

# Insurgency: Boko Haram and the Regionalization of Attacks on Education in the Lake Chad Basin, 2000-2025

<sup>1</sup>Shey Fonjoh Ivo, (PhD), <sup>2</sup>Angandze Sheily Ngobalep (PhD), <sup>3</sup>Kineh Mirabel Dzelam, PhD

<sup>1</sup>The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

<sup>2</sup>The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

<sup>3</sup>The University of Bamenda, Cameroon

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1306000055>

Received: 25 May 2026; Accepted: 30 May 2026; Published: 22 June 2026

## ABSTRACT

The Lake Chad Basin has experienced persistent insecurity due to Boko Haram's insurgency, which has increasingly targeted educational institutions. What began as a localized Nigerian extremist movement has evolved into a transnational security crisis affecting Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. Schools have become central targets due to their symbolic association with Western education, state legitimacy, and social modernization. This study adopts a qualitative desk-based research design, drawing on secondary sources including reports from Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, Amnesty International, and peer-reviewed academic literature. It also uses documented case studies of major school attacks between 2000 and 2025 to trace the regionalization of educational violence. Findings show that Boko Haram's attacks on education intensified after 2009 and became increasingly cross-border due to porous frontiers, weak state presence in border regions, and the group's ideological rejection of Western education. The 2014 Chibok abduction of 276 schoolgirls represents a turning point that globalized the conflict and marked the beginning of intensified school-targeted violence. Subsequent incidents such as the Dapchi abduction (2018) and repeated raids in Cameroon's Far North demonstrate the spillover of educational insecurity across the Lake Chad Basin. The study concludes that Boko Haram has transformed education into a transnational battlefield. School attacks are not isolated acts of violence but part of a broader strategy of territorial disruption, ideological enforcement, and governance collapse across the Lake Chad Basin. The article recommends strengthening cross border military coordination, expanding Safe Schools Initiatives, improving early warning systems in rural areas, and investing in long term educational resilience and psychosocial recovery programs for affected communities.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin, School Abductions, Transnational Insurgency, Education Insecurity.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lake Chad Basin, comprising Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger has become one of the most complex and protracted security crises in contemporary Africa. At the center of this instability is Boko Haram, an insurgent movement that has evolved from a localized religious revivalist group in northeastern Nigeria into a transnational violent organization operating across porous borders. Since the early 2000s, and particularly after its militarization in 2009, Boko Haram has systematically destabilized civilian life, with education systems emerging as one of its most visible and vulnerable targets. Education occupies a central place in both the ideological and operational logic of Boko Haram. The group's popularized name, often translated as "Western education is forbidden," reflects its rejection of secular schooling systems, which it frames as corrupting, immoral, and aligned with Western domination. This ideological framing has translated into deliberate attacks on schools, teachers, and students, transforming education from a space of learning into a site of violence and fear.

As Human Rights Watch notes, Boko Haram has repeatedly targeted schools as symbols of state authority and Western influence, particularly in Nigeria's northeast (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 2). The most defining moment in this trajectory occurred in April 2014 with the abduction of 276 female students from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State. This incident marked a major escalation in the group's tactics and global visibility. According to Human Rights Watch, the attackers disguised themselves as security forces before abducting the girls and transporting them into forested insurgent-controlled areas (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp. 1–3). The Chibok abduction not only symbolized the vulnerability of education in conflict zones but also signaled a shift toward mass, high-impact attacks on schools as part of Boko Haram's broader strategy of psychological warfare and governance disruption. However, while much of the early literature frames Boko Haram as a predominantly Nigerian phenomenon, recent evidence shows a clear regionalization of violence, particularly in relation to education. Since approximately 2013–2014, attacks on schools and educational infrastructure have increasingly spread into Cameroon's Far North region and parts of Chad, reflecting the group's cross-border mobility and the structural weaknesses of Lake Chad Basin states. UNICEF reports that the conflict has severely disrupted education across the region, with thousands of schools damaged, closed, or operating under threat of attack, particularly in northeastern Nigeria and border communities (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

This regional expansion is closely linked to the geography of the Lake Chad Basin, which is characterized by porous borders, difficult terrain, and weak state presence in remote rural areas. The shrinking and fragmented nature of Lake Chad itself has created islands and swampy territories that facilitate insurgent movement and concealment. These conditions enable Boko Haram fighters to move fluidly between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, thereby extending their operational reach beyond national boundaries. As Zenn (2014) observes, the group has exploited these border vulnerabilities to conduct raids, kidnappings, and attacks across multiple states with limited resistance (Zenn, 2014, p. 3).

In Cameroon, particularly in the Far North region, Boko Haram's spillover has resulted in school closures, teacher displacement, and reduced educational access, even in the absence of large-scale abductions comparable to Chibok or Dapchi. In Chad, although attacks have been less frequent, insecurity around Lake Chad islands has contributed to persistent disruption of schooling in border communities.

These dynamics show that education insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin extends beyond Nigeria, emerging as a shared regional crisis driven by interconnected vulnerabilities. Despite military responses such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and national counterinsurgency operations, Boko Haram's capacity to disrupt education remains significant. This persistence suggests that the issue is not solely military but also structural, rooted in governance deficits, socioeconomic marginalization, and weak border management systems. Against this background, this article examines the regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education between 2000 and 2025, focusing on Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. It seeks to understand how and why schools have become central targets in a transnational insurgency and how educational insecurity has diffused across the Lake Chad Basin over time. By situating school attacks within broader patterns of insurgent mobility and state fragility, the study contributes to ongoing debates on transnational violence, borderland insecurity, and education in conflict zones.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education in the Lake Chad Basin between 2000 and 2025. A qualitative approach is suitable because the issue involves complex patterns of violence, ideology, and cross-border mobility that cannot be fully captured through numerical measures alone. The study uses a comparative case-study method, examining Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, to assess how attacks on schools developed across different national settings within the same regional security landscape. Case study research is particularly useful for analyzing conflict dynamics because it allows for an in-depth examination of processes and contextual factors over time (Yin, 2018, p. 15). The research relies entirely on secondary data drawn from credible institutional and academic sources. These include reports from Human Rights Watch on attacks on education in northeastern Nigeria, UNICEF publications on children affected by conflict in the Lake Chad Basin, Amnesty International reports on

abductions, peer-reviewed journal articles on Boko Haram, and selected policy and security reports from regional and international organizations. These sources were selected because they provide detailed documentation of school attacks, including locations, timelines, and descriptions of events, which are necessary for tracing patterns of violence across borders (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp. 1–5; UNICEF, 2018, p. 1; Amnesty International, 2024, pp. 1–3).

Data were gathered through a systematic review of documents published from 2000 to 2025. The study identified and extracted relevant documented cases of school attacks from the literature, including prominent incidents such as the Chibok abduction in Nigeria, the Dapchi kidnapping in Yobe State, and reported attacks and school closures in Cameroon’s Far North region and in border areas of Chad. These cases were then arranged chronologically and geographically to track how violence against education expanded from Nigeria into neighboring countries. This chronological mapping allows for a clearer understanding of escalation patterns and cross-border diffusion of insurgent activity (Zenn, 2014, pp. 1–6; UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

The data were analyzed using thematic interpretation, which involves identifying recurring ideas and patterns across different sources. In this study, attention was given to themes such as the symbolic targeting of education, the cross-border movement of armed groups, and the vulnerability of border communities with weak state presence. This approach makes it possible to understand not only where and when attacks occurred, but also why education became a central target in the insurgency. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative security studies because it allows researchers to interpret meaning across diverse types of evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

To ensure reliability and credibility, the study uses triangulation by comparing information from multiple independent and reputable sources such as UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. This helps to confirm the accuracy of reported events and reduces the risk of bias or misinformation (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp. 1–5; Amnesty International, 2024, pp. 1–3). Since the study is based on secondary data, no human participants were directly involved, but ethical consideration was given to the respectful representation of victims and the use of verified information only. In summary, the methodology combines comparative case study analysis with thematic interpretation of secondary data to examine how Boko Haram’s attacks on education evolved into a regional security problem across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. This approach allows for a structured understanding of both the scale and the dynamics of educational violence in the Lake Chad Basin over a twenty-five-year period.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives that help explain the evolution and regionalization of Boko Haram’s attacks on education in the Lake Chad Basin. These include transnational insurgency theory, borderlands theory, and the concept of symbolic violence against education. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional explanation of how an initially localized insurgency in northeastern Nigeria expanded into a cross-border security threat affecting Cameroon and Chad between 2000 and 2025.

Transnational insurgency theory explains how non-state armed groups operate beyond the territorial boundaries of a single state by exploiting weak governance, porous borders, and regional insecurity networks. In the case of Boko Haram, the group’s movement across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger demonstrates how insurgent organizations adapt to fragmented state authority in border regions. The Lake Chad Basin provides an enabling environment where weak surveillance capacity and limited state presence allow militants to conduct raids, retreat across borders, and re-emerge in different territories. This aligns with scholarly observations that modern insurgencies often evolve into cross-border networks when state control is uneven and regional cooperation is limited (Zenn, 2014, p. 3; Thurston, 2017, p. 52).

Borderlands theory further deepens this explanation by focusing on the social, political, and geographical characteristics of frontier regions. Borderlands are often marked by marginalization, weak infrastructure, informal economies, and limited institutional presence, making them fertile ground for armed group activity. The Lake Chad Basin exemplifies this condition, particularly in rural and island communities where state authority is minimal. These areas function as operational corridors for Boko Haram, enabling the group to

move fighters, abduct civilians, and attack schools with limited resistance. The fragmentation of state power in borderlands also contributes to the normalization of insecurity, where violence becomes embedded in everyday life and governance structures remain weak or absent (Lecocq & Klute, 2019, p. 12).

The concept of symbolic violence against education is central to understanding why schools are repeatedly targeted by Boko Haram. Education is not only a social service but also a representation of state legitimacy, modern governance, and external cultural influence. By attacking schools, Boko Haram challenges both the authority of the state and the ideological foundations of Western-style education. Schools therefore become symbolic targets that carry political, cultural, and psychological significance beyond their physical structures. The Chibok abduction in 2014 illustrates this clearly, as the targeting of female students generated both national trauma and international attention, reinforcing the symbolic impact of educational violence (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 2; Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2).

These theoretical perspectives also help explain the regional diffusion of school attacks across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. Once Boko Haram intensified its insurgency in northeastern Nigeria, its operational mobility combined with weak border enforcement allowed violence to spill into neighboring states. In Cameroon's Far North region, schools became vulnerable not necessarily due to large-scale ideological campaigns but because of geographic proximity and cross-border raids. Similarly, in Chad, insecurity around Lake Chad islands disrupted schooling even in the absence of frequent mass abductions. This pattern demonstrates how insurgent violence spreads through spatial connectivity rather than remaining confined within national borders (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1; Thurston, 2017, p. 88).

In addition, these theories collectively highlight that Boko Haram's targeting of education is not random but strategically embedded within broader insurgent objectives. Schools are attacked to weaken state legitimacy, instill fear in civilian populations, disrupt human capital development, and assert control over contested territories. The persistence of such attacks across different countries in the Lake Chad Basin indicates that the insurgency operates through both ideological motivation and structural opportunity, shaped by governance failures and regional insecurity dynamics.

In summary, the theoretical framework suggests that Boko Haram's attacks on education are best explained by an integrated perspective that combines transnational insurgency dynamics, borderland vulnerabilities, and the symbolic targeting of education. Together, these elements offer a strong account of both the persistence and the regional spread of school-based violence in the Lake Chad Basin throughout the study period.

### **Boko Haram And The Ideological Assault On Education**

Boko Haram's sustained violence against education in the Lake Chad Basin is rooted in an ideological framework that rejects Western-style schooling and associates it with moral corruption, cultural domination, and political subjugation. From its early formation in the early 2000s under Mohammed Yusuf, the movement articulated a critique of secular education systems, arguing that they displaced Islamic learning and reinforced colonial legacies in northern Nigeria. This ideological position later became more radicalized and militarized under Aboubakar Shekau, transforming what was initially a reformist religious discourse into a violent insurgent doctrine that justified attacks on schools, teachers, and students as part of a broader struggle against the state and its institutions (Thurston, 2017, p. 41).

The term Boko Haram, widely interpreted as "Western education is forbidden," reflects more than a linguistic label; it represents a political and ideological stance that frames education as a vehicle of foreign influence and cultural erosion. Within this worldview, schools are not neutral spaces of learning but institutions that reproduce Western values, undermine Islamic identity, and strengthen state authority. This perception has enabled Boko Haram to construct schools as legitimate targets within its moral and political narrative. As a result, violence against education is not incidental but structurally embedded within the group's ideological orientation (Zenn, 2014, p. 2).

---

**Plate 1: Aboubakar Shekau**

Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Aboubakar Shekau on the 20 December 2025 at 12:30 am.

This ideological framing became increasingly operationalized as the group transitioned from a localized religious movement into an armed insurgency. Following the 2009 crackdown by Nigerian security forces and the death of Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram shifted toward more aggressive and violent tactics, including targeted attacks on educational institutions. Schools were burned, teachers were assassinated, and students were abducted in order to disrupt what the group perceived as the reproduction of Westernized knowledge systems. Human Rights Watch documents that dozens of schools in northeastern Nigeria were attacked or destroyed during this period, with education becoming a central battlefield in the conflict between the state and the insurgency (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 3).

A key dimension of Boko Haram's ideological targeting of education is its gendered character. Female education in particular became a focal point of insurgent violence, as seen in the Chibok abduction in 2014. The targeting of schoolgirls reflects a broader ideological opposition to female participation in Western-style education, which the group frames as incompatible with its interpretation of religious norms. The abduction of 276 girls from a secondary school dormitory was not only a tactical operation but also an ideological statement intended to challenge the legitimacy of girls' education and to instill fear in communities that supported it (Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2).

The ideological attack on education also serves strategic purposes beyond religious justification. By targeting schools, Boko Haram undermines state authority and disrupts one of the most fundamental mechanisms of human capital development. Education systems are central to nation building, citizenship formation, and long-term socioeconomic development. Attacking them weakens public trust in government protection and reduces the capacity of the state to reproduce skilled populations. In this sense, ideology and strategy intersect, as the rejection of Western education simultaneously advances both doctrinal goals and insurgent objectives of territorial destabilization (Thurston, 2017, p. 64).

Furthermore, Boko Haram's ideology is not static but has evolved through interaction with regional dynamics and internal factionalism. While the Shekau faction maintained a rigid and highly violent anti-education stance, splinter groups such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have at times adopted more selective approaches to violence, including more strategic engagement with civilian populations. However, even within these variations, schools remain vulnerable targets, particularly in contested rural and border areas where state presence is weak and ideological enforcement is easier to sustain (International Crisis Group, 2019, p. 7).

The persistence of attacks on education across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad demonstrates the durability of this ideological framing. In Cameroon's Far North region, for example, schools have been repeatedly closed due to fear of Boko Haram incursions, even when direct ideological messaging is less visible than in Nigeria.

In Chad, the presence of insurgents around Lake Chad islands has similarly undermined confidence in formal schooling systems. These patterns suggest that once established, the ideological targeting of education becomes spatially transferable, reinforcing insecurity across borders regardless of national context (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1). In summary, Boko Haram's attacks on education are deeply embedded in an ideological system that rejects Western schooling as both morally illegitimate and politically threatening. However, this ideology operates in conjunction with strategic and structural factors, producing a sustained pattern of violence against educational institutions across the Lake Chad Basin. The result is not only the destruction of schools but also the erosion of education as a stable and trusted institution in conflict-affected communities.

### Case Study 1: The Chibok Abduction (Nigeria, 2014)

The Chibok abduction of April 2014 represents one of the most defining moments in the history of Boko Haram's insurgency and a turning point in the regional and global understanding of attacks on education in the Lake Chad Basin. It illustrates not only the group's operational capacity to target schools but also the symbolic importance it attaches to educational institutions, particularly those educating girls. The event occurred in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria, a region that had already experienced years of escalating violence, school burnings, and teacher assassinations prior to 2014. However, the Chibok incident marked an unprecedented escalation in scale, coordination, and international visibility. On the night of 14 April 2014, Boko Haram militants attacked the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok. The attackers arrived in trucks, initially deceiving local residents and school authorities by presenting themselves as members of the Nigerian security forces.

This tactic allowed them to gain access to the school compound with reduced resistance. Once inside, they rounded up students from dormitories, forcing them onto vehicles and transporting them toward remote forested areas believed to include Sambisa Forest and border regions near Cameroon. According to Human Rights Watch, a total of 276 female students were abducted during the raid, although 57 managed to escape shortly after the incident through various means, including jumping from moving vehicles or fleeing during moments of confusion (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp). The strategic logic of the Chibok attack cannot be understood solely as a kidnapping incident; rather, it reflects a deliberate targeting of female education as part of Boko Haram's broader ideological and political project. The school was not randomly selected but represented a symbol of state-supported female education in a predominantly rural and conservative region.

Plate 2: Adopted Chibok school girls under Bokoharam captivity



Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Chibok school girls on the 20 November 2025 at 12:30 am.

By attacking a girls' school, Boko Haram directly challenged the legitimacy of women's education and sought to instill fear in communities that supported schooling for girls. Amnesty International notes that abducted girls were later subjected to forced marriage, forced labor, and ideological indoctrination, demonstrating that the

attack extended beyond abduction into long-term social and psychological control (Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2). The Chibok abduction also had significant operational implications for the insurgency. It demonstrated Boko Haram’s capacity to conduct large-scale coordinated raids on protected institutions, exploit gaps in local security, and move captives across difficult terrain into insurgent-controlled zones. Reports suggest that the abducted girls were transported through forest corridors and potentially across porous borders into Cameroon and other parts of the Lake Chad Basin, highlighting the transnational dimension of the group’s mobility. Zenn (2014) argues that this mobility reflects Boko Haram’s adaptation to counterinsurgency pressure, allowing it to evade Nigerian military operations by dispersing captives and fighters across border regions (Zenn, 2014, p. 4).

The aftermath of the attack generated unprecedented national and international attention. The global “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign brought the issue of school abductions into international policy and media discourse, placing pressure on the Nigerian government to respond more decisively.

Plate 3: “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign in Nigeria



Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/](http://www.BBC.com/) Chibok school girls on the 20 December 2025 at 12:30 am.

However, despite military operations and rescue efforts, a significant number of the abducted girls remained missing for years, and some have never been recovered. The prolonged nature of the crisis underscores the limitations of state response mechanisms and the complexity of operating in the Lake Chad Basin’s difficult terrain. Beyond its immediate humanitarian impact, the Chibok abduction had long-term consequences for education in northeastern Nigeria and the wider region. Many families withdrew their daughters from school due to fear of similar attacks, and numerous schools in rural areas either closed or reduced operations. This created a ripple effect of educational disruption that extended beyond Chibok itself, reinforcing patterns of insecurity in neighboring regions of Cameroon and Chad. UNICEF reports that the psychological impact of such high-profile abductions contributed to widespread school absenteeism and long-term disruption of learning in conflict-affected communities (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

The Chibok case also reshaped Boko Haram’s global image, transforming it from a relatively localized insurgent group into an internationally recognized symbol of extremist violence against education. However, this visibility also had strategic consequences, as it increased military pressure on the group while simultaneously inspiring further securitization of education in the region. Schools became more heavily guarded in some areas, but in others, particularly in remote border zones, they remained vulnerable due to limited state capacity. In analytical terms, the Chibok abduction serves as a critical case study for understanding the intersection of ideology, strategy, and transnational insurgency. It demonstrates how

educational institutions can be transformed into symbolic targets that carry political, ideological, and psychological significance far beyond their immediate geographic location. It also illustrates how a single high-impact event can accelerate the regionalization of insecurity, linking Nigeria's internal conflict to broader instability across the Lake Chad Basin.

Conclusively, the Chibok abduction was not an isolated incident but a pivotal moment in the evolution of Boko Haram's campaign against education. It marked a shift toward large-scale, high-profile attacks on schools and played a central role in shaping both domestic and international responses to the insurgency. Its legacy continues to influence educational security, gendered vulnerability, and counterinsurgency strategies across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad.

### **Regionalization Of School Attacks In The Lake Chad Basin**

The regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education refers to the process through which violence that initially emerged in northeastern Nigeria progressively spread into neighboring Cameroon and Chad, transforming school insecurity into a transnational phenomenon. This shift reflects not only the geographic expansion of insurgent activity but also deeper structural conditions within the Lake Chad Basin, including porous borders, weak state capacity, and shared socio-economic vulnerabilities. Between 2000 and 2025, schools became increasingly exposed to similar patterns of attack across the three countries, including destruction of infrastructure, abductions, intimidation of teachers, and forced closures.

In Nigeria, which serves as the epicenter of Boko Haram's insurgency, attacks on education began as early as the mid-2000s but intensified significantly after 2009. Schools in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states were frequently targeted through arson, bombings, and mass abductions. The destruction of school buildings and killing of teachers created an atmosphere of fear that led to widespread school closures, particularly in rural areas. High-profile incidents such as the Chibok abduction in 2014 and the Dapchi kidnapping in 2018 further demonstrated the group's capacity to carry out large-scale attacks on educational institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp. 1–5; Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2).

These events not only affected Nigeria domestically but also had spillover effects across the region by demonstrating the vulnerability of schools in similarly situated border communities. The expansion of violence into Cameroon occurred primarily in the Far North region, which shares direct borders with northeastern Nigeria and lies within the Lake Chad Basin ecological and security zone. Boko Haram exploited weak border surveillance and difficult terrain, particularly around Lake Chad's islands and swampy areas, to launch cross-border raids. In this context, schools became indirect and direct targets.

Many educational institutions were forced to close due to fear of attacks, while others experienced direct violence including teacher intimidation and occasional destruction of school facilities. Unlike Nigeria, Cameroon experienced fewer mass abductions, but the psychological impact of insecurity significantly disrupted education delivery. Entire communities in border zones began withdrawing children from school as a preventive measure, contributing to a decline in school attendance and educational continuity (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

In Chad, the regionalization of school attacks was less pronounced in terms of frequency but still significant in its effects. Boko Haram activity in Chad was largely concentrated around Lake Chad islands and border villages, where the state's presence is limited and mobility is high. Although large-scale attacks on schools were rare compared to Nigeria, the presence of insurgents in nearby areas created persistent insecurity that affected schooling. Teachers were often reluctant to work in rural zones, and parents avoided sending children to school due to fear of potential raids. As a result, education in Chad's border regions became highly unstable, even in the absence of continuous direct attacks. This demonstrates that regionalization does not require uniform levels of violence but can manifest through varying degrees of disruption shaped by proximity and perceived threat.

A key driver of this regionalization is the geography of the Lake Chad Basin itself. The region is characterized by porous and poorly demarcated borders that allow for fluid movement between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad,

and Niger. The shrinking of Lake Chad has created a fragmented landscape of islands, waterways, and marshlands that provide strategic hideouts for armed groups. These conditions enable Boko Haram fighters to evade national security forces and operate across multiple jurisdictions with relative ease. As Zenn (2014) observes, insurgent mobility in this region is closely tied to the inability of states to maintain consistent territorial control in border areas, which facilitates the cross-border extension of attacks, including those targeting education (Zenn, 2014, p. 3).

Another important factor contributing to regionalization is the shared socio-economic vulnerability of border communities. Many of these areas are characterized by poverty, limited infrastructure, low state presence, and weak access to public services, including education. Schools in such environments are often poorly protected and located far from security installations, making them easy targets for armed groups. In addition, similar cultural and linguistic ties across borders facilitate insurgent movement and local recruitment; further embedding Boko Haram within the broader social landscape of the region.

The regionalization of school attacks is also reinforced by the symbolic effect of violence. High-profile incidents in Nigeria, particularly the Chibok abduction, generated global attention and demonstrated the strategic impact of targeting schools. This visibility may have influenced Boko Haram's continued focus on education as a tool for both psychological warfare and propaganda. By replicating or adapting similar tactics in neighboring countries, the group extended the symbolic power of its actions beyond national boundaries, contributing to a shared regional experience of educational insecurity.

In Cameroon and Chad, the response to this regionalized threat has included increased militarization, temporary school closures, and relocation of educational services in high-risk areas. However, these measures have often been reactive rather than preventive, reflecting broader limitations in regional coordination and resource allocation. The Multinational Joint Task Force has improved cooperation between states, but gaps remain in intelligence sharing, rapid response capacity, and protection of civilian infrastructure such as schools.

In summary, the regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education reflects a complex interaction of insurgent mobility, geographic conditions, governance weaknesses, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. While Nigeria remains the primary site of educational violence, Cameroon and Chad have increasingly experienced spill over effects that disrupt schooling and undermine educational stability. This pattern suggests that Boko Haram's impact on education is not limited by national borders, but rather reflects a broader regional crisis affecting the entire Lake Chad Basin.

### **Key Case: Dapchi Abduction (Nigeria, 2018)**

The Dapchi abduction of 19 February 2018 represents one of the most significant post-Chibok attacks on education by Boko Haram and serves as a critical case for understanding the persistence and adaptation of school-targeted violence in northeastern Nigeria. The incident occurred at the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, a region already experiencing prolonged insecurity due to Boko Haram activity. The attack demonstrated that despite increased military presence and international attention following the Chibok abduction in 2014, schools in the Lake Chad Basin remained highly vulnerable to renewed insurgent operations. On the day of the attack, Boko Haram militants entered Dapchi town and targeted the school during the afternoon hours when students were present in large numbers.

The attackers arrived in vehicles, bypassing or overwhelming local security arrangements, and proceeded to abduct approximately 110 schoolgirls. The operation was executed with minimal resistance, reflecting both the limited security capacity in the area and the continued ability of Boko Haram to penetrate school environments despite heightened awareness of previous attacks such as Chibok. The militants reportedly transported the abducted girls through rural routes and remote terrain, illustrating once again the role of difficult geography in facilitating insurgent mobility and evasion.

Plate 4: Students of Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi protesting and asking for the release of their classmates



Source: Extracted from the website of B.B.C at [www.BBC.com/Dapchi](http://www.BBC.com/Dapchi) school girls on the 20 December 2025 at 11:30 am.

Unlike the Chibok abduction, the Dapchi incident resulted in a relatively swift partial release of victims. In March 2018, Boko Haram returned 106 of the abducted girls to Dapchi, reportedly dropping them off in vehicles and warning local residents not to allow their daughters back into formal schooling. However, one girl, Leah Sharibu, was reportedly withheld because she refused to renounce her Christian faith; making her case a symbol of religious dimension in Boko Haram's targeting practices. Amnesty International highlights that her continued captivity reflects the group's selective use of ideological and religious identity in determining the fate of abductees (Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2).

The Dapchi abduction is significant for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the continued operational capacity of Boko Haram despite military counterinsurgency efforts and international pressure following Chibok. The ability to carry out another mass school kidnapping four years later indicates that school security systems remained inadequate in many rural areas of northeastern Nigeria. Second, the incident shows a tactical evolution in Boko Haram's approach. While Chibok resulted in prolonged captivity for most victims, Dapchi involved a negotiated or strategic release of the majority of abductees, suggesting possible factional differences within the group or shifting operational priorities.

Third, the psychological and social impact of the Dapchi abduction reinforced fear within communities already affected by previous attacks. Many families in Yobe State and surrounding areas reportedly withdrew their children, particularly girls, from school following the incident. This contributed to further educational disruption in a region already suffering from low school enrollment and high dropout rates due to insecurity. The repeated targeting of girls' schools also deepened concerns about gendered dimensions of violence in Boko Haram's insurgency, where female education remains particularly exposed to abduction and intimidation. The Dapchi case also highlights the broader regionalization dynamics of Boko Haram's violence. Although the attack occurred in Nigeria, its implications extended into neighboring Cameroon and Chad, where similar vulnerabilities existed in border communities. The ease with which militants moved in and out of Yobe State underscores the porous nature of Lake Chad Basin borders, reinforcing the conditions that allow school attacks to spread across national boundaries. As in Chibok, the attackers exploited remote terrain and weak surveillance systems, confirming that geography and governance deficits continue to play a central role in enabling educational insecurity.

In addition, the Dapchi abduction exposed limitations in state response mechanisms. Despite prior experience with Chibok, security arrangements at the school were insufficient to prevent the attack. This raised questions

about the effectiveness of Nigeria's counterinsurgency and school protection strategies, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas. It also highlighted gaps in intelligence gathering, early warning systems, and rapid response capabilities, all of which are essential for preventing attacks on vulnerable educational institutions.

Finally, the Dapchi abduction serves as a continuation and evolution of Boko Haram's strategy of targeting education in the Lake Chad Basin. It demonstrates both the persistence of school based violence and the adaptive nature of insurgent tactics in response to changing security environments. Alongside Chibok, Dapchi underscores the ongoing vulnerability of education systems in northeastern Nigeria and reinforces the need to understand school attacks as part of a broader, regionally interconnected pattern of insurgent violence.

### **Drivers Of The Regionalization Of School Attacks In The Lake Chad Basin**

The regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad is the outcome of multiple interacting structural, geographical, political, and strategic factors that enabled a locally rooted insurgency to evolve into a transnational security threat. Rather than being a simple geographical expansion, the spread of school attacks reflects deeper conditions of state fragility, uneven governance, and insurgent adaptation within the Lake Chad Basin. These drivers collectively explain why education became a repeated target across multiple countries between 2000 and 2025. One of the most important drivers is the porosity of borders within the Lake Chad Basin.

The boundaries separating Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger are weakly controlled and often difficult to monitor due to remote terrain, limited infrastructure, and insufficient security deployment. These conditions allow Boko Haram fighters to move fluidly across borders, conduct attacks in one country, and retreat into another to avoid military pursuit. This cross-border mobility is central to the group's operational survival and directly contributes to the diffusion of school-based violence beyond Nigeria. Zenn (2014) emphasizes that Boko Haram's ability to exploit weak border enforcement has been critical to its persistence and regional expansion (Zenn, 2014, p. 3).

Closely linked to this is the geography of the Lake Chad Basin, which has significantly shaped the spatial dynamics of conflict. The region's shrinking lake, fragmented waterways, islands, and marshlands create a complex and difficult-to-patrol environment that favors insurgent concealment and movement. These ecological conditions provide natural hideouts and informal transit routes that reduce the effectiveness of state security operations. Schools located in or near these remote areas are especially vulnerable due to their isolation and lack of consistent protection. UNICEF highlights that these environmental conditions have contributed to prolonged insecurity affecting civilian infrastructure, including education systems, across the region (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

Another major driver is state fragility and uneven governance capacity across border regions. Many rural areas in northeastern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, and western Chad are characterized by weak institutional presence, limited public services, and inadequate security infrastructure. In such contexts, schools often operate without sufficient protection, making them easy targets for armed groups. The absence of strong state authority in these areas creates governance vacuums that Boko Haram exploits to establish mobility corridors and launch attacks. This fragility also limits the ability of governments to implement effective early warning systems or maintain continuous security around educational institutions.

Socio-economic marginalization further reinforces the regional spread of school attacks. Border communities across the Lake Chad Basin experience high levels of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. These conditions weaken community resilience and reduce the capacity of local populations to resist or report insurgent activity.

In some cases, fear of reprisals leads to silence or forced compliance. Schools in such environments are often under-resourced, poorly staffed, and located far from security support, increasing their exposure to attack or closure. Over time, this socio-economic vulnerability contributes to a cycle of insecurity and educational disruption that extends across national boundaries. Ideological diffusion is another important factor driving regionalization. Boko Haram's rejection of Western education is not confined to a single territory but is

embedded within its broader ideological narrative, which is transmitted across its networks of fighters, supporters, and affiliated groups. As the insurgency expanded into Cameroon and Chad, this ideological framing accompanied its operational movement, enabling similar patterns of school targeting to emerge in different locations. The consistent portrayal of education as illegitimate or corrupt ensures that schools remain symbolic targets regardless of national context.

In addition, counterinsurgency pressure in Nigeria has contributed indirectly to the geographic spread of violence. Military operations aimed at dismantling Boko Haram strongholds in northeastern Nigeria have displaced elements of the group into neighboring countries, particularly Cameroon and Chad. This displacement effect has led to the re-establishment of insurgent activity in new areas where state presence is weaker, thereby extending the reach of attacks on education. Rather than eliminating the threat, counterinsurgency efforts have sometimes redistributed it across the region. Finally, weak regional security coordination has limited the effectiveness of collective responses to Boko Haram's cross-border operations. Although mechanisms such as the Multinational Joint Task Force exist to enhance cooperation among Lake Chad Basin states, challenges remain in intelligence sharing, operational synchronization, and resource allocation. These gaps allow insurgents to exploit inconsistencies between national security systems and continue targeting vulnerable communities, including schools, across multiple countries.

In summary, the regionalization of Boko Haram's attacks on education is driven by a combination of porous borders, challenging geography, weak governance, socio-economic deprivation, ideological continuity, counterinsurgency displacement, and insufficient regional coordination. These interconnected factors explain why school violence has expanded beyond Nigeria into Cameroon and Chad, transforming education insecurity into a sustained regional crisis within the Lake Chad Basin.

### **Reckoning With The Damage: Impacts On Educational Systems In The Lake Chad Basin**

The Boko Haram insurgency has produced severe and long-lasting impacts on educational systems across Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, fundamentally altering access to schooling, institutional stability, and human capital development in the Lake Chad Basin. These impacts are not limited to immediate destruction but extend to systemic disruption of education delivery, generational learning loss, and the normalization of insecurity in school environments. One of the most direct impacts is the widespread destruction and closure of schools. In northeastern Nigeria alone, hundreds of schools have been burned, bombed, or abandoned due to repeated attacks and insecurity. Entire communities have been forced to shut down educational activities for extended periods, particularly in rural areas of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States. Human Rights Watch documents that attacks on schools and teachers significantly reduced the operational capacity of education systems, leading to long-term interruptions in learning continuity (Human Rights Watch, 2016, pp. 3–4).

In Cameroon's Far North region, although large-scale school destructions were less frequent, the constant threat of attacks led to widespread preventive closures. Schools often operated intermittently or relocated temporarily due to insecurity. In Chad, particularly around Lake Chad islands and border zones, the presence of insurgents created persistent fear that discouraged regular school attendance, especially in remote communities. UNICEF reports that across the Lake Chad Basin, thousands of schools were affected by closures, displacement of learners, and interruptions in academic calendars due to conflict-related insecurity (UNICEF, 2018, p. 1).

Another major impact is the mass displacement of students and teachers. Violence has forced families to flee to internally displaced persons camps or cross-border refugee settlements, disrupting educational trajectories. Teachers have also been targeted, killed, or forced to abandon rural postings, resulting in severe shortages of qualified personnel in affected regions. This has further weakened the quality of education and increased reliance on temporary or untrained instructors. Gendered impacts are particularly significant, as girls face disproportionate risks of abduction, forced marriage, and sexual violence. Events such as the Chibok and Dapchi abductions intensified fears surrounding girls' education, leading many families to withdraw daughters from school. Amnesty International notes that the targeting of schoolgirls has had a chilling effect on female education participation in northeastern Nigeria and surrounding regions (Amnesty International, 2024, p. 2).

The psychological impact on learners and communities is also profound. Exposure to violence, abduction threats, and school destruction has created widespread trauma, anxiety, and fear of schooling. In many communities, schools are no longer perceived as safe spaces, but as potential sites of violence. This has contributed to long-term declines in school enrollment and attendance rates, particularly in rural and border areas. Overall, the insurgency has not only disrupted education infrastructure but has fundamentally undermined trust in education as a safe and stable institution across the Lake Chad Basin.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Boko Haram's attacks on education in the Lake Chad Basin represent a clear case of transnationalization of educational violence, driven by a combination of ideological motivation and structural conditions. While the insurgency originated in Nigeria, its impact has extended into Cameroon and Chad through mechanisms of border permeability, insurgent mobility, and governance fragility. The analysis shows that schools are not randomly targeted but are central to Boko Haram's ideological and strategic objectives. Education is framed as a symbol of Western influence and state authority, making it a legitimate target within the group's worldview. However, ideological motivation alone does not fully explain the persistence and spread of attacks. Structural factors such as weak border control, difficult geography, and state absence in rural areas provide the operational conditions that allow ideology to be translated into sustained violence.

The regionalization of school attacks also highlights the limitations of national-level responses to a transnational security threat. Although Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad have implemented counterinsurgency operations and participated in joint military frameworks such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, these measures have not fully prevented continued attacks on education. Instead, insurgent activity has adapted by shifting locations, exploiting weak points in border governance, and targeting soft civilian infrastructure.

A key analytical insight is that Boko Haram's violence against education operates simultaneously at symbolic, strategic, and spatial levels. Symbolically, schools represent ideological opposition; strategically, they weaken state legitimacy and human capital formation; and spatially, they are vulnerable due to borderland geography and governance gaps. This multi-layered logic explains why attacks persist across different national contexts despite varying security responses. The study also highlights that educational insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin cannot be understood solely as a Nigerian crisis. Instead, it is a regional governance challenge that reflects shared vulnerabilities across multiple states. The spillover of violence into Cameroon and Chad demonstrates that insecurity in border regions is interconnected and mutually reinforcing, requiring coordinated regional responses rather than isolated national strategies.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Boko Haram's attacks on education between 2000 and 2025 represent a sustained and evolving pattern of transnational violence that has reshaped the educational landscape of the Lake Chad Basin. What began as localized ideological opposition to Western education in northeastern Nigeria has expanded into a regional crisis affecting Cameroon and Chad. The persistence of school attacks demonstrates that education remains a central target within Boko Haram's operational and ideological framework. Despite military interventions and international attention following high-profile incidents such as the Chibok and Dapchi abductions, educational institutions continue to face significant risks due to structural vulnerabilities in border regions. Ultimately, the study shows that the regionalization of educational violence is driven by the interaction of ideology, geography, governance failure, and insurgent adaptability. Addressing this crisis requires not only security responses but also long-term investments in governance, education resilience, and regional cooperation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First, there is a need to strengthen cross-border security cooperation among Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad through improved intelligence sharing, joint patrols, and coordinated rapid response mechanisms under the Multinational Joint Task Force. This would reduce insurgent mobility and limit the ability of armed groups to

exploit border gaps. Second, governments and international partners should expand and fully implement Safe Schools Initiatives across the Lake Chad Basin. This includes improving physical security infrastructure in schools, especially in rural and border communities, and ensuring the presence of trained security personnel where necessary. Third, early-warning systems should be developed and strengthened in vulnerable communities to enable timely detection and response to potential attacks. Community-based monitoring structures can play a key role in identifying threats and improving local resilience. Fourth, greater investment is needed in psychosocial support and reintegration programs for students, teachers, and families affected by school violence. Trauma-informed education approaches are essential for restoring trust in schooling systems. Finally, long-term solutions must address underlying socio-economic and governance challenges, including poverty, youth unemployment, and weak state presence in border regions. Without addressing these structural drivers, educational insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin is likely to persist.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

1. Amnesty International. (2024). Nigeria: Chibok abduction update report. <https://www.amnesty.org> (p. 2)
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 2006: 77-101.
3. Human Rights Watch. (2016). They set the classrooms on fire: Attacks on education in northeastern Nigeria. <https://www.hrw.org> (pp. 1–5)
4. International Crisis Group. (2019). Facing the challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province. <https://www.crisisgroup.org> (p. 7)
5. Thurston, A. *Boko Haram: The history of an African jihadist movement*. Princeton: University Press, 2017.
6. UNICEF. (2018). Education in emergencies in the Lake Chad Basin. <https://www.unicef.org> (p. 1)
7. UNICEF. (2018). Education under attack in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin. <https://www.unicef.org> (p. 1)
8. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage. (p. 15)
9. Zenn, J. (2014). Boko Haram and the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls. *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, 7(5), 1–6.
10. Idayat Hassan and Benson Chinedu Olugbuo. *Boko Haram's Insurgency in Nigeria: Exploring the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Pathways*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
11. Adisa, Waziri "Transnational Organized Crime, Terrorist Financing and Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria," *Journal of Terrorism Studies*: Vol. 3: No. 1, 2021:55
12. Alexander Thurston. *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.
13. Andrew Walker, "Join us or die: The birth of Boko Haram," London: The Guardian, 2016.
14. John Campbell and Asch Harwood, "Boko Haram's Deadly Impact." Council on Foreign Relations, 2018.
15. Dionne Searcey. 'They told us they were here to help us.' Then came slaughter. USA: The New York Times, 2017
16. Andrew Walker, 'Eat the Heart of the Infidel': The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram. London: Hurst Publishers, 2016.