

Mali: COVID-19 and violent extremism –
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The COVID-19 pandemic has become yet another challenge against the backdrop of the state's retreat in a large part of its territory. The first confirmed cases were recorded on March 25, 2020. The government has taken a number of measures, including:

- A special fund of 100 billion for vulnerable families
- Free electricity for poor families for a semester
- The "every Malian has a mask" initiative
- The introduction of a curfew

These measures were fairly respected, although the management of the pandemic by the public authorities was not appreciated by the population. In regional and district capitals, the populations protested against the government's non-compliance with the measures taken, in particular: the unavailability of masks, the lack of transparency in the management of the funds allocated for the preventive measures and the uselessness of the curfew in the face of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. The inconsistency of the measures taken by the public authorities to counter the pandemic contrast with the organization of legislative elections and the non-closure of mosques. Demonstrations, therefore, broke out across the country, sometimes against the results of the parliamentary elections, sometimes against the curfew and the shortages of water and electricity.

Inside the country, a large part of the population believes that the COVID-19 pandemic is an invention of the authorities to make money or, alternatively, a means for the West to slow the development of Africa. In areas not controlled by the state, the preventive measures taken by the government have not received a favourable response, the armed groups, as well as the populations, find them ridiculous. The wearing of masks, hand washing with soap and barrier gestures are strongly vilified in mosques, public spaces and families compounds.

The two rival groups – Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), affiliated with Al Qaeda, and the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (EIGS), affiliated with the Islamic State – have provided guidelines to their followers to prevent the spread of the virus by issuing official public statements. Al Qaeda even emphasized in its message that "Islam is a religion based on hygiene".

They are taking advantage of the situation and are working to encourage more community support for their fight. As the coronavirus pandemic spreads and penetrates deeper into Mali, the risk that terrorist groups will continue to exploit state weaknesses to gain support and strength will increase. Whether in the so-called North, Center and South regions or in Bamako, the killings continued with the onset of the pandemic.