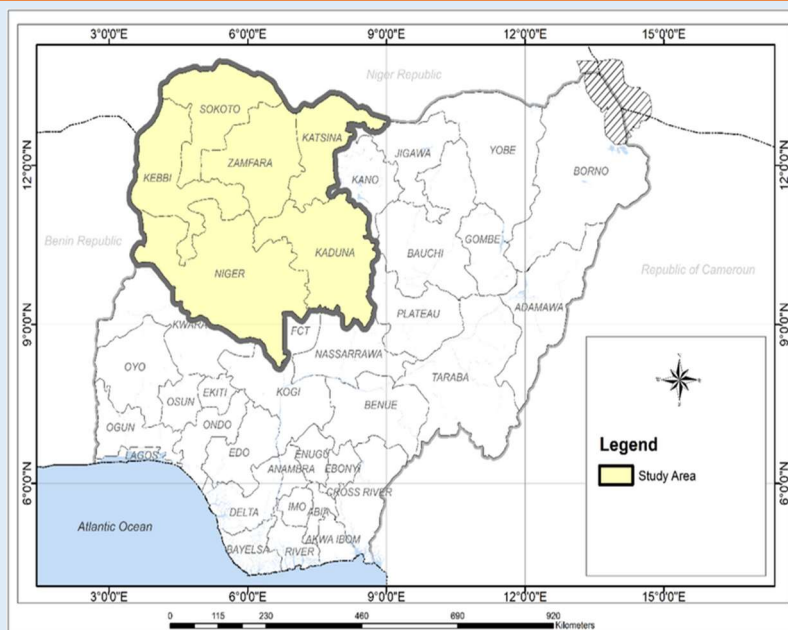


ESCALATING BANDITRY : MASS SCHOOL ABDUCTIONS IN KEBBI AND NIGER STATES ON NOVEMBER 17 & 21, 2025

2 males dead, 1 male injured, 341 people abducted.



Pic 1.1 : Map of Nigeria highlighting the North West corridor including Niger State ¹

BACKGROUND

- In two incidents of mass school abductions recorded between 17/11/2025 and 21/11/2025, a combined total of three hundred and forty-one (341) people including three hundred and twenty-nine (329) students and twelve (12) staff members were reportedly abducted during attacks on Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School in Maga, Kebbi State and St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri community, Agwara LGA, Niger State; two (2) students escaped during the Kebbi incident, two (2) school officials were killed, one (1) official was injured, and fifty (50) students from the Niger attack were later rescued. ²
- Previous incidents between 2014 and 2022 (8 years) across Nigeria (majority in the North) have cumulatively resulted in the attack on about seventy (70) schools, leading to the abduction of 1,683 school children and sixty (60) teachers and other school workers of which fourteen (14) were killed; and the destruction of twenty-five (25) school buildings highlighting a decade-long pattern of targeted school attacks. ³ Twenty-two (22) additional attacks on schools in which eight hundred and sixteen (816) students were kidnapped was also recorded between January 2023 and November 2025. ⁴ These incidents caused widespread displacement and disrupted education, reflecting systemic vulnerabilities such as over 42,000 schools in northern Nigeria lacking perimeter fencing, including 4,270 secondary schools and 38,684 primary schools. ⁵
- These attacks further reflect gaps in the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), adopted by Nigeria in 2019, aimed at protecting students, teachers, and educational institutions during conflict. Structural weaknesses, insufficient intelligence, and poor coordination among the police, military, and school authorities continue to expose students to kidnapping, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violence. ⁶

INCIDENT PROFILE

Between 17 and 21 November 2025, northern Nigeria experienced a sharp escalation in attacks on schools, reflecting the growing threat posed by armed bandits in the region. On 17 November, Government Girls Comprehensive Secondary School in Maga Community, Danko/Wasagu LGA of Kebbi State was attacked around 5:52 a.m., resulting in the death of two (2) people including a Vice Principal and a security guard while the school Principal sustained gunshot injuries.⁷ Twenty-six (26) schoolgirls were abducted, with two (2) managing to escape.⁸

While recovery operations were ongoing in Kebbi, a second mass abduction occurred on 21 November at St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri Community, Agwara LGA of Niger State, where suspected bandits stormed the school around 2:00 a.m., abducting three hundred and three (303) pupils and twelve (12) staff members during a coordinated one-hour assault. ⁹ The Niger State Government confirmed that the school had been operating in violation of a prior directive ordering the closure of boarding schools due to high-risk intelligence reports ¹⁰. Combined police and military units were deployed for search-and-rescue operations even as fifty (50) students escaped and were reunited with their families. Furthermore, it was observed that parents began retrieving their wards following the immediate closure of the school.

The magnitude of the number of people abducted has prompted widespread school closures across northern Nigeria. The Federal Government ordered the immediate shutdown of forty-one (41) Federal Unity Colleges, ¹¹ while Katsina State closed all public schools pending a security review. Additional state measures included Kwara suspending academic activities across four (4) LGAs, Plateau shutting down all basic schools, Niger suspending all boarding schools in the northern senatorial district, and Benue maintaining closure of approximately fifty (50) schools, with displaced pupils sheltering in IDP camps. ¹² Sokoto and Kebbi governments simultaneously tightened security around schools as end-of-term examinations approached.

These incidents underscore systemic vulnerabilities in school protection, as over 42,000 primary and secondary schools in northern Nigeria lack perimeter fencing, exposing students and staff to violent attacks. ¹³ The Federal Government has activated multi-agency security reviews, while religious leaders, northern governors, and security stakeholders have called for urgent, coordinated action to safeguard schools and mitigate the out-of-school children crisis. ¹⁴



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RISK ANALYSIS

The repeated targeting of schools by armed bandits in northern Nigeria has deepened the education crisis and threatens the safety of pupils and staff. Mass abductions disrupt learning, endanger lives, and heighten the risk of sexual and other forms of exploitation, while also weakening public confidence in the government's ability to secure schools. Intelligence reports indicate that many schools' proximity to forests or isolated areas facilitates attacks and provides safe retreats for perpetrators. Systemic weaknesses including unfenced school premises, gaps in security policies, and limited coordination between security agencies and local communities further exacerbate the risk of repeated assaults.

These attacks have significant implications for educational access in a region already facing a severe out-of-school crisis. Nigeria currently has over ten point two million (10.2 million) out-of-school children¹⁵, and school closures in vulnerable states such as Kebbi and Niger amplify this figure. Pupils' fear of abduction, combined with parental reluctance to send children to school, may result in prolonged absences, reducing literacy and learning outcomes while limiting future economic opportunities. The rescue of fifty (50) students from St. Mary's Catholic School, Papiri, highlights both the immediate threat and the potential for partial mitigation, though the overall risk to learning continuity remains high.

Beyond education, the attacks exacerbate social and religious tensions, particularly given that many targeted schools are Christian institutions. This creates potential for polarization in communities already susceptible to interfaith mistrust, intensified by inflammatory political rhetoric. Psychosocial trauma among pupils, staff, and residents, coupled with widespread fear, may provoke vigilantism, reduce community cohesion, and undermine broader security efforts. Without urgent and coordinated interventions, these attacks risk further destabilizing northern Nigeria, compounding educational deprivation, and fueling societal unrest.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS:

- The operatives of the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Army, and other security agencies have been immediately deployed in Kebbi and Niger States to rescue abducted pupils and staff, and to apprehend the perpetrators.^{16 17}
- Federal and State Governments ordered the closure of forty-one (41) Unity Colleges, while Katsina, Niger, Kwara, Plateau, and Benue states ordered closures of vulnerable schools, including boarding institutions, to prevent further attacks. Sokoto and Kebbi governments also tightened security as end-of-term exams approached.¹⁸
- The Ministry of Defence and relevant security agencies are conducting joint operations, including intelligence gathering and search-and-rescue missions in forested areas where bandits are believed to have taken the abducted pupils.
- Religious organizations, including the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Catholic Church, and local authorities, are facilitating communication with parents and communities to ensure safety, recovery, and awareness of risks.^{19 20}
- International organizations including the African Union (AU), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and Save the Children International strongly condemned the recent abductions of schoolchildren and staff in Kebbi State and Niger State, describing the attacks as unacceptable acts of violence. They called for the immediate and safe release of abducted pupils and teachers, urged that perpetrators be identified and held accountable under national and international law, and emphasized that schools must remain safe sanctuaries for learning.^{21 22}
- The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria reportedly cancelled his planned trip to the G20 Summit and instead asked the Vice President to attend on his behalf, signalling the urgency of the crisis and his commitment to personally oversee efforts to secure the safe rescue of the abducted students and strengthen protection measures for schools nationwide.²³

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with State Ministries of Education and school authorities, should ensure all high-risk schools are temporarily closed and adequately monitored until security guarantees are implemented.
- The Ministry of Defence, the Nigeria Police Force, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) should enhance intelligence-led operations, improve inter-agency collaboration, and actively pursue abducted victims to ensure timely rescue and prosecution of offenders
- The State Governments of Kebbi, Niger, Katsina, Kwara, Plateau, and Benue should implement permanent school security measures, including perimeter fencing, guards, and emergency response protocols, prioritizing high-risk boarding and rural schools.
- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and community leaders should support awareness campaigns for parents, students, and local communities on risk mitigation strategies, reporting of suspicious activities, and compliance with school closure directives.
- The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs should increase collaboration with local and international partners to increase provision of relief and psychosocial support for affected pupils, staff, and families, including temporary housing for displaced children in secure locations.



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- National and State Security Councils should conduct comprehensive reviews of school security policies and the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), ensuring coordination across all levels of government and with local communities to prevent future attacks.

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