

NIGERIA

*Many schools were bombed, set on fire or attacked by militants in the north – and increasingly militants turned their attention to students and teachers. Dozens of school teachers were murdered, and at universities there were very heavy casualties in attacks by gunmen firing indiscriminately and in some cases also using bombs.*¹¹⁴⁴

CONTEXT

After Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, it suffered ongoing inter-communal, political and sectarian violence which had claimed the lives of more than 15,700 people by 2011.¹¹⁴⁵ The unrest, which continued into 2013, was seen by observers as being underpinned by endemic corruption, poverty, poor governance, unchecked violence by the security services and discrimination against ethnic minorities.¹¹⁴⁶

Misuse of public funds was seen as having a devastating impact on education quality and on attempts to widen access to education.¹¹⁴⁷ Considerable disparities in access and quality existed among Nigeria's states, with education levels generally lower in the north.¹¹⁴⁸ There remained an enduring distrust of Western education dating back to British colonial rule when missionary schools were largely kept out of the north and the few that did operate there were seen as vehicles for converting young Muslims to Christianity.¹¹⁴⁹

From 2009 onwards, violence spiralled across northern and central Nigeria.¹¹⁵⁰ Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group whose commonly used name means 'western education is a sin' in Hausa,¹¹⁵¹ sought to impose a strict form of Sharia, or Islamic law, in the north and end government corruption. It launched hundreds of attacks against

police officers, Christians and Muslims whom it perceived as opponents.¹¹⁵²

Attacks on education between 2009 and early 2011 most often involved kidnappings of students or staff for ransom in the oil-producing Niger Delta region, apart from a spate of attacks on schools during an uprising by Boko Haram in July 2009.¹¹⁵³ However, in 2011 and 2012, the targeting of education, particularly schools and universities, escalated, with increasing reports of killings by Boko Haram, and reprisals against Islamic schools and suspected Boko Haram supporters. Schools, universities, students and personnel also came under attack during fighting between Christians and Muslims.

Net enrolment in primary school was 58 per cent (2010),¹¹⁵⁴ gross secondary enrolment was 44 per cent (2010)¹¹⁵⁵ and gross tertiary enrolment was 10 per cent (2005).¹¹⁵⁶ The adult literacy rate was 61 per cent (2010).¹¹⁵⁷

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

During an offensive by Boko Haram militants in July 2009 in Maiduguri, Borno state, a number of schools were targeted, although the reported number varies greatly. According to the Sunday Trust newspaper, which provided the only detailed report, 57 schools were destroyed and that number was confirmed by the chairman of the state Universal Basic Education Board. Some of the schools were named: Lamisula School was destroyed, and at Damgari Yerwa Primary School, two blocks of six classrooms were burned down. Classroom blocks at Abbaganaram Primary School, Low Cost Primary School and Goni Damgari Primary School were also targeted.¹¹⁵⁸ The same newspaper reported that, a year later, only a few of the schools had been rehabilitated and none fully, and students were studying in temporary sheds. However, most media sources reported only one school destroyed in July 2009, the Goodness

Mercy primary school, also in Maiduguri, which was reduced to rubble.¹¹⁵⁹

No attacks were reported in 2010 and only isolated attacks were reported in 2011. In Jos, in July 2011, a rocket was fired at a co-educational Muslim-owned school during student examinations, though responsibility for the attack was unconfirmed. The city has a long history of violence between Christian and Muslim communities.¹¹⁶⁰

On 27 December 2011, in an apparent reprisal attack following a series of church bombings by Boko Haram, a homemade bomb was thrown into the window of an Arabic school in Delta state while a class was in session, wounding seven people – six of them children under the age of nine.¹¹⁶¹

Then, in January 2012, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was reported to have issued a chilling threat via an internet audio message stating: ‘You have primary schools as well, you have secondary schools and universities and we will start bombing them... That is what we will do.’ This caused fear among parents, many of whom were reported to have stopped sending their children to school.¹¹⁶² From January to March 2012, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the damage and destruction of 12 schools in and around Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, citing retribution for state security force attacks on a Tsangaya (Koranic) school and the arrest of Koranic students in January 2012.¹¹⁶³ At least 5,000 children were unable to attend classes as a result,¹¹⁶⁴ in a state with one of the country’s lowest primary school attendance rates.¹¹⁶⁵ The methods of attack varied and included burning buildings and using explosives. All of the attacks occurred at night or in the early morning when schools were vacant, and in several cases, watchmen were tied up or held at gunpoint to prevent their intervention. The schools targeted were either non-denominational or provided both Western and Islamic education.¹¹⁶⁶

In May 2012, suspected Boko Haram militants used explosives and gunfire to attack two primary schools in the northern city of Kano.¹¹⁶⁷ From September to November 2012, according to media sources, at least a dozen more primary and secondary schools in Maiduguri, Damaturu, Zaria, Barkin Ladi, Potiskum and Fika were set on fire or damaged by explosives, including in attacks by Boko Haram, but also during fighting between Boko Haram and state security forces, or in clashes between Muslims and Christians.¹¹⁶⁸

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

Prior to 2011, and in contrast with attacks on schools, most attacks on school students, teachers and personnel involved kidnapping for ransom and appeared to be carried out for criminal rather than political objectives. For example, in Abia state, in the south-east, a school bus carrying 15 nursery and primary school students to the Abayi International School was hijacked in September 2010.¹¹⁶⁹ Similarly, a head teacher at a primary school funded by ExxonMobil in Eket, also in the south-east, was abducted in October 2010.¹¹⁷⁰

Some shootings also occurred in the north, including at a military-run secondary school near Kano in December 2011, which left four air force personnel dead and two injured, but the perpetrators and motives were unknown.¹¹⁷¹ Similarly, another shooting resulted in the death of the head teacher of the Government Day Secondary School in Potiskum, Yobe state, in October 2012. According to a witness, when he discovered the head teacher’s occupation, one of the gunmen said: ‘You are the type of people we are looking for.’¹¹⁷²

Later, in 2013, militants began targeting students and teachers (see Attacks on education in 2013 below).

In addition, one incident appeared to be linked to Boko Haram: the killing of Sheik Bashir Mustapha, a prominent Muslim cleric critical of Boko Haram, and one of his students, while he was teaching in his home in October 2010.¹¹⁷³

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Attacks on higher education facilities

Boko Haram was believed to be responsible for a series of threats to, and bombings of, universities in 2011-2012. In July 2011, during a spate of Boko Haram attacks in Maiduguri, officials shut the campus of Maiduguri University after receiving an anonymous letter warning that the student senate and examinations and records buildings would be burned down.¹¹⁷⁴ Hours later, two lecturers were reportedly killed during clashes that took place between Boko Haram and military forces near the campus.¹¹⁷⁵ In September 2011, at least 15 universities reportedly received an email message from Boko Haram, warning them that their campuses were on a target list for bombings.¹¹⁷⁶ Boko Haram also claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on universities in Kano and Gombe in late April 2012.¹¹⁷⁷ The attack in Kano took place at Bayero University, where around 20 people were killed by explosives and gunfire while worshipping at two Christian church services on campus, one held indoors and the other outdoors; at Gombe University, a building was bombed but no one was injured.¹¹⁷⁸

Attacks on higher education students, teachers and personnel

At least 25 people, most of them students,¹¹⁷⁹ were killed when unknown gunmen burst into a university residence in the north-eastern town of Mubi, in Adamawa state, on the night of 1 October 2012, and shot victims or slit their throats.¹¹⁸⁰ Earlier, a demand to evacuate the university, widely believed to have

been written by Boko Haram, had been posted on a women's student hostel.¹¹⁸¹

In addition to students, university staff members were also targeted for attack, mainly in the south. Seven university staff members were kidnapped from the Federal College of Education, Rivers state, between January and October 2012, and one of them died, allegedly from torture.¹¹⁸² Between 2010 and 2012, six other higher education personnel were abducted in the south, including two professors at the University of Uyo; the Director of Continuing Education at the College of Education in Afaha Nisit, Akwa Ibom; the Provost of the College of Health Sciences at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University; the Vice-Chancellor of Enugu State University of Technology; and the Delta State Commissioner for Higher Education.¹¹⁸³ In the north, one lecturer from the University of Maiduguri was also shot and killed, reportedly by Boko Haram.¹¹⁸⁴

Violence also occurred due to sectarian clashes. During post-election violence in April 2011, on the outskirts of Zaria in northern Kaduna state, a mob of youths supporting former military leader Muhammadu Buhari, who backed the imposition of sharia law in the north, cornered four Christian students and a Christian lecturer in the staff quarters of the campus of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic and beat them to death with sticks, clubs and machetes.¹¹⁸⁵

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

Schools, universities, students and teachers were attacked in northern Nigeria. A majority of these incidents were suspected to be the work of Boko Haram, which claimed responsibility in several cases.¹¹⁸⁶ According to Amnesty International, more than 50 schools were attacked and partially destroyed or burned down in the first seven months of 2013, most of them in Borno state and a few in neighbouring Yobe state.¹¹⁸⁷ In the Borno state

capital, Maiduguri, an official reported to Amnesty that at least five government secondary schools and nine private schools were burned down between January and April.¹¹⁸⁸ According to one Borno State Ministry of Education official, some 15,000 children in the state stopped attending classes between February and May as a result of attacks.¹¹⁸⁹

While most previous attacks on schools had targeted infrastructure and were carried out at night when schools were empty, there appeared to be a marked change in tactics with reports of teachers and school students increasingly targeted.¹¹⁹⁰ In March, at least three teachers were killed and three students seriously injured in a simultaneous attack on four schools in Maiduguri.¹¹⁹¹ In June, two secondary schools were targeted in Yobe and Borno states: seven students and two teachers were killed when suspected Boko Haram militants attacked their school in Damaturu,¹¹⁹² and the following day, gunmen attacked a school in Maiduguri while students were sitting their examinations, killing nine students.¹¹⁹³

In one incident in July, gunmen attacked a government secondary boarding school in Mamudo, Yobe state, at night, while students were sleeping. Sections of the school and dormitory were set ablaze, and a number of students were shot as they tried to escape. At least 22 students and one teacher were killed.¹¹⁹⁴

School teachers appeared to be targeted specifically, with some 30 reported to have been shot dead, sometimes during class, from January to September.¹¹⁹⁵ A number of teachers also said they had been intimidated by Boko Haram elements or subjected to close surveillance by the group in remote towns in Borno state.¹¹⁹⁶ In a video statement made in July 2013, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau threatened teachers, saying: 'School teachers who are teaching Western

education? We will kill them! We will kill them!'; he also endorsed recent school attacks and claimed that non-Islamic schools should be burned down.¹¹⁹⁷

One major attack also occurred on a college in Yobe state in September. Unknown gunmen suspected to be affiliated with Boko Haram entered the campus of the Yobe State College of Agriculture in the middle of the night and began firing on students in their dormitories as they slept. While casualty figures varied, reports suggested that as many as 50 students were killed.¹¹⁹⁸ The gunmen also reportedly set fire to classrooms. Some 1,000 students were said to have left the campus in the wake of the attack.¹¹⁹⁹

Several other incidents involving higher education were reported. Students alleged that the police used tear gas and fired live ammunition to break up a protest against university transport prices at the University of Uyo in June, killing a student; police, however, denied this claim, saying that the students had brought the body to them outside the campus, which they were prohibited from entering. University equipment was reportedly destroyed in anger after the killing and 45 students were arrested, of whom 44 were charged with arson and murder.¹²⁰⁰

In another incident, on 13 February, local police detained between 10 and 12 lecturers at Rivers State University of Science and Technology for holding a meeting of the local chapter of the Academic Staff Union of Universities on campus. They were held for five hours before being released.¹²⁰¹

ENDNOTES NIGERIA:

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Global Coalition to
Protect Education
from Attack