



GEOGRAPHIC EXPANSION OF SCHOOL BANDITRY: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SAFE SCHOOL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN OYO STATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the geographic expansion of school banditry (2022–2026) and the implementation of the Safe School Policy in public primary and secondary schools across the Oyo Central, Oyo North, and Oyo South senatorial districts of Oyo State, Nigeria. Anchored on Routine Activity Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, it adopted a descriptive survey design and answered two research questions. From a population of 19,361 stakeholders, a stratified random and purposive sample of 576 respondents (students, teachers, administrators, parents, security personnel, and education officials) was drawn from six Local Government Areas (LGAs); 487 usable responses (84.5%) were analysed. Data were collected with the School Banditry Geographic Expansion Scale (SBGES) and the Safe School Policy Implementation Assessment Tool (SSPIAT) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.89 and 0.84 respectively) and analysed using means, standard deviations, and a 3.00 adequacy benchmark. School banditry had expanded across all three districts, with Oyo North highest (mean = 4.02), followed by Oyo Central (3.52) and Oyo South (3.29). Safe School Policy implementation was inadequate in all districts (grand mean = 2.62), lowest in Oyo North (2.46), with psychosocial support (2.39) and perimeter security (2.46) weakest. The study concludes that banditry has expanded across Oyo State and that implementation is inadequate, most critically in Oyo North, where the threat is greatest. It recommends a district-differentiated framework, mandatory security audits, a dedicated security fund, and an integrated community-school safety partnership model.

Keywords: Geographic expansion, School banditry, Safe school, Policy implementation, Public schools.



Introduction

School security in Nigeria has deteriorated markedly over the past decade, driven by the geographic expansion of armed banditry, kidnapping, cult violence, and attacks on schools. The 2014 Chibok abduction catalyzed the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, the Federal Government's Declaration on Safe Schools, and a National Safe Schools Framework. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2024) recorded at least 19 attacks on schools in Nigeria in 2022 and 2023, compared with at least 11 in 2020 and 2021, and its latest report found that over 700 students and education staff were reportedly kidnapped in Nigeria in 2024 and 2025 (GCPEA, 2026).

School banditry has migrated from its North-East and North-West epicentre toward the Middle Belt and increasingly into Southern states. Oyo State, historically insulated, now records armed robbery on school premises, inter-cult violence, extortion of school funds and, in Oyo North communities adjoining Kwara State, kidnapping and ransom demands against school personnel. The threat is spatially uneven: Oyo North (Oke-Ogun), Oyo South (urban and peri-urban Ibadan), and Oyo Central (Oyo town and Ogbomosho) present different profiles, so treating the state as one security environment obscures what should drive differentiated policy. No systematic study has examined the geographic pattern of banditry expansion within Oyo State or the fidelity of Safe School Policy implementation across its three senatorial districts; this study addresses that gap.

Statement of the Problem

The expansion of school banditry into Oyo State threatens educational access, teacher retention, student wellbeing, and community confidence in public schooling. Although the Federal Safe Schools Declaration and Oyo State's corresponding framework provide normative grounding, implementation at school and Local Government Area (LGA) levels remains fragmented, under-resourced, and unresponsive to spatial differences in threat. Evidence on expansion patterns and implementation fidelity across the three senatorial districts is needed to allocate security resources efficiently.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. investigate the geographic pattern and extent of school banditry expansion across Oyo State's three senatorial districts;
2. assess the level of the Safe School Policy implementation across its five components in the three senatorial districts; and
3. compare the level of the Safe School Policy implementation among the three senatorial districts.

Research Questions

1. What is the geographic pattern and extent of school banditry expansion across the three senatorial districts of Oyo State?
2. What is the level of the Safe School Policy implementation across the three senatorial districts of Oyo State?



Significance of the Study

The study is significant to the Oyo State Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Oyo State Universal Basic Education Board (Oyo SUBEB), Oyo State Post Primary Schools Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), and the Oyo State Security Trust Fund as the first empirically grounded geographic analysis of school banditry expansion and district-level assessment of implementation fidelity. It gives the Federal Ministry of Education and the Presidential Safe Schools Initiative a South-Western case study and extends Routine Activity Theory and Ecological Systems Theory to a Southern state.

Scope and Delimitations

The study covers public primary and secondary schools in six LGAs across Oyo State's three senatorial districts: Atisbo and Saki West (Oyo North); Oyo East and Afijio (Oyo Central); and Ibadan North and Ibadan South-West (Oyo South). Respondents were students (Primary 4–6 and Junior Secondary School 1 to Senior Secondary School 3), teachers, head teachers and principals, parents/Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) leaders, school-attached security personnel, and LGA education officers, covering 2022–2026. Private schools, tertiary institutions, and other states are excluded.

Conceptual Review

School Banditry and Its Geographic Dynamics

School banditry encompasses criminal acts that target schools, school communities, or educational resources through organized or opportunistic violence; GCPEA (2024) tracks attacks on schools, on students, teachers, and other education personnel, and on higher education, alongside the military use of educational facilities, and its Nigeria profile highlights raids, arson, and abductions by criminal gangs, often for ransom, which closed over 400 schools in the north-west in 2022. The School Banditry Geographic Expansion Scale (SBGES) typology adapts these categories to locally salient forms of violence. Banditry tends to spread toward areas of lower state security capacity, making rural and peri-urban schools with weak perimeters high-value, low-risk targets (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In Oyo State the risk gradient runs north–south, with Oyo North bordering Kwara, Oyo South facing cult and gang violence, and Oyo Central showing both.

Safe School Policy and Implementation Fidelity

Nigeria's Safe School Policy architecture stems from the Ministerial Declaration on Providing a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment (Oslo Conference, May 2015), operationalized through the Federal Safe Schools Initiative's four pillars: prevention, response, mitigation, and accountability. In Oyo State, responsibility is shared across the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, TESCOM, Oyo SUBEB, and the Security Trust Fund. Akinola and Ojo (2023) found that the absence of a clear lead authority, unified budgeting, or shared accountability leaves schools with ad hoc measures and minimal institutional support. Implementation fidelity is the degree to which prescribed protective measures are delivered as designed, with adequate resources, trained personnel, and monitoring; Carroll et al. (2007) identified five dimensions (adherence, dosage, quality, participant responsiveness, and programme differentiation).



Conceptual Framework

The framework positions Safe School Policy implementation as the independent variable and school banditry incidence as the dependent variable, mediated by physical security environment, community-school collaboration, and psychosocial climate. Moderating variables (geographic location, school level, school size, and community socioeconomic profile) condition the strength of this relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory (RAT), developed by Cohen and Felson (1979) and elaborated by Felson and Boba (2010), holds that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge; it has been extended to school-based crime (Tillyer & Eck, 2011). Migrating bandit groups, urban gangs, and cult networks form a fixed baseline risk; schools with weak fencing, predictable schedules, and few security personnel are suitable targets; and capable guardianship is the lever Safe School Policy strengthens. RAT therefore predicts an inverse relationship between implementation fidelity and banditry incidence, examined here by comparing district-level banditry (Table 4) and implementation (Table 5) scores.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) conceptualizes outcomes as products of nested micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. It explains why outcomes vary geographically under a nominally uniform policy: a school in Ibadan South-West operates within a different ecosystem of community relationships, economic conditions, and security presence than one in Saki West, so implementation must be ecologically calibrated, the anchor for the district-differentiated design.

Empirical Studies

Akinola and Ojo (2023) examined school security management and students' safety in public secondary schools in bandit-affected areas of Safana LGA, Katsina State. Aderinto et al. (2025), anchoring a qualitative study of secondary schools in Katsina State on Routine Activity Theory, found schools highly vulnerable to bandit attacks and abductions, attributing this to the absence of perimeter fences and too few security operatives. Neither Katsina study covered Oyo State. At the national level, a Universal Basic Education Commission audit reported that 78% of public schools lack perimeter fencing and 65% operate without security guards (Lawal, 2026). GCPEA (2024) located most of the 19 school attacks it recorded in Nigeria in 2022 and 2023 in the north-eastern, north-western, and north-central states, which is consistent with the gap this study addresses.

Gap in Literature

Nigerian scholarship on school banditry and Safe School Policy concentrates on the North-East, North-West, and North-Central zones. Oyo State has had no systematic study of banditry's geographic dynamics or implementation fidelity; this study fills that gap through the first district-differentiated analysis across its three senatorial districts.



Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design using structured instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), combining descriptive (banditry patterns and implementation levels) and comparative (inter-district differences) components.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised five stakeholder groups in six LGAs (Table 1): senior primary and secondary students, teachers, head teachers/principals, parents/PTA executives, and LGA education/security officials, totalling 19,361 based on 2023/2024 Oyo SUBEB and TESCOM records.

Table 1: Population Distribution by Senatorial District and Stakeholder Group

District/LGA	Students	Teachers	Admin	Parents	Officials	Total
Atisbo (Oyo North)	1,847	94	18	112	7	2,078
Saki West (Oyo North)	2,314	118	22	138	9	2,601
Oyo East (Oyo Central)	2,193	107	19	126	8	2,453
Afijio (Oyo Central)	1,976	98	17	114	7	2,212
Ibadan North (Oyo South)	4,812	246	47	289	14	5,408
Ibadan South-West (Oyo South)	4,103	209	38	247	12	4,609
Total	17,245	872	161	1,026	57	19,361

Source: Oyo SUBEB and TESCOM records, 2023/2024.

Using the Yamane (1967) formula at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error, 391 students were sampled from $N = 17,245$. Proportional stratified sampling yielded 42 teachers and 48 PTA security-committee parent representatives; purposive sampling yielded 38 of the 161 administrators; and all 57 security/government officials were enumerated. The gross sample was 576 (Table 2), of which 487 usable responses were analysed.

Table 2: Sample Distribution across LGAs and Stakeholder Categories

LGA	Students	Teachers	Admins	Parents	Officials	Total
Atisbo	64	7	6	8	7	92
Saki West	80	9	7	9	9	114
Oyo East	76	8	6	8	8	106
Afijio	69	7	6	8	7	97
Ibadan North	58	6	7	8	14	93
Ibadan South-West	44	5	6	7	12	74
Total	391	42	38	48	57	576

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Instrumentation, Validity, and Reliability

Two instruments were used. The **School Banditry Geographic Expansion Scale (SBGES)**, a 38-item instrument, measured perceived frequency, spread, and typology of banditry incidents



(2022–2026) on a 5-point Likert scale with Yes/No typology checklists. The **Safe School Policy Implementation Assessment Tool (SSPIAT)**, a 45-item instrument, measured implementation fidelity across perimeter security, psychosocial support, community-school collaboration, staff security training, and incident reporting/emergency response on a 5-point Likert scale. Six experts in Educational Policy and Administration, Security Studies, and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Ibadan, Lead City University, and Ladoke Akintola University of Technology validated both. A pilot among 45 respondents in Odeda LGA, Ogun State, yielded Cronbach's Alpha of 0.89 (SBGES) and 0.84 (SSPIAT), both above 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

Approval was obtained from Oyo SUBEB, TESCO, the six Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs), and the Security Trust Fund. Trained research assistants (three per LGA, drawn from University of Ibadan Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students) administered the instruments over eight weeks (May–July 2026). Of 576 instruments distributed, 521 were returned and 487 were usable (84.5%). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations, with a 3.00 adequacy threshold) addressed Research Questions 1 and 2.

Data Presentation

Demographic Profile

Table 3: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N =487)

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Stakeholder	Students	331	68.0
	Teachers	36	7.4
	Administrators	32	6.6
	Parents/PTA	41	8.4
	Security/Govt Officials	47	9.7
District	Oyo North	193	39.6
	Oyo Central	184	37.8
	Oyo South	110	22.6
School Level	Primary	201	41.3
	Secondary	286	58.7
Location	Urban	213	43.7
	Peri-urban	158	32.4
	Rural	116	23.8
Banditry Experience	Direct	214	43.9
	Witnessed	168	34.5
	None	105	21.6

Source: Field Survey, 2026.



Table 3 shows that students formed the largest stakeholder group (68.0%) and that 78.4% of respondents had directly experienced or witnessed school banditry. Oyo North formed the largest district share (39.6%), and rural respondents accounted for 23.8%.

Geographic Pattern of School Banditry Expansion

Research Question 1: *What is the geographic pattern and extent of school banditry expansion across Oyo State's three senatorial districts?*

Table 4: *Mean Scores on School Banditry Incidence by District and Typology (N = 487)*

Typology of School Banditry	North	Central	South	Overall	SD
Armed robbery on school funds/property	4.21	3.64	3.48	3.78	0.81
Abduction/attempted abduction	3.94	3.11	2.73	3.26	0.93
Inter-cult and gang violence	3.62	3.87	4.09	3.86	0.74
Extortion/threats against administrators	4.08	3.74	3.53	3.78	0.79
Armed strangers/herdsmen encroachment	4.41	3.28	2.61	3.43	1.04
Destruction/looting of property	3.87	3.46	3.31	3.55	0.82
Composite Banditry Index	4.02	3.52	3.29	3.61	0.86

Source: *Field Survey, 2026; Scale: 5 = Very High, 1 = Never.*

Table 4 shows a clear geographic gradient: Oyo North recorded the highest composite index (4.02), followed by Oyo Central (3.52) and Oyo South (3.29), all above the 3.00 threshold, so banditry is pervasive statewide. Typologies diverge as armed-stranger/herdsman encroachment is concentrated in Oyo North (4.41), consistent with proximity to cattle-corridor routes, while inter-cult and gang violence peaks in Oyo South (4.09), reflecting Ibadan's urban dynamics.

Safe School Policy Implementation

Research Question 2: *What is the level of Safe School Policy implementation across the three senatorial districts?*

Table 5: *Safe School Policy Implementation Levels by Component and District (N = 487)*

Component	North	Central	South	Overall	SD	Adequacy
Perimeter Security/Physical Infrastructure	2.31	2.49	2.58	2.46	0.97	Inadequate
Psychosocial Support Services	2.27	2.41	2.48	2.39	0.94	Inadequate
Community-School Security Collaboration	2.64	2.81	3.12	2.86	0.91	Inadequate
Teacher/Staff Security Training	2.58	2.74	2.89	2.74	0.88	Inadequate
Incident Reporting/Emergency Response	2.49	2.67	2.83	2.66	0.96	Inadequate
District Composite	2.46	2.62	2.78	2.62	0.93	Inadequate

Source: *Field Survey, 2026; Decision rule: mean $\geq$ 3.00 = Adequate.*

Implementation is inadequate at composite level in all three districts (grand mean = 2.62) and, overall, on all five components, although Oyo South's community-school collaboration (3.12) marginally exceeds the 3.00 threshold. Oyo North, with the highest banditry index (4.02), has the



lowest implementation composite (2.46) as the most affected district is the least protected. Psychosocial support (2.39) and perimeter security (2.46) are the most deficient components.

Discussion of Findings

Oyo North is the most banditry-affected and least policy-protected district (implementation composite = 2.46). This is what RAT predicts when capable guardianship is absent from high-risk environments. Psychosocial support (2.39) is the weakest component and, with 78.4% of respondents reporting direct or witnessed exposure, its absence risks post-traumatic stress, attendance anxiety, and dropout.

Conclusion

School banditry in Oyo State has expanded geographically and is no longer a marginal, exclusively northern phenomenon; all three senatorial districts face measurable, differentiated threats requiring district-sensitive responses. Safe School Policy implementation is inadequate, most alarmingly in Oyo North, where the threat is greatest, a resource-allocation failure requiring urgent correction. The mismatch between threat and protection across districts supports accelerated, adequately resourced implementation, with psychosocial support the most neglected component.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Oyo State Government and Ministry of Education should adopt a risk-stratified Safe School Implementation Framework that calibrates implementation intensity to each district's banditry index, designating Oyo North a Priority Intervention Zone for perimeter security, personnel, and psychosocial services.
2. Oyo SUBEB and TESCO should institutionalize mandatory annual school security audits using a standardized checklist aligned with the National Safe Schools Framework, publishing results in school performance profiles to guide Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and state capital budget allocations.
3. A dedicated, ring-fenced School Security Fund, jointly financed by the state government and LGAs and protected by legislative appropriation, should be established.
4. Psychosocial support should be strengthened by assigning at least one trained, trauma-informed counsellor to every public secondary school and cluster of primary schools, in partnership with the University of Ibadan's Department of Guidance and Counselling on a school trauma-response protocol.
5. Teacher security training (security awareness, emergency response, and psychological first aid) should be integrated into TESCO's annual professional development programme and completed before deployment to high-risk zones.



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