI-DS) works to reduce corruption in defence and security sectors worldwide.

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