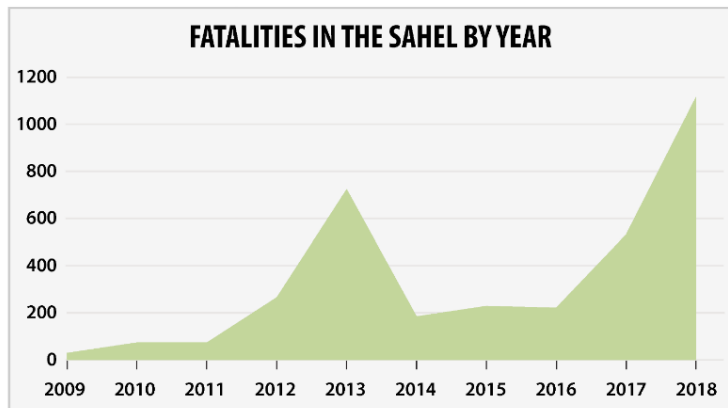
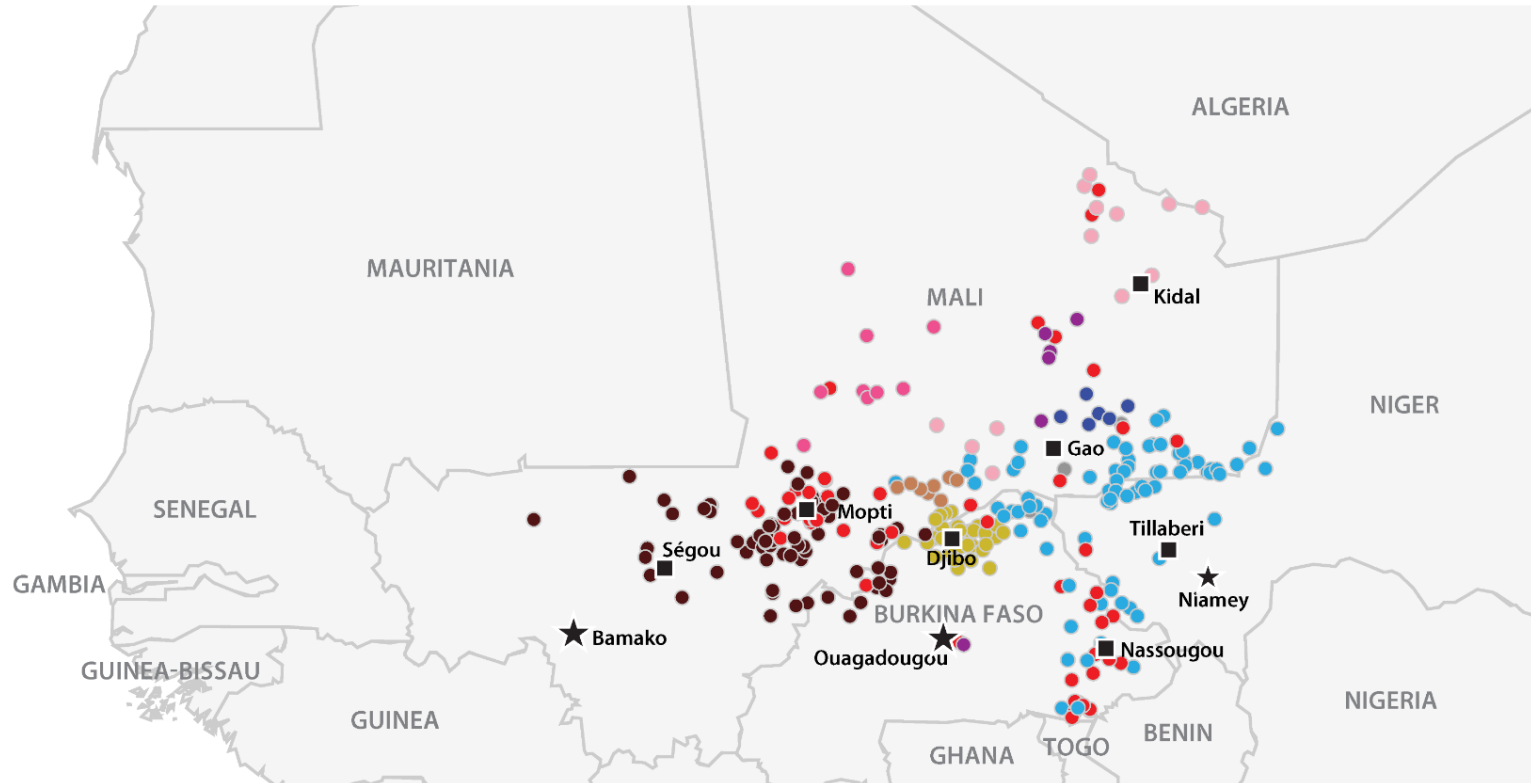




VIOLENT EVENTS LINKED TO MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN THE SAHEL IN 2018



Note: Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, this graphic shows violent events involving the listed groups in 2018. Data on attacks or fatalities does not attempt to distinguish the perpetrators of the events. Group listings are intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered official designations. Due to the fluid nature of many groups, the listed affiliations may change.

Sources: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Menastream, SITE Intelligence Group, Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC).

- **Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM)** – JNIM is a coalition of the following militant Islamist groups, founded in March of 2017 and led by the leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly:
 - **Ansar Dine** – Founded by Iyad Ag Ghaly, after he failed to become leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which pushed for secession in Mali in 2012. The group operates in the region around Kidal.
 - **Macina Liberation Front (FLM)** – Founded in 2015 by Amadou Koufa and operational in the Mopti region. The group is believed to include former members of Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).
 - **Katiba Serma** – Led by Abu Jalil al Fulani and operational in the Serma region between Gao and Mopti. The group is a semi-autonomous subgroup of FLM.
 - **AQIM Sahara** – Branch of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) led by Djamel Okacha (a.k.a. Yahya Abu al Hammam) (deceased). The group is active across Mali and the southwest corner of Niger.
 - **Al Mourabitoun** – Led by Hasan al Ansari (deceased) after co-founder Mokhtar Belmokhtar went into hiding or was killed. Al Mourabitoun was a merger between Belmokhtar's Those Who Sign in Blood and MUJAO. The group is most active in the region surrounding Gao.
 - **Ansaroul Islam** – Founded in 2016 by Malaam Ibrahim Dicko (deceased) and based in the Soum Province of Burkina Faso. The group expanded its operations further south of the country in 2018.
 - **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)** – Founded in May of 2015 by Abu Walid al Sahrawi, former member of the MUJAO faction that became al Mourabitoun. The group's activity stretches out from the shared borders of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.
 - **Katiba Salaheddine** – Founded by Sultan Ould Badi, former member of AQIM, and co-founder of MUJAO in 2011. Badi allied himself with ISGS's al Sahrawi, a colleague from his days with MUJAO, in 2016.
 - **Unaffiliated** – Active militant Islamist groups who either could not or have chosen not to claim responsibility for attacks.

Highlights

A review of violent events involving militant Islamist groups in the Sahel between 2010 and 2018 highlights that:

- The number of reported violent events linked to militant Islamic group activity in the Sahel has been doubling every year since 2016 (from 90 in 2016 to 194 in 2017 to 465 in 2018). Reported fatalities linked to militant Islamist groups has similarly doubled in recent years (from 218 in 2016 to 529 in 2017 to 1,110 in 2018).
- Violence against civilians has also expanded. Reported events of violence against civilians jumped from 18 in 2016 (representing 20 percent of all violent episodes) to 39 in 2017 to 160 in 2018. Violence against civilians accounted for some 34 percent of all reported violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel in 2018.
- Mali remains the focal point of militant violence, accounting for roughly 64 percent of the reported events in the Sahel in 2018.
- The surge in activity reflects greater operational capacity and cooperation of the militant Islamist groups in the region. Roughly half of all violent events in 2018 are linked to the coalition of groups operating under the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) umbrella, which formed in March 2017. The Macina Liberation Front (FLM) was linked to more than 40 percent of JNIM activity in 2018. Two of the newest militant groups, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Ansaroul Islam, are linked to 26 percent and 15 percent, respectively, of all reported violent events in the Sahel since the beginning 2018.
- After years of avoiding militant Islamist violence, Burkina Faso has experienced a rapid growth in reported events (from 3 in 2015, to 12 in 2016, 29 in 2017, to 137 in 2018).
- The militant Islamist groups in the Sahel typically operate in distinct geographic concentrations. Four theaters stand out:
 - JNIM in central and northern Mali
 - Ansaroul Islam in the area around Djibo, Burkina Faso
 - ISGS along the Mali-Niger border
 - JNIM and ISGS activity in eastern Burkina Faso
- A time lapse review highlights the rapid acceleration of violent episodes linked to militant Islamist groups. Prior to 2012, only one militant Islamist group, AQIM, operated in Mali. By 2018, more than 10 groups were active in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Violent episodes in 2018 exceeded all activity observed from 2009-2015 combined.