

Policyweekly

| Attacks on Schools: Mitigating the Trend



Policy Recommendations

- 1 There is a need to supplement the efforts of security agencies by adopting conscious safety plans in physical structural and administrative planning in schools.
- 2 There is a need for cooperation between schools and local communities, which would strengthen both school security plans and government safety measures.
- 3 There is a need to strengthen early warning systems and response mechanisms, especially in areas prone to attacks.
- 4 There is a need to raise Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) awareness among key stakeholders to mobilise their voices and actions to support SSD implementation.
- 5 The Nigerian government must re-establish its authority and monopoly of the instrument of violence through effective securitisation countrywide.

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of a prosperous society. However, reports on attacks on schools have continually made headlines. Schools and colleges should be safe places for students to learn. Many countries face security challenges that violate student's rights to education and protection. According to Education Under Attack 2014, a [report](#) published by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), armed forces and non-state armed groups targeted students, teachers, schools, and other educational facilities in at least 70 countries worldwide between 2009 and 2013, with 30 countries experiencing a significant pattern of attack. The dynamics are worse in fragile states or those experiencing armed conflicts.

In recent years, Nigeria has been afflicted by a troubling trend: a surge of school attacks, leaving a trail of ruin, pain, and disrupted education for thousands of children. Abductions and kidnappings have gained popularity and are crucial security concerns. While many have been victims of the threats above, relatively few have escaped death, injuries or trauma during such attacks. Under the

current conditions, the safety and security of school administrators, teachers, students, and the local community where the schools are located are no longer guaranteed, particularly in the North East geopolitical zone, where jihadist terrorists are active. These attacks have not only harmed all involved but have had a significant impact on the country's

educational system and prospects of its youth. This edition of Nextier Policy Weekly looks at the insecurity in Nigeria, the trend of attacks on academic institutions by armed groups, and the way forward.

Violent Conflict Data: School-Related Attack Trend

Period: 1st June 2020 - 25 October 2023

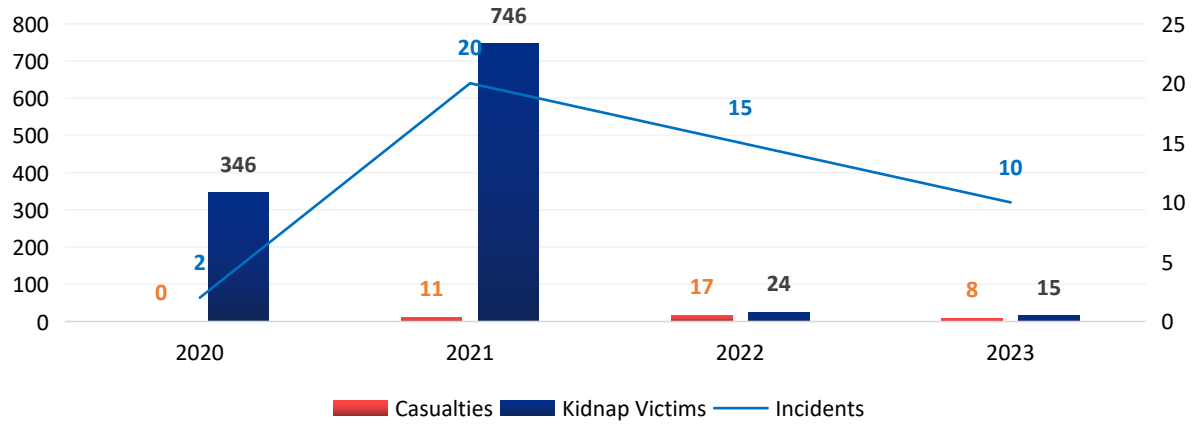


Figure 1: School-Related Attack Trend (Source: Nextier Violent Conflict Database)

Violent Conflict Data: Regional Overview

Period: 1st June 2020 - 25 October 2023

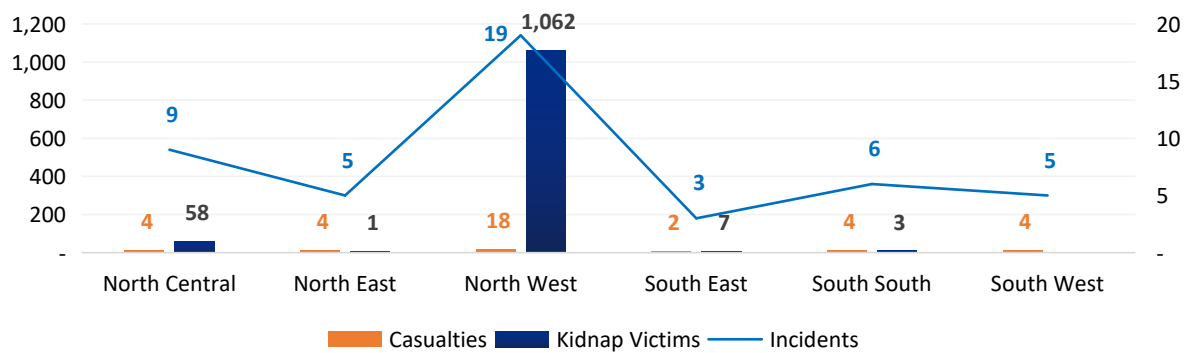


Figure 2: Regional Overview of School Attacks (Source: Nextier Violent Conflict Database)

According to the Nextier Violent Conflict Database, attacks on schools have averaged ten incidents in the attack trend between 2021 and 2023 (See Figure 1). The Northern region of Nigeria recorded the highest with 33 incidents between 2020 and 2023, with the North West peaking the chart on kidnap count.

Shift from Insurgents to Other Actors

The foremost record of school attacks, which gained local and international attention, was the Boko Haram insurgents' abduction of 276 Chibok girls in 2014. However, the attacks on schools and learning facilities in Nigeria have become the go-to option for factions and criminal forces such as gunmen, bandits, secessionist agitators and kidnapers.

Nextier Violent Conflict Data: Actors of Attacks

Period: 1st June 2020 - 25 October 2023

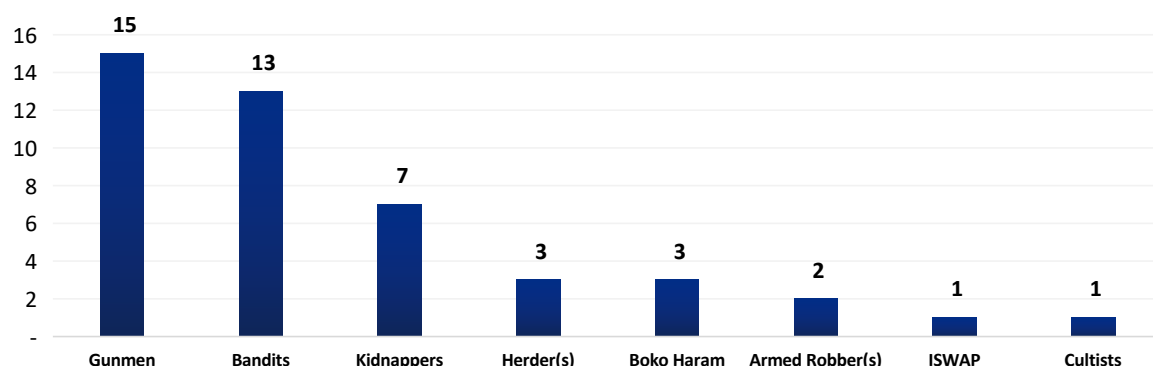


Figure 3: Actors of School Attacks (Source: Nextier Violent Conflict Database)

The Nextier Violent Conflict Database has recorded 15 incidents of attacks on schools perpetrated by gunmen, while 13 have been from bandits. The statistics from gunmen and bandits trump the incident count of attacks from jihadist insurgents, initially the key orchestrators of school attacks. This is evidenced by Boko Haram's [ideology and disdain](#) for Western education. The attacks on schools in North West Nigeria by bandits and gunmen reveal that other actors in Nigeria's conflict theatre identify schools as easy targets, allowing these abductions to occur easily. According to a [report](#), Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, and Kebbi state have recorded the most since school abductions gained prominence in 2014. The [abduction](#) of more than 24 students during an attack in the Bugundu district of Zamfara state indicates that targeted abductions of students are an issue that persists and requires rapid attention.

Violent attacks on schools have also occurred in the South East. The sit-at-home orders by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have created an avenue where enforcers assault students and teachers. A report from [HumAngle](#) revealed one of such attacks by the sit-at-home enforcers in Enugu who subjected underage children to inhumane treatment. Occurrences in other regions, such as the North Central region, can be seen from the kidnap of four students of the Nasarawa State University on the 10th of October, 2023. The resort to attacks on schools by gunmen and bandits can be linked to grinding poverty levels. Nigeria is increasingly facing a dire economic situation.

Recent [economic reforms](#) have put a greater strain on an already desperate population. A Nextier Policy Weekly article, "[Would the Worsening Poverty Increase Insecurity in Nigeria?](#)" identified that the economic reforms bringing about a high cost of living and the need to meet wants could feed into an already volatile security situation. As a result of the economic situation, violent actors prey on school students, who can be seen as the most vulnerable targets for ransom payments.

Impacts of Attack on Education in Nigeria

1. Loss of Lives - The loss of innocent lives is one of the most tragic results of terrorist acts in schools. Students and instructors have been put in harm's way during these attacks and wounded or kidnapped. Survivors' trauma can have long-term consequences, making it difficult to finish their studies and follow their aspirations.

2. Disruption to Academic Calendar Of Students - The attacks on schools in Nigeria have disrupted the education of thousands of students. Many students have been forced to abandon their studies due to safety concerns or because their schools have been attacked. This disruption has a long-lasting impact on their prospects and the country's overall development. Nigeria currently has more than [10 million](#) children out of school - most of them in the north and girls - and the school attacks and kidnappings have only made the situation worse.

3. Scepticism Towards Sending Children to School - The abduction of students from school has had some effects. It has hampered schooling in Northern Nigeria, a region with [the lowest global education and human](#)

[development levels](#). The fear of insurgents has created some scepticism among parents regarding sending children to school. This adds to an already explosive mix of jobless youth and crippling poverty.

Scrutinising Some Ongoing Efforts

1. The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD): Nigeria's commitment to the Safe Schools Declaration indicates a purposeful attempt at protecting institutions against attacks. The foundation of the declaration is based on common sense methods to reduce the likelihood of assaults on students, instructors, schools, and universities, as well as to alleviate the harmful impact of such attacks. Despite the country adopting the Safe School Declaration, the problem remains intractable due to governments' lack of sufficient remedies. The SSD has remained mostly unknown to the general public over the years. The SSD has yet to be completely implemented, and schools are not adhering to the SSD's basic norms.

2. Increased Security Presence: As the abduction of students is a manifestation of insecurity in Nigeria, it also brings to light the vulnerability of citizens and the need for more practical solutions to address the trend. The Nigerian military has created security posts near certain schools, but Northern Nigeria's number of schools and landmass means many remain unprotected. With the identification that schools are easy targets for violent groups, there is a need for state governments to provide tailored operations for rapid response as a more practical solution to individual school policing, which could prove costlier.

Recommendations

1. School-Based Safety and Security Plans: Based on the gravitas of insecurity, security agencies need to supplement efforts by adopting conscious safety plans in schools' physical structural and administrative planning. This could be through the fortification of structures and constant awareness of emergency action in situations of attacks. Guidance in formulating the security plan should be sought from the local and law enforcement authorities.

2. Liaison between Schools and Local Communities: There is a need for cooperation between schools and local communities, strengthening school security plans and government safety measures. Thus, to establish community support for school-based safety measures, form a school protection committee and incentivise community engagement.

3. Strengthening Early Warning Systems and Response Mechanisms: There is a need to strengthen early warning systems and responses, especially in areas prone to attacks. For instance, in Abuja, intelligence reports on planned attacks led to the closure of schools. Applying these intelligence warnings in other areas beyond the capital will prove beneficial in thwarting attacks. Following the abduction of students in [Chibok](#), which gained international attention, it could serve as a pointer for federal and state governments to increase school security by providing an avenue for rapid response in the case of school attacks.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.thenextier.com/spd) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

4. Awareness: Key stakeholders need to raise SSD awareness to mobilise their voices and actions to support SSD implementation. Improve stakeholders' ability to demand the creation of a legal framework to encourage SSD implementation, as well as press the government to approve a state-level SSD cost/financing implementation plan.

5. Increase Overall Security Efforts: There is a need to increase security efforts in Nigeria. The Nigerian government must re-establish its authority and monopoly of the instrument of violence. Effective securitisation countrywide will reduce the likelihood of school abductions.

Conclusion

Attacks on academic institutions have moved beyond terrorist organisations. Other armed actors such as bandits, kidnappers, secessionists and gunmen see it as an alternative funding source for their activities and to press home their agitations and angst. Conversations around safe schools must consider the different push factors and patterns of attacks. These efforts would provide the evidence to inform tailored responses across the different hotspots.

Reference

Uzeugbu, E. (2019). Security Challenges of Attacks on Schools in Nigeria: The Role of School Administrators, Staff, Parents and Students. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3456304

Authors:

Joshua Biem is a Policy and Research Analyst at Nextier

Samuel Oluwajobi is a Data Analyst at Nextier

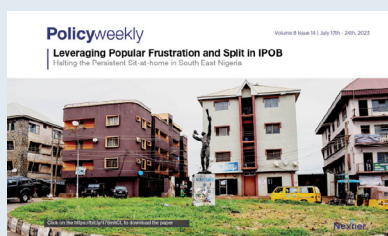
Nextier Sample Publications



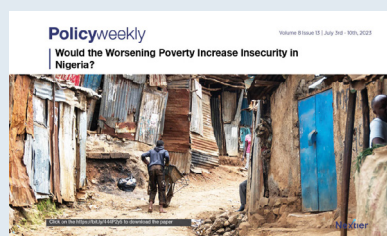
Food, Fear, and Fortitude: Rural Women's Journey Amid Armed Conflicts in Plateau State
Plateau State has been under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The region has been grappling with an increasing threat of armed attacks, particularly in its rural areas. The aftermath of these bloodbaths...



Why is Fuel Subsidy Removal Hurting Many Nigerians? Examining Six Ways to Reduce the Pains
Fuel subsidy ended in Nigeria when on 29th May 2023, the newly sworn-in President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, subtly announced the end of subsidy by thanking the outgoing...



Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria
You are currently viewing Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria...



Would the Worsening Poverty Increase Insecurity in Nigeria?
Third World nations in general, particularly Africa, which includes Nigeria, struggle greatly with poverty. Many individuals in Nigeria live in poverty due to the country's...



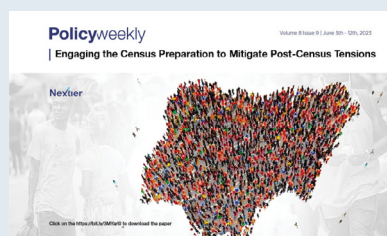
Safety of Buildings VERSUS Claims of Vengeance: Exploring Issues around the Alaba Market Demolitions
On Sunday, February 18, 2023, videos were circulating about the commencement of demolitions in Alaba International Market, Ojo Local Government Area of...



Strengthening Child Protection in Post-Conflict Communities in North East Nigeria
Children are usually the most vulnerable in armed conflict and post-conflict environments. Beyond being afflicted by humanitarian crises occasioned by armed...



Nigeria's Off-Cycle Elections and the Impending Violence
Off-cycle elections are held outside the regular elections calendar. General elections take place in the same year in Nigeria as part of the country's...



Engaging the Census Preparation to Mitigate Post-Census Tensions
Barring the last-minute suspension of Nigeria's housing and population census, scheduled to start on 3rd May and end on 7th May 2023, the country would...