

## “How can you impose taxes on those who want to help the poor?”

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the Sahel

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This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 09 February - 30 March 2026, assessing observed narratives based on 14 months of systematic social media monitoring in [Mali](#) and [Niger](#).



Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access, staff safety and shape community perceptions. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations. By tracking both emerging and entrenched narratives on social media, this briefing provides insight into how public sentiment towards aid actors in Mali and Niger is developing. It aims to support policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

**This briefing is part of a longer-term initiative for Mali and Niger to examine how aid agency acceptance or rejection is expressed on social media.** The content is selected based on predefined lists of UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations and general key words related to humanitarian and development assistance. Comments associated with posts that attracted the highest number of comments were analysed qualitatively to identify dominant narratives. This edition covers examples of

- **public reactions to new fiscal and regulatory measures affecting NGOs, including debates on taxation, transparency, and state oversight in Mali and Niger**
- **perceptions of humanitarian engagement with national actors, including responses to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) sensitisation of Malian armed forces**
- **narratives around international actors in global conflicts, particularly distrust toward the UN and aid system in discussions of the Iran–Israel–US crisis**

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in Mali and Niger but highlights the narratives that are most visible. Public sentiment towards the aid sector develops over time, shaped by how individuals interpret and connect social media content through the lens of personal experience and prior exposure.

**Past editions:** [Even More Unemployment](#) (05-11 Jan), [Hope They Aren't Wearing Microphones](#) (15 Dec-04 Jan), [Madam, You Are Mistaken, You Are Not Nigerien](#) (08-14 Dec), [The AES Must Continue Its Fight](#) (01-07 Dec), [All](#)

## Key Takeaways

### Financial and Regulatory Oversight of NGOs in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso

Between March and April 2026, social media discourse regarding new fiscal and regulatory measures for NGOs and CSOs was captured across **20 posts**, reaching an estimated **262,000 users** (253,000 in Mali and 9,000 in Niger). This content generated **319 comments**, which significantly focused on the comparison of governance styles between Mali and Burkina Faso. Notably, despite the high volume of discussion, hostility toward the aid sector remained very low, with only **1% of comments** expressing critical views towards the aid activities. In Mali, the 10% tax on NGO resources prompted a debate centered on government transparency, while in Niger, the discourse followed the institutionalization of a "Coordination Framework" intended to align NGO activities with national priorities.

## Key Narratives

- **NGOs as essential service providers for vulnerable populations:** A primary narrative in the Malian discourse frames NGOs as vital actors that fill gaps in state service delivery. Commenters expressed concern that the 10% tax would directly reduce the volume of aid reaching those in need, particularly in rural areas where NGOs provide infrastructure.
- **Comparison of state austerity and transparency:** The majority of the discussion in Mali centred on a comparison between the Malian government and the transition authorities in Burkina Faso. Users argued that while Burkina Faso imposes higher taxes (20%) on NGOs, its leadership has demonstrated greater austerity (e.g., leaders renouncing salaries) and visible results in infrastructure, whereas the Malian tax is perceived as an attempt to fund an "opaque" government budget.
- **The requirement for state sovereignty and financial control:** A smaller narrative argues that NGOs currently operate without sufficient state oversight or harmonized accounting.

**"That's their problem. We're in Mali, and the realities are different."** ("Ça c'est leur problème. Nous sommes au Mali et les réalités sont différentes.")

**"NGOs are humanitarian aid organizations, meaning they help the poor. How can you impose taxes on those who want to help the needy?"** ("Les ONG sont des structures d'assistance humanitaire c'est à dire aider les pauvres. Comment ceux qui veulent aider tes démunis tu leur impose des taxes")

## What this tells us

- **Public perception of NGO utility remains:** Unlike other geopolitical topics where NGOs are viewed with suspicion, reactions to fiscal measures showed that some also view the aid sector as necessary.
- **Operational risks outweigh reputational risks:** The primary threat to NGOs in this context is fiscal and administrative, rather than a loss of community acceptance. However, if NGOs are forced to cut programs due to the 10% tax, they must communicate clearly that the reduction is a result of new fiscal requirements to avoid being blamed for "abandoning" communities.
- **Austerity as a benchmark for legitimacy:** The Malian public uses "Burkinabé austerity" as a yardstick. Aid organizations can lean into their own transparency and low overhead narratives to maintain public support, as the audience is currently highly sensitive to how money is managed and where it goes.
- **Institutionalization of oversight in Niger:** The creation of the "Coordination Framework" in Niger suggests that NGOs will likely face increased pressure to show their alignment with national priorities to maintain their operating licenses.

### Mali: IHL Sensitization for National Armed Forces

A Facebook post by the ICRC regarding International Humanitarian Law (IHL) sensitization sessions for the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) in Ménaka reached 5,000 users. A significant portion of the engagement was positive, with users expressing appreciation for the "capacity building" of national forces and offering prayers for the army's success.

These comments framed the partnership between the ICRC and the FAMA as a constructive initiative. While the engagement consisted of a limited number of individual comments, the feedback centered on the professionalization of the military, characterizing the ICRC's technical training in IHL as a contribution to national security efforts.



## Mali and Niger: Social media conversations on the US-Iran conflict

Between February and March 2026, social media discourse in Mali and Niger regarding the Iran-Israel-US conflict was captured across **38 social media posts**, reaching an estimated **442,000 users** (428,000 in Mali and 14,000 in Niger). While the reach

was significant highlighting a large proportion of silent information users, the comment volume was moderate with **144 comments**, of which **47% were critical** toward the UN and the international aid system. The discourse reflects low trust in international mediation. In Mali, the UN is dismissed as a "biased referee" that only enforces rules when they favor the West. In Niger, the UN is characterized as a "malign" entity that thrives on human suffering.

## Key Narratives

- **Perceived lack of neutrality and "Double Standards":** A dominant narrative portrays the UN and its Security Council as biased actors whose actions are dictated by Western interests. Comments frequently cite the lack of enforcement of UN resolutions against Western-aligned states as evidence that international law is applied selectively.
- **Institutional Ineffectiveness :** The UN is characterized as an obsolete or reactive institution that is unable to prevent conflict.
- **Perceived Institutional Profit from Conflict:** Another narrative suggests that international organizations and UN agencies have a financial or operational interest in the persistence of crises. This framing views humanitarian aid not as a solution, but as a sector that requires instability to maintain its presence and funding.

**"The UN thrives on human blood; it needs war to create refugees and displaced people; the UNHCR and the WFP exist because of this; false health alerts must be fabricated so that the WHO can operate everywhere; and the UN is a harbinger of disaster"** ("L'ONU vit dans le sang humain il faut la guerre pour qu'il ait des réfugiés ou déplacés que le HCR et le PAM existe il faut inventer des fausses alertes sanitaires pour que l'ONU existe partout l'ONU est porteuse de malheur")

## What this tells us

- **Continued erosion of trust in the international system:** In the current Malian and Nigerien digital environment, the UN is not viewed as an effective body capable of maintaining peace. .
- **Disillusionment with available instruments:** Reference to "International Law" or "UN Mandates" raise expectations for effective civilian protection.
- **Narrative Spillover:** Hostility originally directed at the UN Security Council often spills over to technical agencies (WFP, WHO, UNHCR). This complicates the ability of purely humanitarian actors to distance themselves from political controversies.
- **Legitimacy through Self-Reliance:** Public trust is increasingly tied to the concept of "Sovereignty." Organizations that are perceived as being directed by external (Western) headquarters face higher barriers to community acceptance than those aligned with regional frameworks like the AES.
- **Operational Risk via "Self-Interest" Narratives:** The accusation that aid actors benefit from conflict is a high-risk narrative. It shifts the perception of aid workers from "helpers" to "profiteers," which can directly impact staff safety, explains the lack of empathy when aid workers are attacked, undermines acceptance and access to vulnerable populations.

## Other resources

Insecurity Insight regularly examines key discussions around aid activities driven by information posted by IP addresses in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sahel, Sudan, and Syria**. Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations. **Subscribe** to our Social Media Monitoring mailing list for regular updates.

## Key numbers

### Mali: Scale of analysis

- Number of posts: 538
- Estimated total reach: 6.7 million social media users
- Total comments analysed: 907

### Comment distribution by organisation type

- General aid sector: 314 comments (34%)
- UN standalone: 293 comments (32%)
- International development actors: 138 comments (4.1%)
- UN agency: 132 comments (14%)
- LNGOs: 97 comments (10%)
- INGOs: 69 comments (7%)
- International humanitarian actors: 1 comments (0.1%)
- Donors: 1 comments (0.1%)

### Distribution of critical comments by actor type:

- UN standalone: 57 critical comments (83%)
- UN agency: 4 critical comments (5%)
- LNGOs: 3 critical comments (4%)
- INGOs: 1 critical comments (1%)
- Donors: 1 critical comment (0.1%)
- General aid sector: 3 critical comments (4%)

### Comment language

- French: 859 comments
- Emojis / no text: 29 comments
- English: 11 comments
- Bambara: 1 comment

### Niger: Scale of analysis

- Number of posts: 350
- Estimated total reach: 630K social media users
- Total comments analysed: 450

### Comment distribution by organisation type

- UN agency: 185 comments (41%)
- LNGOs: 140 comments (31%)
- UN standalone: 86 comments (19%)
- International development actors: 138 comments (4.1%)
- Donors: 7 comments (1%)
- INGOs: 2 comments (0.4%)
- International humanitarian actors: 1 comments (0.2%)
- General aid sector: 19 comments (0.6%)

### Distribution of critical comments by actor type:

- UN standalone: 42 critical comments (80%)
- UN agency: 7 critical comments (13%)
- International humanitarian actors: 1 critical comment (1%)
- General aid sector: 2 critical comments (3%)

### Comment language

- French: 398 comments
- Emojis / no text: 35 comments
- English: 14 comments
- Other languages: 3

## Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research. This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles. This document is funded and supported by the European Union (EU). The opinions expressed in the report do not in any way reflect the position of the EU who are not responsible for the content expressed in this document. We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: [info@insecurityinsight.org](mailto:info@insecurityinsight.org). Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our [Social Media Monitoring](#) mailing list. Find more resources at the [Social Media Monitoring](#) website.

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