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Banditry and the Challenge of Securing Educational Institutions in North-Western Nigeria: Revisiting the Safe School Initiative

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ABSTRACT
The Nigeria state is grappling with multidimensional security threats which to a large extent has greatly affected educational institutions in Nigeria. Apart from terrorism in the North East, banditry in northwest has become a routine activity and a threat on the already educationally disadvantage north. Hence the imperative of the Safe School Initiative cannot be over emphasized. This paper therefore is an attempt to interrogate the phenomenon of banditry, the security of educational institutions in north west vis-à-vis the need to revisit the Safe School Initiative. Methodologically, it is survey research hinged on the philosophy of positivism with the blend of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. This paper claimed that the Safe School Initiative if properly implemented can promote protection of educational institutions while also guaranteeing safety of students and teachers. It argues that banditry is product of multidimensional factors especially consistent years of neglect by government, poverty, unemployment, ungoverned spaces and weak justice system this paper further identified corruption, poor funding, policy summersault, poor inter-agency collaboration, increasing rate of banditry as major challenges of the Safe School Initiative. It also posited that the inability of government to implement the Safe School Initiative has made educational institution more vulnerable and this is manifested in the rate of attacks on schools, kidnapping of school children and teachers. In the finally analysis, this paper claims that the failure of government to ensure safety learning environment has implications for school enrolment and the prospect of education in north west Nigeria. It recommends amongst others the need to revisit and reinvigorate the Safe School Initiative.

INTRODUCTION

Security challenges portend a lot of threat to national security. More often than not women, girls and children are major victims as these categories are usually more vulnerable. Regardless of the inherent challenges that has characterized the Nigerian educational system, the increasing rate of crime and insecurity in Nigeria has further compounded the issue as in recent years the educational system has become a worst hit by terrorist and bandits in northern Nigeria. A lot of schools are attacked, destroyed; students are raped, killed and kidnapped for ransom. Considering the low rate of school enrolments in northern Nigeria in relations to the inability of the Nigerian state to ensure the security of schools creates an impending danger for education in northern Nigeria.

Banditry has had a crippling effect on education in the region and is a threat to the future of education not only in

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the North West, but in Nigeria as a whole. The attacks on schools are a violation of children's rights to education, life and liberty, and have created fear in not only the students, but their parents as well, who would rather have their children remain under their watch at home than allow them go to schools when they are not sure of their safety. This has led to low school enrolments, which in turn has severe implications for intergenerational human capacity development (Akpa-Achimugu and Ibeh ,2023).

In April 2014, more than 200 girls aged between 16 and 18 were abducted from a secondary school in the Nigerian town of Chibok by Boko Haram insurgents. Hundreds of schools and other educational facilities have been destroyed, school teachers killed and students kidnapped. Between 2009 and 2015, attacks in North-Eastern Nigeria destroyed more than 910 schools and forced at least 1,500 to close. This has left more than 600,000 school-age children without access to learning due to the conflict (Anyanwu, 2016). In northwestern Nigeria, the presence and prevalence of under-policed and unregulated hinterlands, forestlands and borderlands have provided an enormous opportunity for rural criminality. In addition, the presence of viable but vulnerable rural economy based largely on animal husbandry, crop production and informal mining, equally provides an avalanche of handy crime objects/ targets: cattle, cash, treasure, etc (Okoli and Ugwu ,2019).

The threats to life, rape, kidnapping and allied vices in Nigeria schools led the Federal Government of Nigeria to launch a programme tagged "Safe School Initiative (SSI)." According to Idris (2018), the Safe School Initiative (SSI) was launched by the Federal Government of Nigeria in May, 2014 to protect Nigeria children in schools from the insurgent attacks in form of kidnapping, hostage taking, rape and outright killing by the hoodlums. To affirm the insurgency effects on Nigeria schools, Adebayo (2018) explains that, Nigeria Safe School Week Initiative was launched in response to alarming rate of violence and insecurity across Nigeria schools especially in the North East, which is particularly targeted at children and female students in schools.

The Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) is a response to children and schools affected by militants in the North Eastern States of Nigeria. The program was launched by the Government of Nigerian and the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, alongside with the Nigerian Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector leaders in Abuja in May 2014 (Shaba, 2015).

The situation in the north east is now incrementally been made manifest in north western Nigeria as series of schools in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduan and Nigeria have been attacked and students and teachers kidnapped. The most recent is the kidnapped of 39 students of the Institute of Forestry and Mechanization, Afaka, the kidnap of students of the Greenfield University and the kidnap of about 10 students and 2 lecturers at the Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic all in Kaduna state.

These increasing rates of attacks on schools and the kidnapping of students have also led to the closure of several schools in the northwest and even in some parts of north central that are contiguous to the north west. This has in no small way affected the educational system, the morale of both teachers and students and has generated and is generating phobia. All these notwithstanding, it is the duty of the Nigerian state to guarantee the safety of schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Like most concept in social science, the concept of security is conceived from different perspectives. Hence, it means different things to different people. Within the context of security studies, there exist traditional and modern explanations of security. While the traditional perspective is state-centric and militaristic in nature the modern perspective is humanistic and development centered. The traditional perspectives align with the realist orientation of state, power and security. This perspective views security in terms of power and capacity of a state to defend its territorial integrity and protect life and properties of citizens. The modern perspective of security dwells more on human welfare and wellbeing while also linking security to development. This likes of Mcnamara and Buzan contributed towards the rethinking of the concept of security. In the context of this study, both traditional and modern perspectives are germane as far as the security of schools is concerned.

The concept of banditry is one of the most controversial concepts in security studies within the context of North-Western Nigeria. To so many scholars, what is described as banditry in Nigeria has no difference with terrorism taking at the look at the modus operandi, strategies, fatalities and casualties associated with bandits in North-Western Nigeria. Regardless of the conceptual differences, Egwu (2016), sees banditry is the practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches. It manifests itself in varied forms such as cattle rustling, incessant killing of people, robbery, raiding/ looting and kidnapping. To Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) armed banditry, therefore, implies the actual or threatened use of arms (any instrument of force/coercion/violence) to dispossess people of their material belongings. Typically, armed banditry is a gang phenomenon, although some bandits have been known to operate as lone brigands not associated with any criminal networks.

Banditry is a type of organized crime committed by outlaws typically involving the threat or use of violence. A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, kidnapping, ca le rustling etc either as an individual or in

groups. Banditry is a vague concept of criminality and in modern usage it relates to armed robbery which is usually involves the with violence or threat of violence by a person, with whom the victim has had no previous contact, and it is usually unprovoked and unpredictable (Conklin, 1992:103).

Kwaja and Abdul (2014) who opined that armed banditry is a crime related to cattle rustling or practice of stealing the cattle from the ranches, mostly driven by economic motives organized by hoodlums; it's tied with incessant conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers. Okoli & Ugwu (2019) conceptualized armed banditry as organized crimes with violence consisting armed robbery, cattle rustling and kidnapping through the use of force or threat thereby intimidating individuals and groups mostly rural communities, the perpetrators engage in killings, rapping and robbing the victims.

In simple terms, the Safe School Initiative is an intervention aimed at ensuring that every child is offered a safe place to learn, play and realize their full potential, especially for children in emergencies and conflict (Ogunode, Ayeni and Adebayo,2024). Nigeria's minimum standard for safe school defines safe school as a system that promotes the protection of students from violence, exposure to weapons and threats, theft, bullying and the sales or use of illicit substances on school grounds. It further defines school safety as school and school-related activities in which learners are safe from violence, bullying, harassment and substance use (NMS, 2021).

Learning which is the process of transmitting knowledge, skills and ideas cannot take place in an unsafe environment. Schools are important to nation building; the school represents a space where learners are comprehensively educated and developed. This development, however, can be guaranteed only if learning takes place in a safe and secure environment. Therefore, a holistic school safety and security plan is critical to ensure that all learners, staff members and school property (including buildings and equipment) as well as school communities are protected from human-induced and natural hazards (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

Several factors constitute threat to the safety of schools, students and staff. Conflict and insecurity are two major factors that threatens they safety of schools in northern Nigeria. A precursor to the safe school initiative is the Safe School Declaration. Globally, the foundation for Safe School Declaration was led by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), an inter-agency group dedicated to addressing the problem of targeted attacks on education during conflict. After series of preliminary consultations, engagements and activities, the Safe Schools Declaration was launched on 29 May 2015 in Oslo, Norway.

The Safe Schools Declaration was meant to provide countries with the impetus to express support for the protection of learners, teachers and learning environments from attack during times of armed conflict. The declaration commits to ensuring that all forms of educational pursuit continue during armed conflict and that countries implement concrete measures to deter the use of academic institutions by the military. Specifically, the declaration outlines recommendations to better prevent attacks on education, protect schools from military use and respond to and mitigate the impact of attacks when they do occur in conflict-affected areas (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

Nigeria endorsed the Declaration on 29 May 2019 thus becoming the 37th country to join the SSD framework. The Federal Executive Council approved the Memorandum on "Mainstreaming and Implementation of the SSD Laws and Policies in Nigeria" thereby paving the way for the domestication of SSD on 20 March 2019. Subsequently, on 31 December 2019 President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Safe Schools Declaration Ratification Document signaling the country's commitment to ratify and uphold the principles of the SSD. The Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with related Ministries and other stakeholders spearheaded the process of formulating a comprehensive National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools (NPSSVFS), which integrated and harmonised two existing policy proposals on Violence free Schools and Safety and Security in Schools in August 2021 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

This policy is therefore built on four important and complementary pillars to ensure a comprehensive approach to school safety:

1. Pillar 1 – Safe Learning Facilities (i.e., making them resilient to different types of hazards, e.g., floods, fire)
2. Pillar 2 – Prevention and Response to VAC in Schools (i.e., ensuring that safeguarding and child protection practices are institutionalised in schools and focused on ending violence against learners)
3. Pillar 3 – School Disaster Management (i.e., making plans and committees that address the needs identified in risk assessments)
4. Pillar 4 – Risk and Resilience Education (i.e., ensuring early warning, and building resilience practices into formal and informal education)

The SSI notwithstanding, there has been persistent attacks on schools in north western Nigeria. The first known abduction of school children in Nigeria took place in 2014, when 276 girls were taken from their school dormitory in Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. Several years later, more than 100 of the girls remain missing and a recent report estimates that 40 have died. This follows the mass students' abduction in Dapchi, Yobe State, and again in 2020, when suspected gunmen attacked the government Boy Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State and abducted over 300 students (Ojelu, 2021).

There were two cases of abductions which involves 27 students and 15 others both in Kagara in Niger State. Few days later, 317 female students at Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State were abducted. In a similar event, 150 schools children of Salihu Tanko Islamic School and another 39 students of Federal College of Forestry were abducted by armed bandits (Ojelu, 2021). In case of Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna State over 140 students was reportedly abducted including undisclosed or unreported schools abduction in northern region. These armed groups have continuously attacked school children in the region, abducting over 800 students for ransom since 2020 (Iwara, 2021).

The Greenfield University kidnapping took place on April 20, 2021, when at least 20 students and two staff were kidnapped in Kasarami village, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, during an attack by suspected armed bandits at Greenfield University. The kidnappers demanded N800 million ransoms. On April 23, 2021, the kidnappers killed three of the students to demonstrate how serious they were (Ojelu, 2021). On 17 June, 103 students were abducted from the Federal Government Girls College in Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State. On 5 July, 121 School children were abducted from the Bethel Baptist High School in Maramara, Kaduna State. On 16 August, fifteen students, a teacher, and his family, were abducted from the College of Agriculture in Bakura, Zamfara State; and, on 17 August, 2021, nine students were kidnapped on their way home from the Islamiyya School in Sakkai village in Faskari, Katsina State (Ojelu, 2021).

> Security threats in Nigeria, due to activities of armed bandits/extremist such as kidnapping school children for ransom is one of the major prevalent insecurity issues that threaten to collapse government structures in the country. Nigeria is currently groaning under the yoke of the jihadist/Islamic movement, secessionist's movement and all manners of criminalities. The recent spate of abductions and mass kidnapping of school children represents one of the existential threats to the future of education in northern Nigeria. The problems have provoked serious concerns across the nation, has called for urgent and holistic resolution. It has continued to be precarious, volatile and highly unpredictable, therefore creating untold fear on the people in the region; exacerbate the close down of many schools, food crisis situation, sexual molestation/slavery, and increasing wave of Internally Displaced Persons. Government's response to the challenges has generally been ineffectual, uncoordinated and poorly executed (Osimen & Daudu, 2022:1).

Below are some tables sourced and compiled by UNICEF indicating rates of attacks on schools in some states within the North West and some parts of north central. It should be noted that the priority of this paper is north west.

Table 1: Notable Media Reports of School Attacks and Abductions in Katsina, Zamfara, and Niger States (Note that Niger State is in North Central Nigeria)

S/N	Scale	School Affected	Sources
1	Over 300 students abducted. Schools were closed. Students were rescued.	Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State	The Guardian 12 Dec 2020, BBC, 12 Dec 2020 Punch 18 Dec 2020
2	17 students kidnapped, and rescued	Kankara, Katsina state	AlJazeera 16 Dec, 2020
3	42 individuals abducted (27 students, 3 staff, 12 family members); 1 student killed	Government Science College, Kagara, Niger State	The Guardian 17 Feb 2021 Punch 17 Feb 2021
4	Over 279 schoolgirls abducted, and rescued	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State	The Guardian, 2 Mar 2021 AL Jazeera. 2 Mar 2021 Human right watch, 17 Feb 2021
5	11 Islamic school pupils and a teacher abducted; 4 persons killed	Islamic school in Katsina State	Vanguard News 18 Aug 2021
6	3 senior secondary students abducted	Community Secondary School, Runka town, Safana LGA, Katsina State	Vanguard News 3 Mar 2021
7	Approximately 200 students abducted	Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Tegina, Niger State	Al Jazeera, 31 May 2021 AP News 3 Jun 2021
8	136 students abducted	Islamic school in Tegina, Rafi LGA. Niger state	Premium times 3 Jun 2021
9	73 students	Government Day Secondary School in Kaya, Maradun LGA, Zamfara	The Cable 1 Sep 2021

10	13 Islamic seminary pupils killed	Islamic seminary in Katsina State	Premium times 17 Dec 2023
11	5 attacks involving arson, destruction, and abduction	Various schools across Zamfara, Katsina, and Niger	UN Security Council Report Human Rights Watch 2 Sep 2024

Source: (1) Niger State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, (2) Katsina State Ministry of Education (3) Zamfara State Universal Basic Education cited in UNICEF (2025).

Table 2: Summary of Incidences (2020 – 2025) Across the Nine (9) LGAs

States	LGA	Estimated Incidents
	Rafi	about 150
Niger[1]	Shiroro	over 120
	Munya	about 100
	Faskari	2
Katsina[2]	Batsari	58
	Kankara	11
	Tsafe	-
Zamfara[3]	Shinkafi	-
	Maru	198

Source: (1) Niger State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, (2) Katsina State Ministry of Education (3) Zamfara State Universal Basic Education cited in UNICEF (2025).

The consistent attacks on schools notwithstanding, it also led to the temporary and permanent closure of schools within the North-Western Nigeria since government could not guarantee the safe of school children. This view was corroborated by Akinkuotu (2021) when has asserted that:

> The attacks on schools have led to many school closures in the region. For instance, Kaduna state government reportedly shut down 13 schools in July 2021 after the abduction of 150 students from Bethel High School. Also, the Zamfara state government announced the closure of all schools in the state after the abduction of over 200 girls from the school in Jangebe and 75 students from the Government Secondary School in Kaya. The governor of Kano state also ordered the closure of ten schools located on the outskirts of the state and five health training institutions in the state. In Yobe state, the government ordered all boarding school students to go home except SS3 students (the equivalent of Grade 12 students). Katsina state also closed all its boarding schools after the Kankara abduction in December 2020, and Sokoto state shut down 16 boarding schools along its borders (Akinkuotu in Punch, 2 March 2021).

The importance of theories in social science research cannot be overemphasized. Apart from the fact that, it gives clearer understanding of the issues or subject under investigation, it serves as basis for proper understanding. Considering the multiplicities of perspectives and the constant lack of consensus amongst scholars, there are several theoretical perspectives and parameters that can be employed in social science research. This research however, is anchored on the Routine Activity Theory. Routine activity theory, first formulated by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979) and later developed by Felson, is one of the most widely cited and influential theoretical constructs in the field of criminology and in crime science more broadly. Routine activity theory is, in short, an attempt to identify, at a macro-level, criminal activities and their patterns through explanation of changes in crime rate trends (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This theory attempts to establish a relationship between trends, patterns, changes within human society and how these eventually leads to crime or crime patterns. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, hunger and drivers of crime. when people are unemployed or are unable to meet their basic needs based on their life chance, crime likely becomes an alternative. It was based on this premise the Cohen & Felson argued that changes in structural patterns of people's daily activity and how the new configuration provided greater criminal opportunities and, therefore, could influence the trends observed in rates of certain types of crime, in particular crimes against persons or property (Felson & Cohen, 1980).

Banditry in North Western Nigeria have become a routine, a trend that now constitute major threat to educational system and educational development. Attacks on schools, kidnapping of both students and teachers have become a recurring decimal in north western Nigeria of Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Kaduna state. The only state within the North west the seem immune for now is Kano state. Within the context and lens of the Routine Activity theory therefore, it is obvious that banditry and its related activities cannot be unconnected to the dynamics and dynamism of the Nigerian society. Consistent years of neglect by the states, increase rate of unemployment, poverty and economic backwardness which has become a routine become major precipitators of banditry in North Western Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the bolt and nut of every research. It spells out the nature and type of research, methods and instruments of data collection as well was analysis. This research is hinged on the pragmatic philosophy which is a blend of interpretivism and positivism. This study is primary research and it adopts the survey research design. Survey research refers to a process of eliciting data from a target population through either questionnaire or interview instrument, and subject such data to statistical analysis for the purpose of drawing conclusions (Obasi, 1999). The survey approach includes interviews, questionnaire and Key informant interview (KII) etc which are basically the tools for primary data collection. It will also source secondary data from books, journals, newspapers, periodicals and official government publications and policy statements.

Data collected were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Statistical tools like the frequency distribution table, bar-charts, complimented with content analysis was employed. The study sample frame comprises of people within the academia, school administrators, related NGOs, teachers, students, policy makers, security personnel and people from some host communities who were purposively selected. Though the study area is the North Western states of Nigeria comprising Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kaduna, Zamfara, Jigawa and Sokoto, the survey was not restricted to these states alone as there are respondents who are by geography not resident in the North West but are very much conversant with the security dynamics there. Hence, respondents were sampled from across other geopolitical zones of Nigeria as will be noticed in the survey outcome. The major occupation of people from these states is farming and agriculture and commerce are the main stay of their economy. These states also have a very rich political history; rich cultural heritage and its populations are predominantly Muslims with Hausas and Fulani as the dominant ethnic groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated in the methodology section, questionnaire and KII were the major instruments for data collection. The survey indicated that about three hundred and seventy-two respondents shared their opinion on the subject matter. This survey was carried out through the instrumentality of google form. This section there showcases and analyses field outcomes using both quantitative and quality measures.

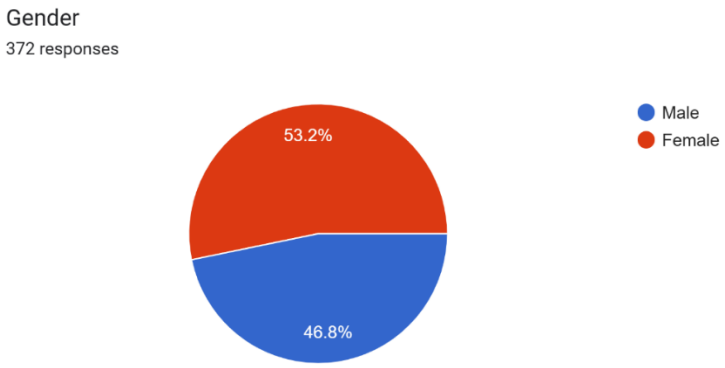


Figure 1: Pie -chart representing gender distribution of respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2026

The Pie-chart in Figure 1 represents a gender distribution of respondent. While 53.2% of the entire respondents were females, 46.8% were males. This is an indication of gender mainstreaming gin this research investigation

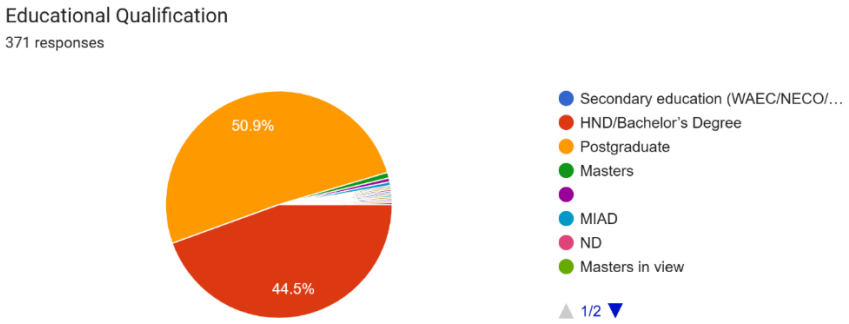


Figure 2: Pie -chart representing educational qualification distribution of respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2026

Figure 2 above reflects the educational distribution of respondents. It indicates that 59% of the respondents are holders of postgraduate qualifications while 44.5% are graduates with either Higher National Diploma or a Bachelor's degree. What this portends for the research is the credence that comes with an enlightened sample frame in the conduct of research.

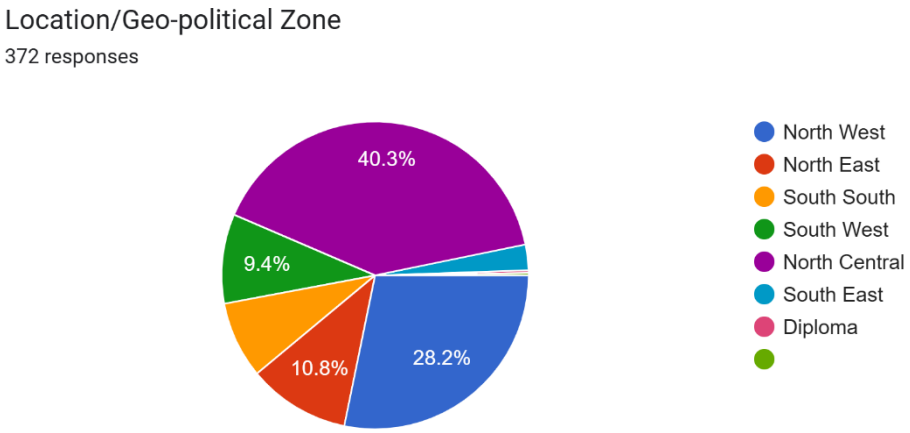


Figure 3: Pie -chart representing geo-spatial distribution of respondents
Source: Field Survey, 2026

The statistical tool (Figure 3) above represents the geo-spatial distribution of respondents in Nigeria. Nigeria is made up of six geo-political zones. In an attempt to elicit a national perspective even though the study area is North West, the research ensured that Nigerians across different zones share their opinion on the issue of banditry and the imperative of the SSI. North Central has a total of 43.3% respondents, North West, 28.2% while North East has a total of 10.8%. in all of this the north which is the focus of this study is well represented.

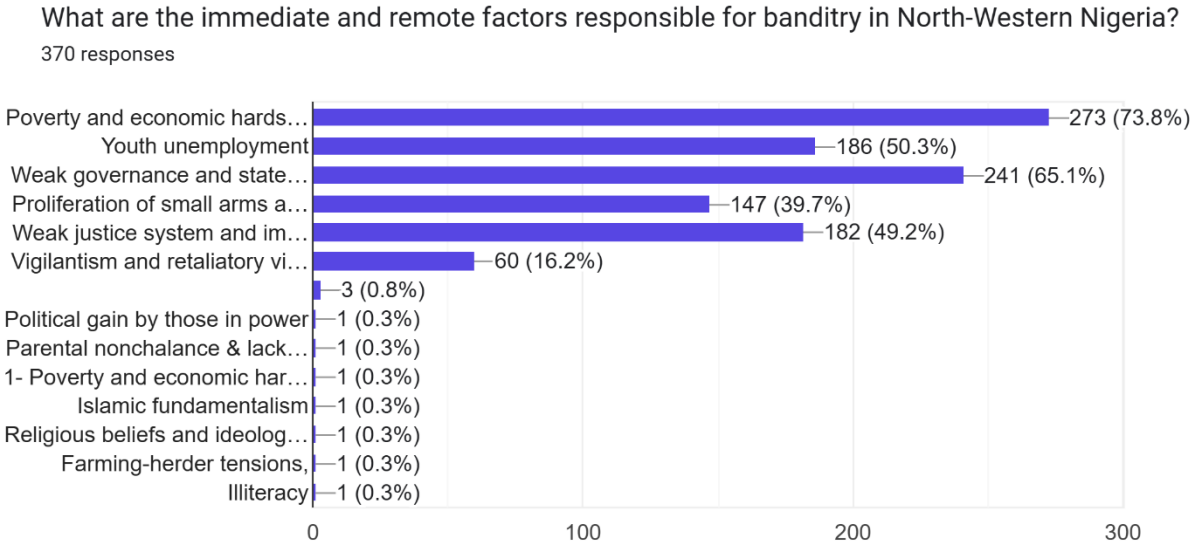


Figure 4: Distribution of responses on factors responsible for banditry in Nigeria
Source: Field Survey, 2026

Research on banditry without identifying the drivers of banditry would not be appropriate. Hence, the chart above was designed to elicit the opinion of respondents on the immediate and remote drivers of banditry in Nigeria. This study identified Poverty and economic hardship, Youth unemployment, weak governance and state presence, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, weak justice system and impunity, vigilantism and retaliatory violence as the major precipitators of banditry. About 73.8% of the entire respondents claimed that Poverty and economic hardship are the divers of banditry in Nigeria. Closely related to this is weak governance and state presence based on the opinion of 65.1% of the respondents.

In a KII with Prof Ogbaji of the Federal University Dutsin Ma Katsina state, He was of the view that:

> The causative factors for banditry must be viewed from a holistic point of view not in isolation as there are multiplicities of factors driving banditry and each of these factors cannot be treated in isolation. There is no doubt that poverty and unemployment are major drivers, but there are other states in Nigeria with high rate of poverty, yet no banditry in those states. It therefore means that beyond poverty and unemployment, it is imperative to also look at the economics of banditry which has lured a lot of youths in northern Nigeria in to this criminality (KII with Prof Ogbaji, 2026).

Unlike Prof Ogbaji, Prof Manu of the Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State based on argument on the dysfunctionality and absence of government when he posited thus:

> A meaningful conversation on the drivers of banditry in Nigeria, should be situated within the context of the role of government and state-citizenship relations. Banditry in north western Nigerian is a reflection of the failure of government over the years to keep to its part of the social contract. The inability of the state to provide basic needs and necessities for its citizens is a major trigger to insecurity as manifested in banditry. These failures notwithstanding, there is hardly any meaningful presence of government in remote communities in the north hence, giving room for non-state actors to take charge. If an area is ungoverned even though it falls within the territory of Nigeria, violent non-state actors will take advantage (KII with Prof Manu, 2026)

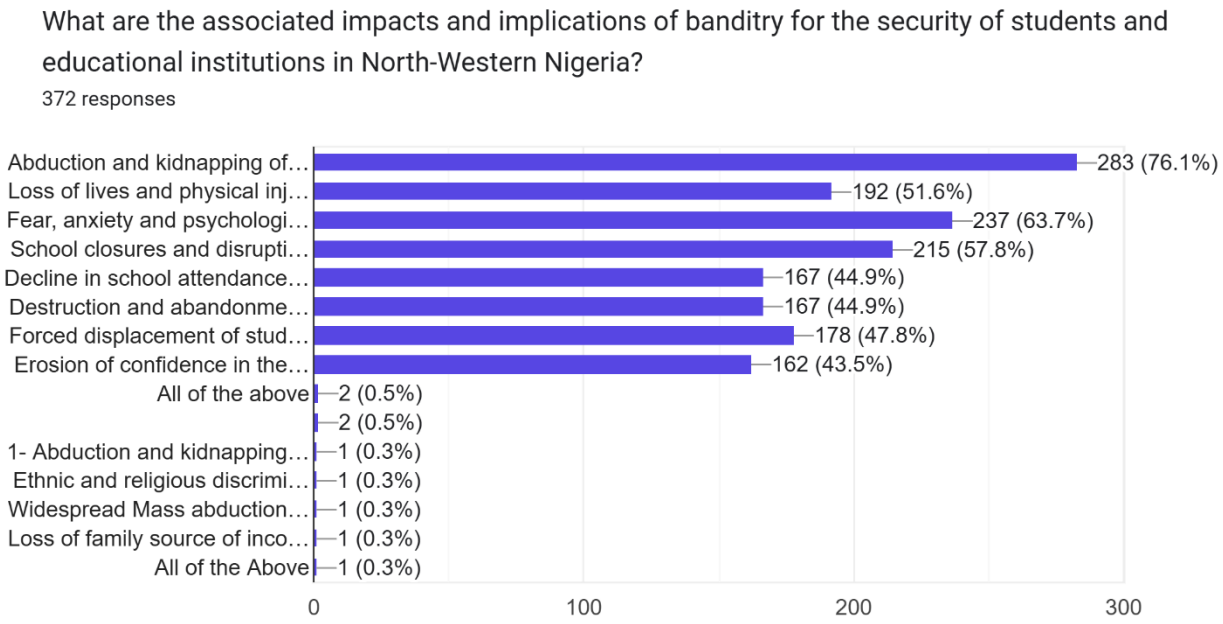


Figure 5: Distribution of responses on implications of banditry on education in northwestern Nigeria
Source: Field Survey, 2026

The above chart is very germane to this study since the major objective of this study is to identify and interrogate the implications of banditry for education in north west Nigerian. Hence the chat above was designed to elicit the opinion of respondents. As some of the implications of banditry for education, it identified abduction and kidnapping of students and teachers, loss of lives and physical injuries, fear, anxiety and psychological trauma, school closures and disruption of learning, decline in school attendance and enrolment, destruction and abandonment of educational infrastructure, forced displacement of students and families, erosion of confidence in the education system and government security amongst others as the impacts and implications of banditry for education in north western Nigeria.

In a KII with Dr Samuel Ayegba of the Department of Defence and Security Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna he was of the opinion that:

> The impact and implications of banditry for education in north western Nigeria is an obvious reality. For years northern Nigeria has been described as educational disadvantage with poor school enrolment, high level of illiteracy and increasing rate of out of school children. The emergence of banditry will further threaten the already disadvantaged north. Where children are being kidnapped, molested and killed will parent be motivated to enroll their kids in school? The impact of banditry on education in north west Nigeria has left both parents and children traumatized. Hence

the phobia of going to school (KII with Dr Ayegba, 2026).

In a similar vein, Mr Victor Adejoh of the College of Forestry and Mechanization posited thus:

> The educational system and everything around it are the most affected by banditry. From school children, infrastructure, teachers and host communities, all are affected. The fact that schools are not hidden and are vulnerable makes it easy for bandits to attack. Looking at the impact and implications of banditry therefore, a holistic perspective is important. Banditry has socio-economic, psychological and social implications for both students, teachers, parents and government as well (KII with Mr Adejoh, 2026).

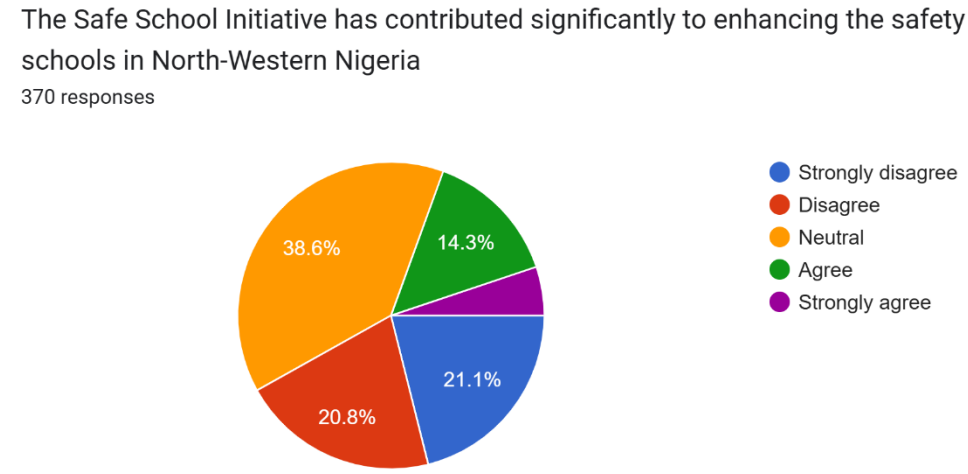


Figure 6: Distribution of responses on impact of the Safe School Initiative in northwestern Nigeria
Source: Field Survey, 2026

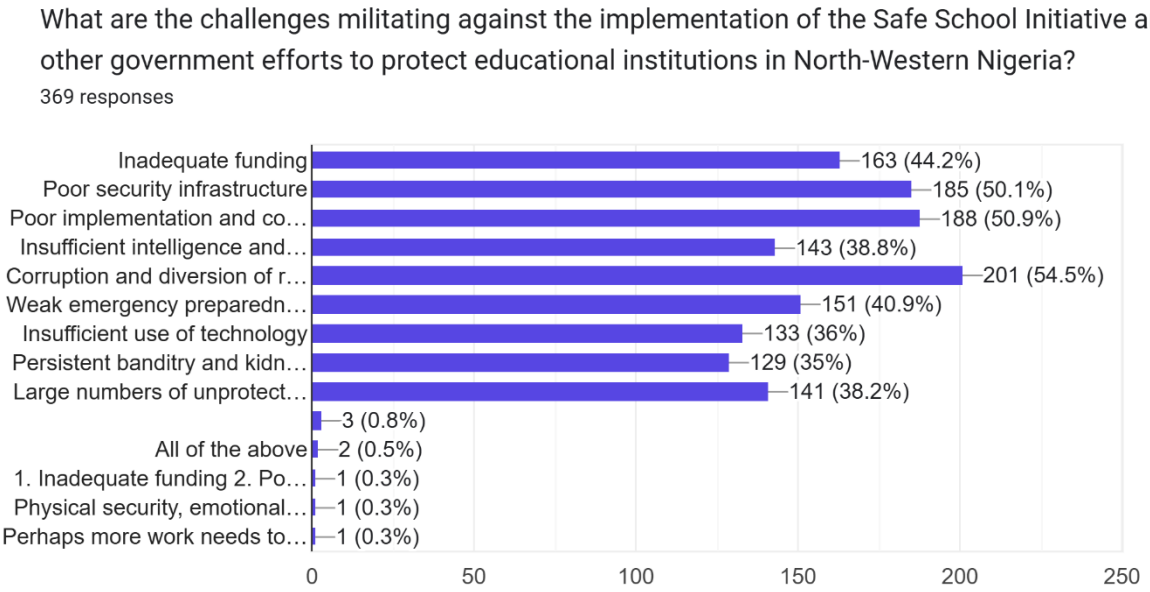


Figure 7: Distribution of responses on challenges of the Safe School Initiative in northwestern Nigeria
Source: Field Survey, 2026

There is hardly any policy framework devoid of challenges or weaknesses. The chat above was an attempt to elicit respondents' opinion on the challenges of the SSI. It identified inadequate funding, poor security infrastructure, poor implementation and coordination, corruption and diversion of funds, weak emergency preparedness, insufficient use of technology, persistent banditry amongst others. Perspectives from the questionnaire should similarities with the KII for obvious reasons.

In an interview with Dr Adamu on the challenges of the SSI he was of the opinion that:

> The Safe Schools Initiative in Nigeria faces the persistent challenge of insecurity, as armed conflict, insurgency, and attacks on educational institutions continue to threaten the safety of

students and teachers...Beyond physical insecurity, inadequate funding, weak infrastructure, and limited implementation capacity can undermine efforts to create and maintain genuinely safe learning environments across Nigeria (KII with Dr Adamu, 2026).

One of the heavily contested and controversial issues concerning the implementation of SSI in Nigeria is the degree of transparency and accountability particularly in relation to the management of the fund earmarked for the Initiative. Questions have been asked on the modalities for the disbursement and utilization of the USD10milion pledged at the launch of SSI. There were specific calls for the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice to open an inquiry into the mismanagement or diversion the USD 30million budgeted for the Safe School Initiative.

Another major challenge confronting the Safe Schools Initiative is the lack of adequate funding and infrastructure needed to provide secure and conducive learning environments. Many schools, particularly in rural and conflict-affected communities, may lack secure buildings, perimeter fencing, adequate lighting, emergency facilities, and other basic resources. Without consistent investment and effective monitoring of resources, efforts to improve school safety may remain difficult to sustain over the long term (Dr Zakari, 2026).

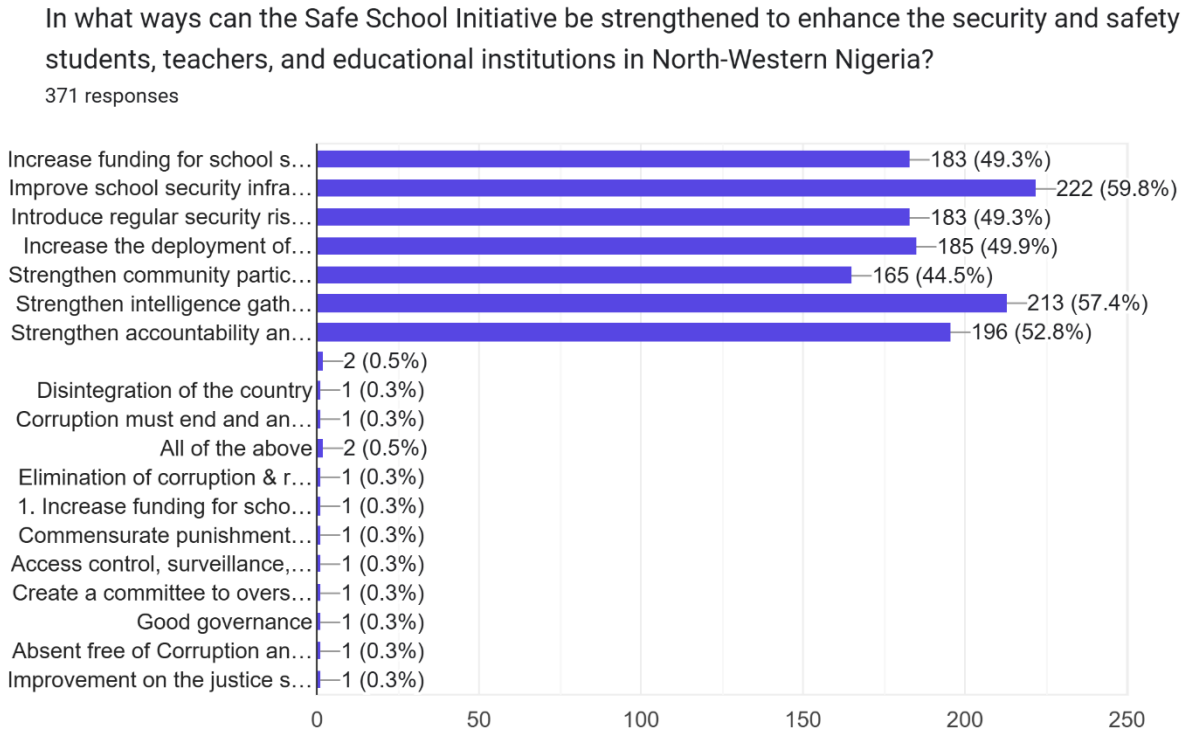


Figure 8: Distribution of responses on measures need to enhance the Safe School Initiative in northwestern Nigeria

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The chart above was meant to elicit respondents view on the required measures to strengthen and enhance the safety and security of schools in north west Nigeria. The survey identified increase funding, improve school security infrastructure, increase deployment of security personnel, enhance accountability, strengthen community participation amongst others.

The effectiveness of the Safe Schools Initiative also depends heavily on cooperation between government institutions, security agencies, school authorities, communities, parents, and development partners. Where coordination is weak, security responses may be delayed and important information about emerging threats may not be communicated effectively. Strengthening community participation, improving early-warning systems, and ensuring clear responsibilities among stakeholders are therefore important for creating schools where both teachers and learners can study without fear (KII with Adejoh, 2026).

Strengthening the Safe Schools Initiative requires sustained investment in school security infrastructure, including secure buildings, perimeter fencing, adequate lighting, emergency communication systems, and safe routes to and from school. These measures should be supported by regular security assessments so that schools can identify vulnerabilities and respond

appropriately to emerging threats (Zubairu (2026). He further claimed that:

> Effective implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative depends on stronger collaboration among government agencies, security personnel, teachers, parents, community leaders, and development partners. Establishing reliable early-warning and reporting mechanisms, providing regular safety training for school personnel, and involving local communities in school protection can improve the capacity of schools to prevent, identify, and respond to security threats (KII with Zubairu, 2026).

The long-term success of the Safe Schools Initiative requires adequate and transparent funding, continuous monitoring, and accountability at all levels of implementation. Government should ensure that resources allocated for school safety reach vulnerable schools, while programmes should be regularly evaluated to determine whether security interventions are actually improving the protection and wellbeing of students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Banditry has emerged as a major threat to the security and continuity of education in North-Western Nigeria. The persistent abduction of students, attacks on schools, displacement of communities, and threats against teachers have disrupted learning and created widespread fear among students, parents, and educational personnel. Beyond the immediate loss of lives and property, these attacks have broader consequences for educational access, school attendance, and the development of human capital in the region. The problem therefore extends beyond the protection of individual schools and represents a significant challenge to the right to safe and uninterrupted education.

The Safe School Initiative provides an important framework for addressing these challenges by promoting safer learning environments and strengthening collaboration between government institutions, security agencies, communities, and other stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of the initiative depends on its consistent implementation, adequate funding, effective monitoring, and adaptation to the changing nature of banditry. Security measures must be accompanied by functional early-warning systems, improved school infrastructure, emergency preparedness, community participation, and appropriate protection for teachers and learners.

Ultimately, securing educational institutions in North-Western Nigeria requires a comprehensive and sustained approach rather than isolated security interventions. Government at all levels must strengthen the implementation of the Safe School Initiative while addressing the wider conditions that enable insecurity to persist. Greater cooperation between communities, security agencies, educational authorities, and development partners is also essential. By making school safety a sustained national and regional priority, Nigeria can reduce the disruption caused by banditry and create an educational environment in which students and teachers can learn and work without persistent fear of attack.

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