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NAVIGATING THROUGH A
VIOLENT INSURGENCY IN

MALI

On April 14, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), al-Qaeda's branch in Mali that operates across the Sahel, released a statement claiming COVID-19 is a "God-sent soldier" that is weakening the Malian Armed Forces and the "invaders." As the government introduces movement restrictions and international actors suspend rotations of troops, the COVID-19 outbreak did not prevent the March 29 parliamentary vote from being held amid low voter turnout and rising tensions nationwide. The pandemic comes at a time when the country has experienced another uptick in jihadist militant and intercommunal violence, which has claimed up to 300 civilian lives since January.

Unabated violence

Since the beginning of the year, armed conflict in Mali has resulted in more than **1,000 reported fatalities**, the third highest number in Africa after Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The epicenter of the violence is the borderland region of **Mopti**, where jihadist militants have long capitalized on local conflicts over land ownership and livelihood security. In recent weeks, however, the security situation has increasingly deteriorated in Tombouctou and especially **Gao**, where suspected JNIM militants attacked a Malian army camp killing at least 25 soldiers on April 6.



Ngaina | 25 March 2020
After clashes with security guards, suspected Katiba Macina (JNIM) militants kidnap opposition leader Soumaila Cissé near Niafunké in Tombouctou. As of April 15, he is still held captive.

Bamba | 6 April 2020
JNIM attacks a Malian army base in Gao, killing 25 soldiers.

Koffel | 5 April 2020
Clashes between Islamic State (ISGS) and Katiba Macina (JNIM) militants cause more than 100 fatalities in the Deboye area of Mopti. ISGS is forced to withdraw towards Konna.

Ouenkoro | 28 March 2020
JNIM fighters attack villages in Ouenkoro, clashing with local Dan Na Ambassagou self-defense militias and reportedly killing 12.

Civilians continue to be a major target of violence in Mali. In the first three months of 2020, ACLED records nearly 300 civilian fatalities across the country, increasing by an estimated 90% compared to the previous quarter. While communal militias are responsible for more than half of all civilian deaths, the government's heavy-handed tactics have resulted in an increasing civilian toll, especially among the Fulani pastoralist communities of Mopti and Segou.

