

Nigeria

In Nigeria, SAR reported non-state actors carrying out attacks and raids on higher education institutions. Student expression was also threatened by police using force against peaceful student protests and suspensions targeting students' social media activity.

Nigeria is bound by national and international legal instruments protecting academic freedom. Nigeria is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides for freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which provides for the right to education (Article 13) and calls on state parties to “respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity” (Article 15(3)). Full exercise of academic freedom depends also on respect for institutional autonomy, defined as “that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability, especially in respect of funding provided by the state, and respect for academic freedom and human rights.”¹ Nigeria’s constitution also contains provisions that support academic freedom and related rights relevant to incidents reported here, including explicit protections for the right to education (Article 38), freedom of opinion and expression (Article 39), and freedom of assembly (Article 40).² In March 2019, Nigeria endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, an “inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict.”³

Over the past year, Nigeria saw an intense surge in attacks and abductions targeting education institutions, particularly in the country’s northern region. Attacks had been prevalent in the region in recent years, especially at the **University of Maiduguri**, where SAR has reported eight attacks since 2017. Boko Haram, a terrorist organization based in northern

Nigeria, claimed responsibility for a number of those attacks. Armed criminal groups seeking ransom appear to be responsible for many of the recent attacks and kidnappings. Roughly 1,000 students and staff from primary to higher education institutions have been abducted since December 2020.⁴ Education facilities have often been shuttered as a preventative measure, while the government has struggled to prevent additional incidents. Amidst the heightened insecurity posed by attacks and abductions, increasing university tuition fees at some institutions regularly prompted protests by students.

In March 2021, SAR reported armed groups carrying out violent attacks and raids at higher education institutions in the northern region of Nigeria. More than 90 higher education students and personnel were abducted and at least 11 people were killed in connection with these incidents. On March 10, 2021, a group of five gunmen stormed the **National Institute of Construction Technology**, situated in Uromi, and abducted a student and staff member.⁵ Security forces were able to secure their release six days later after tracking them to a forest. One day after the raid in Uromi, gunmen attacked the **Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation** and abducted 39 students and staff members.⁶ The gunmen had breached the college’s perimeter at roughly 11:30 PM and began opening fire. The abducted students and staff were released by May 5. On April 20, an armed raid on the **Greenfield University** campus resulted in 20 students kidnapped and an employee killed.⁷ Five of the abducted students were reported dead on April 26. The remaining students were released by May 30 after a ransom was paid to their captors.⁸ On May 30, gunmen raided **Taraba State University** and

kidnapped Umar Buba, head of the university's Faculty of Agriculture and a former dean of student affairs. He was released on June 3.⁹ On July 11, gunmen raided **Zamfara College of Agriculture and Animal Sciences (ZCAAS)** and kidnapped the provost, Habibu Bukullu.¹⁰ The gunmen released him days later, though it is unclear whether a ransom was paid. The next month, on August 16, a group of unidentified gunmen again raided **ZCAAS**, killing a police officer and two campus security guards, and kidnapping 15 students and 4 staff members.¹¹ The students were reportedly released on August 27. It is unclear whether the staff members were also released.

Over the past year, SAR has also reported attacks on student expression in Nigeria. These have included the use of violent force and arrests by state security forces during student protests, as well as disciplinary measures by university administrators. On November 4, 2020, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education summarily suspended two students, **Chibuzor Remmy** and **Sunday Idongesit Okpokpo**, for alleged social media posts calling on classmates to protest issues relating to access to banking on campus and calling for the cancellation of examinations and a matriculation ceremony.¹² The university lifted the suspensions after a lawyer representing one of the students denounced the disciplinary action during a radio appearance. On December 16, police fired tear gas at students from the **Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education** peacefully protesting a sudden closure of the university following a reported uptick in COVID-19 cases and abductions of secondary school students by Boko Haram.¹³ The students had been turned away from the college by security guards, who also used tear gas against them. Tear gas was also deployed on February 1, 2021, when unidentified state security forces attempted to disperse a group of **University of Abuja** students peacefully protesting a reported 100 percent increase in tuition fees.¹⁴ The students, who were protesting along an expressway near the campus, were also reportedly beaten with batons. At **Kaduna State College of Education**, on June 28, 2021, state security forces clashed with students protesting against school tuition fee increases.¹⁵ Two students were reportedly struck by stray bullets from security forces and died from their injuries. College officials suspended academic activities following the clashes.

Violent attacks, raids on campuses, and abductions of students and staff, the use of force by police and other security forces against student protesters, and disciplinary measures intended to punish nonviolent student expression undermine the right to education

and academic freedom, as well as institutional autonomy and the peaceful exchange of ideas. Such attacks violate higher education's core values and constrain the sector's ability to serve society.

SAR calls on state authorities in Nigeria to take all available steps to respond to and prevent raids and violent attacks on campuses, including by securing the safe return of missing students and staff and holding perpetrators accountable. SAR also calls on state and higher education authorities to respect and promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy, including by refraining from the use of force or disciplinary measures against nonviolent student expression.

ENDNOTES

1. See UNESCO, "Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel," November 11, 1997, para. 17, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.
2. See Constitution of Nigeria (2011), available at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Nigeria_2011.pdf?lang=en.
3. Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "Safe Schools Declaration Endorsements," available at <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/endorsement/>.
4. Garba Muhammad, "Kidnapped Nigerian students freed after ransom paid - school, parent," *Reuters*, July 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kidnapped-nigerian-students-freed-after-ransom-paid-school-parent-2021-07-09/>; Jariel Arvin, "How kidnap-for-ransom became the 'most lucrative industry in Nigeria,'" *Vox*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22596198/students-nigeria-profit-kidnapping>.
5. SAR Academic Freedom Monitoring Project (AFMP), March 10, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-03-10-national-institute-of-construction-technology/>.
6. SAR AFMP, March 11, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-03-11-federal-college-of-forestry-mechanisation/>.
7. SAR AFMP, April 20, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-04-20-greenfield-university/>.
8. Sheedah Lawal, "14 Abducted Greenfield University Students, Staff Released," *Information Nigeria*, May 30, 2021, <https://www.informationng.com/2021/05/14-abducted-greenfield-university-students-staff-released.html>.
9. SAR AFMP, May 30, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-05-30-taraba-state-university/>.
10. SAR AFMP, July 11, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-07-11-zamfara-college-of-agriculture-and-animal-science/>.
11. SAR AFMP, August 16, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-08-16-zamfara-college-of-agriculture-and-animal-science/>.
12. SAR AFMP, November 4, 2020, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2020-11-04-ignatius-ajuru-university-of-education/>.
13. SAR AFMP, December 16, 2020, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2020-12-16-saadatu-rimi-college-of-education/>.
14. SAR AFMP, February 1, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-02-01-university-of-abuja/>.
15. SAR AFMP, June 28, 2021, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2021-06-28-kaduna-state-college-of-education/>.