

Policyweekly

Fatal Roads, Overlooked Lives: The Case for Urgent Road Safety in Nigeria



Policy Recommendations

- 1 The Nigerian government must adopt a proactive and comprehensive approach to curb road accidents' frequency and severity.
- 2 It is necessary to leverage public-private partnerships (PPPs) to maintain existing roads and provide quality standard equipment for proper road maintenance.
- 3 The Nigerian government must incorporate technology and data-driven solutions to enforce traffic rules.
- 4 The government must create a policy that mandates in-class driving school before obtaining a learner's permit.
- 5 The government, in collaboration with stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations, transport unions, and educational institutions, should prioritise raising awareness about the causes and consequences of road accidents.

Introduction

Roads contribute to almost all economic and social development processes, facilitating trade and transportation. Notwithstanding, they also come with significant risks, particularly road accidents, which have become a major global health crisis, causing millions of deaths and severe injuries each year. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) [report](#), road traffic accidents are among the leading causes of death and disability globally. Approximately [1.3 million people](#) die in traffic accidents annually, with over 90% of these fatalities occurring in low-and middle-income countries, especially in Africa.

African countries [report the world's heaviest burden](#) of road traffic mortality index at 26.6 deaths per 100,000 citizens - a figure significantly higher than the global average of 18.2 deaths per 100,000. Such constructs result primarily from inadequate road infrastructure, inconsistent enforcement of traffic laws, and limited emergency response resources. In Nigeria, road traffic incidents claim over [40,000 lives annually](#)—a toll surpassing fatalities from insurgency and other violent conflicts. Despite the scale of the problem, road safety is often

overshadowed by other national priorities, stalling progress toward reducing road traffic incidents. The staggering figure underscores a pressing public health crisis and the broader challenges Nigeria faces in governance, infrastructure development, and public safety. This edition of the Nextier SPD Policy Weekly makes a case for urgent and comprehensive interventions to reduce road traffic fatalities in Nigeria.

In March 2024, the Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Police Force, ACP Olumuyiwa Adejobi, highlighted that Nigeria experiences more fatalities from road crashes than from insecurity-related incidents. Data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Nextier corroborate this statement. Comparing statistics on road accidents (Figure 1) from the NBS with violent conflict trends (Figure 2) from Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflict Database reveals striking differences in the scale of these public safety issues.

The Scale of Road Fatalities in Nigeria

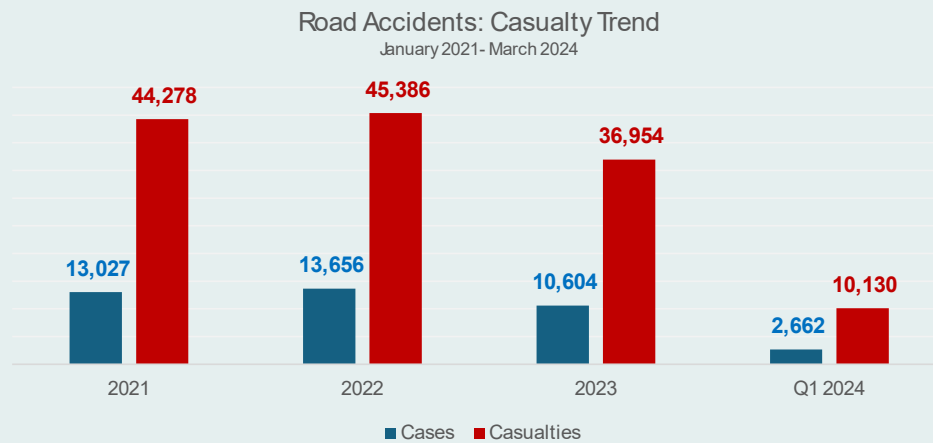


Figure 1: Road Accidents: Casualty Trend
(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

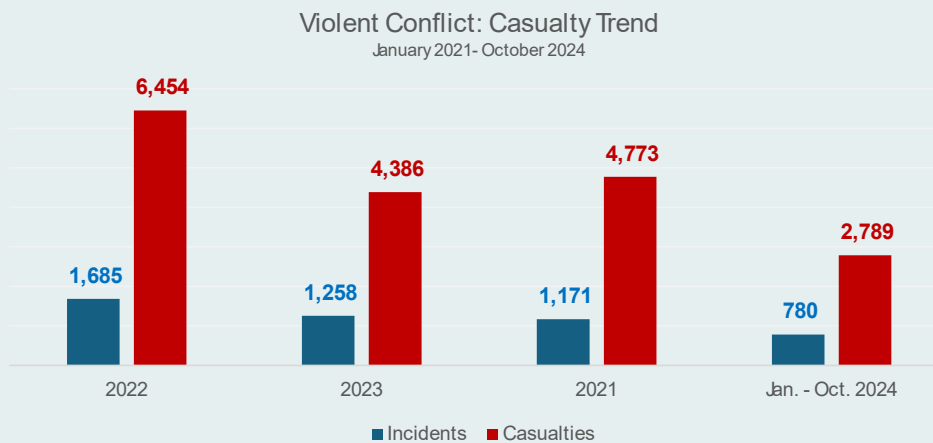


Figure 2: Violent Conflict: Casualty Trend
(Source: Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflict Database)

According to these sources, Nigeria records an average of 9,987 road accident incidents annually, resulting in approximately 34,187 casualties, including fatalities and injuries. In contrast, violent conflicts average 1,223 incidents annually, with around 4,600 casualties. The frequency and scale of road traffic accidents reveal a public health crisis that is far less visible than violent conflicts yet

equally, if not more, damaging to Nigerian society. While the average number of lives lost in violent conflicts remains alarmingly high, road accidents claim far more lives each year, indicating that public attention on violent conflict overshadows a parallel crisis that demands urgent action.

Road Accidents: States with Highest Cases
January 2021- March 2024

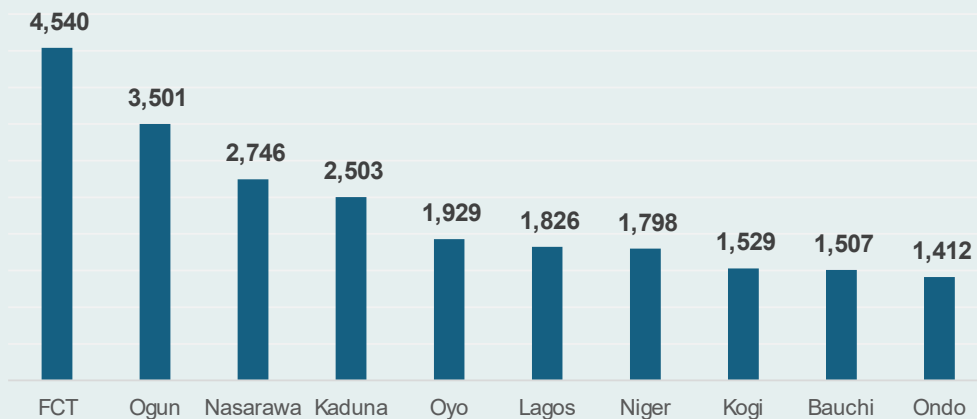


Figure 3: Road Accidents: States with Highest Cases
(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

Violent Conflict Data: States with Highest Incidents
January 2021- October 2024

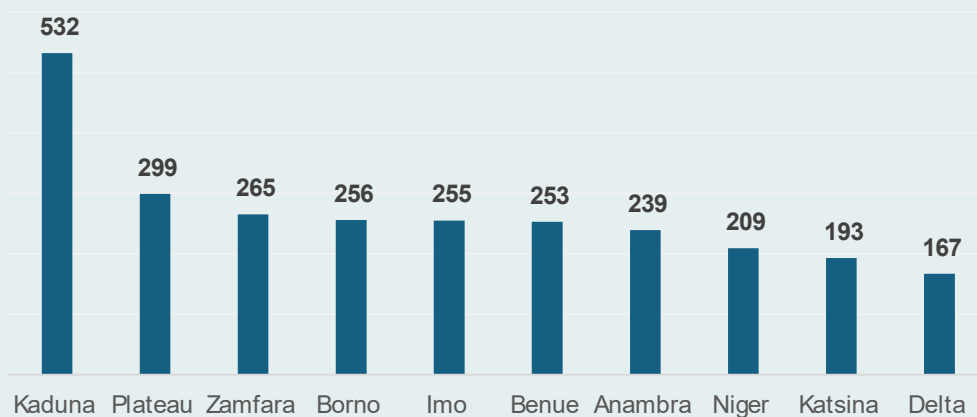


Figure 4: Violent Conflict Data: States with Highest Incidents
(Source: Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflict Database)

State-level data on incidents highlights distinct geographic patterns for road accidents (Figure 3) and violent conflicts (Figure 4) in Nigeria. The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) leads with 4,540 incidents of road accidents, followed closely by Ogun with 3,501 and Nasarawa with 2,746. Other high-incident states include Kaduna, Oyo, and Lagos, reflecting that urban areas or states with significant road networks experience more frequent accidents, likely due to high traffic

volumes. In contrast, violent conflict incidents are concentrated in Kaduna, which reports the highest number with 532 incidents, followed by Plateau (299) and Zamfara (265). States such as Borno, Imo, and Benue also show high conflict incidents, largely areas affected by socio-political tensions or insurgent activities. Notably, Kaduna stands out as a hotspot for both road accidents and violent conflicts, indicating an elevated overall risk for residents.

Road Accidents: States with Highest Casualties
January 2021- March 2024

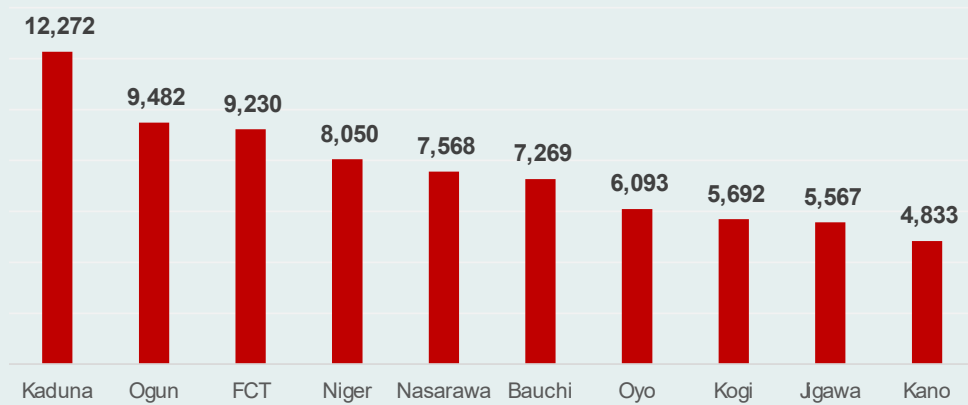


Figure 5: Road Accidents: States with Highest Casualties
(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

Violent Conflict Data: States with Highest Casualties
January 2021- October 2024

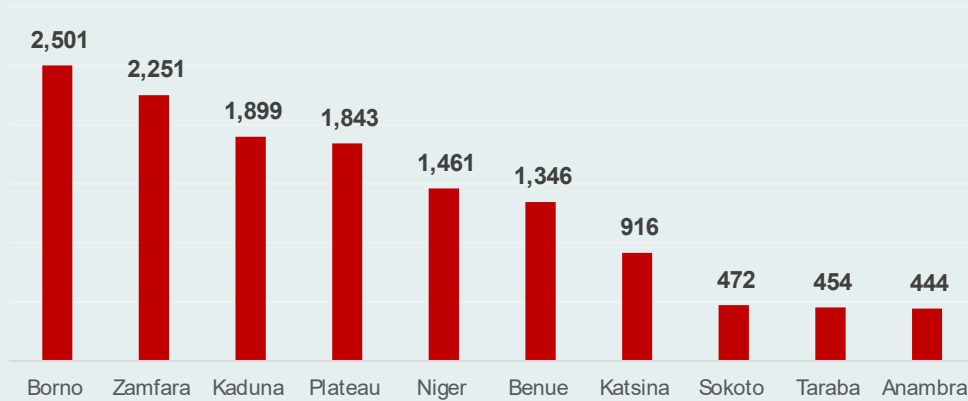


Figure 6: Violent Conflict Data: States with Highest Casualties
(Source: Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflict Database)

The casualty data reveals that road accidents (Figure 5) in Nigeria result in far more severe impacts than violent conflicts, with a total toll of 76,056 casualties from accidents compared to 13,587 from conflict incidents (Figure 6). Kaduna leads in road accident casualties with 12,272, followed closely by Ogun (9,482) and FCT (9,230), while other states like Niger, Nasarawa, and Bauchi also report significant figures. This stark contrast suggests that areas with heavy traffic and major road networks face elevated risks. Although violent conflict casualties are highest in Borno (2,501), Zamfara (2,251), and Kaduna (1,899), the overall toll remains substantially lower than that of road accidents. Kaduna stands out as a critical area, bearing high casualties in both categories, but road accidents represent a more pervasive threat across the nation.

Causes of Road Accidents

The causes of road accidents in Nigeria are multifaceted. These causes include excessive speeding, poor road infrastructure, ageing vehicles, and other factors, such as unemployment and income inequality. These factors have led to an alarming increase in casualties and have caused Nigeria to [record](#) more road crashes than any other country. Excessive speeding is one of the significant causes of road accidents. According to [a 2023 social statistics report by the National Bureau of Statistics](#), between 2020 and 2022, excessive speeding was identified as the leading cause of road crashes. The report stated that over the three years (2020, 2021, and 2023), crashes from excessive speeding reached 18,386, with 5,472 in 2020, 6,336 in 2021, and 6,578 in 2022. This high number is because [excessive speeding](#)

[slows](#) a driver's reaction time. Also, the [severity of the impact when a collision occurs increases](#) as a driver increases the speed at which they are driving.

Poor road infrastructure and designs also contribute to road accidents. According to the [International Monetary Fund's](#) novel measure of cross-country road quality, Nigeria has the sixth-worst road infrastructure in Africa. For years, successive governments have failed to adequately address the deterioration of Nigerian roads. A study by Eneh et al. (2023) on road and vehicle qualities as a factor of traffic carnage in Nigeria showed that for every decrease in road quality, road deaths increased by 0.18642 per cent. Although humans and the environment account for 17 per cent of road accidents, road conditions such as road designs and the general nature of the road account for 83 per cent of road accidents (Peter et al., 2017, as cited in Kumazhege and Ibrahim, 2024).

Poor vehicle conditions are another factor contributing to road accidents. Poorly maintained cars result in brake failure, leading to road crashes (Afolabi and Kolawole, 2017). Worn-out tyres also [contribute](#) to road accidents and cause significant casualties. [A Federal Road Safety Commission](#) (FRSC) study found that passengers are significantly more likely to sustain injuries from road crashes than drivers. This is due to the vehicle's design, which gives the driver more protection, while the passenger is left with little to no protection measures.

Driver training and licensing processes in Nigeria are often inadequate, leading to many unqualified road drivers. Corruption in the licensing system allows individuals to obtain licenses without proper training or assessment. This lack of competence contributes significantly to unsafe driving practices and road accidents. Furthermore, ineffective enforcement of traffic laws. The lack of stringent enforcement emboldens reckless driving, overloading, and drunk driving, further contributing to road accidents.

Impact of Road Accidents on Society

Road accidents can lead to a devastating chain reaction of social and economic consequences. For instance, the loss of a breadwinner in a household can severely disrupt family stability, potentially forcing children to drop out of school due to financial constraints (Afolabi and Kolawole, 2017).

Beyond the immediate human toll, road accidents often destroy critical traffic infrastructure, further complicating transportation systems and incurring additional repair costs (Afolabi and Kolawole, 2017). The economic burden of road accidents in Nigeria is substantial, estimated at [3 per cent of the nation's GDP](#). This figure encompasses various costs, including medical expenses for treating injuries, productivity losses due to incapacitation or fatalities, and the significant strain placed on emergency and healthcare services. According to a 2018 Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) report, Nigeria loses approximately [₦9.8 billion annually to road accidents](#). These losses underscore the multifaceted impact of road traffic incidents, highlighting an urgent need for coordinated interventions to mitigate the economic and societal fallout.

There is also the psychological impact that comes from road accidents. Survivors of road accidents may develop mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. These mental health issues affect the victims' families and friends. A study on traffic accidents in Nigeria and PTSD found that there was a higher prevalence of PTSD in survivors of road accidents (Iteke et al., 2011). The study also found that PTSD is more prevalent in females than males. Relatives or people connected with those who were involved in road accidents may [develop](#) depression if the victims lose their lives. Moreover, some may develop anxiety and avoid driving. This also disrupts the day-to-day lives of survivors and people close to them.

Recommendations

The following recommendations need to be implemented by the government and various stakeholders to ensure that the roads are safe and that the number of casualties and fatalities is significantly reduced.

- 1. Vigorous Enforcement of Road Safety Rules:** The Nigerian government must adopt a proactive and comprehensive approach to curb road accidents' frequency and severity. A key step is enhancing the presence of traffic police, particularly in high-risk areas prone to accidents. Increased visibility and enforcement can deter reckless driving, ensure compliance with traffic regulations, and respond promptly to emergencies. Moreover, traffic violations must be met with stringent penalties to discourage unsafe driving behaviours. Current laws should

be rigorously enforced, while legislative frameworks governing road safety must be reviewed and strengthened. Aligning these laws with international standards will improve their effectiveness and align Nigeria with global best practices in road safety management.

- 2. Improve Road Infrastructures:** Nigerian roads are perpetually in a bad state. It is estimated that Nigeria loses [450 billion annually](#) to bad roads. Addressing this issue requires a strategic and collaborative effort involving the government and the private sector to improve the state of the nation's roads. Through public-private partnerships (PPPs), resources and expertise can be mobilised for large-scale road rehabilitation and construction projects. Equally important is addressing the country's poor maintenance culture. Existing roads should be consistently maintained, and quality standard equipment needs to be in place to ensure proper road maintenance. Road designs should be done properly. This will prevent frequent road accidents from occurring. The government must also establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that funds allocated for road projects are effectively utilised. Transparent contracting processes and strict monitoring and evaluation will help curtail corruption and inefficiency in road development projects.
- 3. Technology and Data-Driven Solutions:** Nigeria needs to incorporate technology and data-driven solutions to enforce traffic rules. Installing traffic cameras at critical junctions and high-risk areas can help monitor road users and ensure compliance with traffic laws. Also, integrating advanced safety technologies, such as vehicles with reliable driver assistance, will significantly reduce the risk of road accidents. Moreover, to counter vandalism, there should be a heavy security presence. Those caught in vandalising monitoring systems such as traffic cameras should be arrested and severely punished.
- 4. Mandatory Training School:** The government must create a policy that mandates in-class driving school before obtaining a learner's permit. This foundational step will ensure prospective drivers understand road safety regulations and best practices before stepping behind the wheel. Also, the government should enforce existing laws on driver's license acquisition. This can

be done by mandating that people engage in driving practice for a certain number of hours before they apply for a provisional license. This will help create an understanding and solid knowledge of driving and driving rules. This will give people a solid foundation needed for driving and equipment with the skills to drive safely.

- 5. Public Awareness:** Public awareness campaigns are critical to reducing road accidents in Nigeria. The government, in collaboration with stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations, transport unions, and educational institutions, should prioritise raising awareness about the causes and consequences of road accidents. Targeted campaigns can highlight issues like speeding, drunk driving, and the dangers of distracted driving while promoting adherence to traffic laws. Community engagement will be crucial in educating local communities about road accidents and ways to prevent them from happening. Effective policy parking will create organised traffic, prevent accidents and educate people about road accidents.

Conclusion

Road accidents are a serious public health concern in Nigeria. Although more attention is paid to violent conflict, little is given to road crashes. As a result of this, more lives are lost on roads than in violent conflict. This situation calls for immediate action from all levels of government and various stakeholders. Significant steps need to be taken to ensure that the roads are safe for everyone on them and there is a substantial reduction in casualties and fatalities from road accidents.

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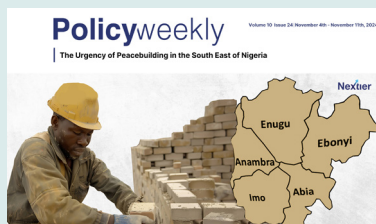
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