

## ***Armed Banditry and Terrorism in Northwest Nigeria: Interrogating the Legal, Ethical and Security Strategies***

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*Abstract— In recent years armed banditry is fast becoming a new normal life in Nigeria and the Northwest regions security challenges in particular has rapidly risen into a theatre of wars and this has triggered the movement of illicit activities of terrorists groups into the North Central region of the country. This paper examined the growing incidence of armed banditry and how it affected human security in the North West geographical zone of Nigeria with the view to ascertaining a sustainable roadmap to tackling armed banditry, kidnapping and insurgency in Nigeria. The study is methodologically structured using the doctrinal approach in data collection and this has to do with both primary and secondary sources. Research findings revealed that deployment of aerial and techno-driven surveillance, strengthened collaborative efforts of security agencies and telecom operators, a robust adoption of community participatory policing strategy can significantly minimize criminal activities in the affected region. Its findings equally found that armed banditry is driven by unemployment among youths, political interest by politicians, porous international borders and poverty among others. The paper submitted that, banditry insurgency and kidnapping within the region requires a multipronged approaches with both the municipal and international community working in collaboration to overcome the armed groups, protect the population across the vast ungoverned territory and exterminate the nexus of jihadist network and to dislocate the probable plans of the Islamic insurgencies in the central Sahel as well as the decade old Boko Haram insurgencies in the lake Chad region of North West Nigeria..*

**Keywords:** Armed Banditry, Kidnapping, insurgency, Nigeria State response, Terrorism, Security strategy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has globally been tacked as a cankerworm on many nations social, technological religious, cultural, and even economic development (Nyarks & Campus, 2022). This has generated anxieties not only among citizens of Nigeria but equally foreigners, a situation that if not addressed, could potentially cripple the nation's economy.

The pervasive security challenges and its associated threats to human safety in North West Nigeria have generated a lot of issues and a subject of national security concern. The violent criminal atrocities orchestrated in the region which include cattle rusting and arms proliferation can only be compared with galloping inflation, receding economic development as well as unabated corruption as a measure of national economic and security embarrassment to the nation - state.

There is no doubt that meaningful progress cannot be achieved until the nation is rid of incessant kidnapping, banditry and other organized crimes. According to (*Ibrahim and Ahmad, 2020*), the recent kidnapping wave in Nigeria can be traced back to the 2006 abduction of expatriate of oil company employees in the Niger Delta region, which was displayed as an open message to the world in view of the marginalization, injustice, exploitation and underdevelopment and neglect of the region. This ugly menace became increasingly lucrative and boldly commercialized in several parts of the country, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria.

The multifaceted layers of criminality associated with the current state of armed banditry, kidnapping and insurgency calls for effective mechanisms to mitigate the threat it possesses to peace and security in the affected region. The region has rapidly degenerated into a theatre of war with the increasing involvement of many armed non-state actors that include herder allied groups, vigilantes, and other criminal gangs whose level of criminality has triggered the forced migration and displacement of over two hundred thousand people as well as the death of about Eight Hundred Thousand (800,000) people since 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Presently, in Nigeria, the consequences of kidnapping, banditry and insurgency affects not only locals, such as the poor and rich, the elderly and children, but also foreigners, particularly those on investment missions. Available research from (*Slack, 2016; Nyarks, 2022*) revealed that, contrary to the original belief that kidnapping is initially considered a problem for the rich and wealthy, its pandemic spread to significant proportions among the middle class and the poor is a pointer that it should today be everybody's concern in Nigeria and beyond.

In July 2019, the North West state governors initiated negotiation with a number of these armed non-state actors operating in the affected region with a view to addressing this menace. Despite the success recorded in the drastic reduction in terrorists attacks, released of kidnapped victims, and weapons recovery, the renewed attacks by armed bandits, kidnapping gangs as well as cattle rustlers in the affected states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa and to a greater extent Niger State in Worth Central Nigeria between November 2019 and December 2023 posed a threat to

the peace treaty negotiated by the State. Governors of the aforementioned states in the region (West African Network for Peace building (WANEP)

The current situation has generated anger amongst the population. This has made the senate president to warmed that the current insecurity trajectory in the country is crippling socio-economic activities and scaring away investors, which has left the development of Nigeria in stagnation. Hence, he called for a concerted effort from all arms of government to tackle the challenge (*Umoru, 2019*). *Olaniyi, 2020*) showed that the situation has imposed Nigeria into the United States visa ban countries. The incessant incidences of kidnapping and banditry have incurred immense threats to the government, the security agencies and all related stakeholders in the country (*Samuel, 2019*), (*Ibrahim and Ahmade, 2020*).

In addition, available statistics from the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime showed that Nigeria is ranked third (behind South Africa and Cameroon) in the number of kidnapping cases in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (UNODC, 2020). It is important to note that kidnapping and banditry are two of several typologies of crime, and the macroeconomic implications of crime can be very devastating. According to (*Olanyi, 2020*) the criminal activities of these bandits, kidnapers and insurgents has resulted in the refusal of Nigerian from accessing USA visas.

The violent criminal activities by the terrorists groups, armed bandits and kidnapers is fanned by competition over resources, now aggravated by climatic change which has resulted in the violent clashes between predominantly Fulani herders and mostly Hausa farmers. Terrorism thrives amidst a booming organized crime of cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, gang rapping and market raids of which jihadist groups are now stepping into to take advantage of the security challenges.

Bandits are loose collection of various criminal groups involved in kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, cattle rustling, rape and other sexual violence, pillage and attacks on traders, farmers and travelers particularly in Nigeria's North west region. Available research on the origin of banditry in the region dates to more than 120 years and the term was used in a colonial correspondence to describe a 1901 attack on a 1200 – Carmel trade caravan that resulted in the death of about 210 traders (*Murtala Ahmed Rufai, 2018*).

Pathetically, government responses to these worrisome developments of modern day insurgency of kidnapping banditry, violent crimes and criminalities in the region has been that of outright militarization of urban areas leaving the remote areas at the mercy of non-state armed actors (Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) and Nigeria Working Group on Armed Violence (Nyarks; 2012; *Nwagav, 2013*) while serious consideration has not been directed at deployment of techno-driven and satellite based law enforcement agencies, activation of good governance and institutional framework, community oriented policing strategy and collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies and telecoms operators on curbing insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and violent crime and criminalities in north west region should be prioritize. It is when these considerations are projected as against militarization that

efforts of civil society; alternative dispute resolution, community policing capacity building, curricula for violence prevention in schools, social inclusion, reintegration of perpetrators into the society and trauma counseling, shall be seen complimentary and effective.

Beyond all reasonable doubts, the above pictures of the North West region set the tones for an all dimensional crimes and criminalities spanning from insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, human trafficking, arm proliferations, radicalization of vulnerable youths and terrorism. Kidnapping that was alien to Nigeria until the 1984 botched abduction of Dr. Umam Dikko, a former Second Republic Minister of Transport and Aviation, has now become a daily phenomenon in the country triggered by the lucrative monetary benefits the perpetrators enjoy from the crime and the apparent inability the nation's security operatives to arrests and promptly punish offenders. The entire landscape appears to be under siege of kidnapers, bandits, and terrorists as virtually every part of the country has been attacked.

In addition, fighting terrorism and banditry in the north – west can no longer be approach with reactive and customary policing strategy, rather, combating this bandit using community-oriented policing laced with intelligence led strategy cannot be over emphasized, as it is those policing strategies that effectively deploy satellite-based techno-driven surveillance to hostile and strange terrain with tremendous precision in both covert and overt operations (*Romaniuk, 2012*). This therefore calls for collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, law enforcement agencies (Military, State Security Service, Nigeria Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps and others). National Space Research and Development Agency (NSRDA) along with all telecommunication providers in the country using technology deployment to stay ahead of bandits and act of terrorism, including the use of unmanned aerial vehicle (drones) to execute threats in any part of the country.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 1. Armed Banditry

The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. A bandit in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonized over the colonizer (*Warto, 1994*). Furthermore, bandits like Chuckhole Roto, Herachio Bernel and Santanon were often celebrated as heroes of Mexican independence. Therefore, Mexicans have warm regards and respect for those “social workers” termed bandits, while on the contrary, the state often considered them as nuisance and outlaws, that need to be eradicated (*Watts, 1987*). Therefore, in some pre-industrial societies, peasants see bandits differently from the state not as outlaws, hoodlums, and miscreants but as avengers and breadwinners. However, a bandit in traditional African setting is entirely opposite to that of America and Europe the former specialized in armed robbery and other related crimes (*Curott & Fink, 2008*). The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming killing and wanton destruction

of properties and hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling (Rufai, 2017). Since most herdsmen could do anything possible to prevent the rustling of their herds, then the bandit also apply force with the aid of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) to ensure effective stealing of livestock (Addo, 2006). Hence, the application of force during livestock theft is what is herein considered cattle rustling and armed banditry (Rufai, 2018).

## **2. Terrorism**

Terrorism refers to the wanton use of armed violence by non-state actors to instill fear in a population in pursuit of avowed social, religious, and political objective (Falode, 2019). It is a politically motivated violence perpetrated by extremist subnational groups whose aim is more of undermining the status quo than overthrowing it (United States Government (USG) 2019).

## **3. Kidnapping**

This could be difficult to precisely define as it varies from country to country likewise region to region even from state to state. Kidnapping occurs when a person is abducted and taken from one place to another against their will, or a situation in which a person is confined to a controlled space without the confinement being from a legal authority. Consequently, when the transportation or confinement of the person is done for an unlawful purpose, such as for ransom or for the purpose of committing another crime the act becomes criminal. Kidnapping is an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud.

## **4. Insurgency:**

This is the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, challenge or nullify political control of a region. From international legal perspective it is seen as a rebellion, carried out by rebels, who are not recognized as belligerents, against a constituted authority or state that has been recognized by the United Nations. It is also seen as a form of rebellion in which a dissident group that has the support of a sizeable portion of the population instigates rude spread acts of governments or to extract political, economic or social concession over a define area. In the security parlance, and appropriate for this study, the term insurgency is any guerilla, terrorists, militant, revolutionary, or any other form or irregular warfare that does not follow the rules laws, and conventions of way and is usually carried out against a state.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Insecurity in Nigeria and North West region in particular has gone full circle in recent years due to the country wide emergence and domination of various non-state armed groups with differing rationales, objectives and modus Operandi (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022). Research on the ubiquitous precarious security situation of Northern Nigeria has been perennial, even though with disproportionate emphasis on the phenomenon of Boko Haram insurgency and Herdsmen – farmers crises has assumed a full circle, organized research on banditry is still at an embryonic stage of nascence.

Although there have been research works on the matter under discuss, none of these extant studies could systematically and aptly offer a compelling narrative in Nigeria and the scenario where banditry has assumed the scale of a complex emergency in the northwestern states of Nigeria. Consequently, Nigeria is currently grappling with a plethora of security challenges which is impacting negatively on Nigeria's national security and development.

According to (*Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014*) the armed violence perpetrated by criminal opportunist and syndicates in the countryside and frontiers of the country(s) are alarming. That armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, act of armed criminality targeting at human life or property and allied armed violence amongst others constitute the major drivers of banditry in the region. In their contributions, (*Okoli, 2019; Mac-Leva, 2023; Ojewale & Balogun, 2023*) stated that some of these security challenges are criminal gang's separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists, banditry, Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen - farmers clashes, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery ethno-religious conflicts, piracy, Biafra secessionist movement, unknown gunmen debacle, militancy amongst others.

Foremost among those perspective is the narrative that situates the phenomenon as an essential complexity of farmers - herders' crises in a volatile security context characterized by the declining states capacity to govern (*Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016*). Currently, the attack now affect the entire northern region of Nigeria, especially the border area with Nigeria Republic in what has become a recurring tragedy, not only have thousands been killed, but women have been raped, children have become orphans, villages have been sacked and destroyed, farm produce has been destroyed, the property has been stolen, and civilians kidnapped for ransom (*Wanep.org. August 19, 2020*) (*Mohammed, 2021*). This development or trend gradually spread to neighboring states such as Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and Kebbi in 2019. As a result, the states established a committee headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former Inspector -General of Police (*Nationonlineng.net, July 10, 2019*). According to statistics provided by him, that between 2011 and 2019, about 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children were orphaned and more than 190,340 were displaced in Zamfara due to armed banditry. This was corroborated by the former Governor of Zamfara State Abdulaziz Yari who revealed that 500 villages and 13,000 hectares of land were destroyed and 2835 people were killed in his state between 2011 and 2008 (*Hum Angle August 2, 2020*). It revealed further that, the Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma and Sububu forests in Northwest region have since become strategic areas for banditry groups to carry out their attacks (*Mohammed, 2021*).

*Okoli (2017)* asserts that there exist four patterns of rural banditry in Northwest region. They include, village raids, highway robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling. According to him, village raids are invasions and looting of rural communities, particularly at night. These often take the form of scorch earth attacks that leaves affected communities in utter displacement in the aftermath of an incident. Communities' raids can be uni-episode or coordinated. The former happens when a

single community is invaded while the later occurs when the attacks occurs simultaneously in a number of adjacent communities within a locality. The primary reason of village raids is material plundering. In effect, in most circumstances, household, farmlands, shops and markets are targets of looting.

Noteworthy however, that some of the attacks have been merely to revenge, designed to showdown on communities which have hitherto challenge or opposed the bandit's onslaught through organized vigilantism (*Okoli, 2017*). The increase in crime rate is due largely to the under governed spaces couple with permeable borders which have facilitated the influx of small arms and light weapons from the Sahel region. The movement of the light weapons and arms is facilitated by the vast forest which has encourage the illicit arms trade to fester. In addition the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the North West exposes the vulnerable youths to criminal activities. The socioeconomic realities prevalent in the northwest include multi-dimensional poverty, widespread unemployment, inequality, marginalization, deprivation, exclusion and non availability of access to basic amenities.

### **SOME PREDISPOSING FACTORS OF ARMED BANDITRY KIDNAPPING AND INSURGENCY IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA**

Predictors of insurgency that keep aggravating armed banditry, kidnapping, village and market raids, cattle rustling, illicit artisanal gold mining, proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) are underlisted as follows:

- Porous borders: The dramatic increased in the illicit criminal activities across the borders of West African countries has become so notorious. Interstate boundary is another major challenge that protects armed bandits. (*Jumere & Surma, 2015*) observed that the increased in the border forest that connect Kaduna State, Katsina and Zamfara States served as an escape route and equally a migration source for bandits to the local government whenever they kidnap of women into the forest and cattle rustling are contemplated. These free movement of people and merchandise across the borders in the country continue to contribute to the inflow of illegal weapons that aid the operations of the bandits.
- Struggle for scarce resources: The northwest region is blessed with some mineral deposits. Zamfara State in particular has huge deposit of mineral resources and it has been the major reason why some prominent persons who have interest in the mineral deposits in the state to sponsor bandits in order to drive away community stakeholders or villagers, in order for them to exploit the juicy minerals illegally with no interference. This informed the decision of the state government to place a ban or suspension of mining activities in Zamfara State (*Guardian, 7 April, 2019*).
- Large forest zones and ungoverned spaces: Topography plays a part, as well as in facilitating banditry. Northern Nigeria's forest lands are tremendous, tough and dangerous. They are too under-policed. A few of the forests run nearby the differing permeable borderlines on the region's wildernesses. Borders are ineffectively portrayed, under-policed, and in this way not well represented. The result of this can be a

plentitude of evil action regularly encouraged by criminal syndicates (*Okoli, 2019*). Thus, the expansive forest lands within the northern region of the country provide a hideout and operational base for bandits to flourish free from impedances by security agents. The forest lands have in this way ended up ungoverned spaces where bandits have sway. The terrain is scantily populated and free from observation. Thus, these ungoverned spaces have created a controlled vacuum that regularly gets filled with felonious bandits' gangs (*Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016*) and *Oladejo (2011)*. The many forest in the north west especially the twin forests of Mashema in Zamfara's north bordering the nearby Niger Republic and Birnin Gwari to the south leading to the neighboring, equally insecure, state of Kaduna, have been a source of weapons for the bandits (*Egbejule, 2022*).

- Poverty and unemployment: The huge budgetary provisions for infrastructural development, improvement in social amenities and social investment programmes are mostly misappropriated for selfish reasons or unjustly channel for undeserving population. The level of impunity associated with siphoning of the common wealth of the citizens is overwhelming. As a consequence, broad unemployment, extra ordinary destitution, and inescapable imbalance (which are common indications within the North West) fuel the event of banditry. The level of exclusion, deprivation and hardship concentrated in this region could be a formula for calamity. It exposed the youth to criminal exercises and makes them profoundly vulnerable to enrollment by bandit gangs (*Oladejo, 2021; WANEP, 2021, Akinyetun et al, 2022:68*).
- Proliferations of fire Arms: A major cause of escalating intensity of conflict is the rising proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. In view of the possession of sophisticated weapons by the civilian population (*Egbuta, 2015*). Research revealed that a former Head of State in Nigeria General Abdulsalemi Abubarkar recently stated that an estimate of 6 million arms and ammunitions are moving across the country. The sources of these weapons include, military stockpiles, stolen or seized by militants in Libya and Sahelian states such as Mali, weapons move overseas through west African ports as well as homemade guns that are difficult for the authorities to interdict and regulate (*Centre for Democracy and Development, 2022*). The availability of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) created an avenue for nonconventional or non-state actors to possess weapons in some cases even beyond state control. These weapons are available to the criminals and terrorists in relatively cheap prices and are used in illegal operations, such as banditry and kidnapping in northwestern Nigeria.
- Demographic pressures and climate change: Over recent decades the far north has seen a substantial shortening in the length of rainy season aggravating water scarcity and an increase in desert or semi-desert conditions which have shrunk both arable land and pasture (*National Meteorological Agency, 2008*). The region demographic pressures of rapidly growing population has meanwhile increase demand for available land and in the absence of more efficient methods of both crops and livestock production. The desertification and the population growth have intensified violence and competition for



territory suitable for farming and grazing between farmers and predominantly Fulani pastoralists.

- Inadequate presence of police personnel in rural communities: There is lack of enough police personnel to effectively checkmate the activities of this criminal element in rural areas especially in the northern region. Nigeria is grossly under-policed, therefore, the rural population particularly farmers tuned to vigilantes – known as Yan Sakai-for assurance. But the Yan Sakai have been unpredictable in their retaliatory savagery. Although the bandits do enroll from the pastoralists, the vigilante’s reaction has been to target all herder communities, notwithstanding culpability (*Hassan, 2021*). The pastoralist however has reacted with their possess, forest-based and better armed-self-defense bunches, which over time have ended up nearly undefined and indistinguishable from the original bandits (*Hassan, 2021*).

*Anyaditce (2018)* contends that one of the variables giving impulse to banditry is the contracted police drive in Nigeria. There are few (however ineffectively prepared and unmotivated) policemen in Nigeria as against the huge population which makes the country communities for the most part undeserving of police consideration.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Armed banditry remains an emerging security threat in northwest Nigeria. Its dynamics and trends are still evolving. This paper evaluates the multidimensional factors that are triggering the reign of terror by armed bandits in northwest region and its spill over to other regions in Nigeria. Armed banditry is precipitated by institutional irregularities, with extant literature associating the upsurge of armed banditry to socio economic, political and geographical factors, bad governance, poverty, inequalities, weak institutional capacity of the state in local governance, poor management of human/material resources, justice system and security are the root causes of armed banditry in the region. It is against this background that the current wave of terror in the north-west triggered by multidimensional and complex forces of politicization of security, ethno-communal conflict, climate change-related migration, illegal gold mining resource competition among diverse ethno-communal groups, and conflicting interest of the political elites, especially in the northern part of the country. The incidence of armed banditry has resulted to the loss of lives and properties, rising crime rates, escalated intergroup conflicts and affected agricultural development, dislocated the economic wellbeing of the people. Amidst these, this paper shows the complicity of the state institutions and the political elites as well as some faceless business interest (in illegal mining and weapon merchants) that are crises enablers and complicit in the reign of terror by the armed banditry in the northwest. Despite several efforts by the government and community to curtail the security challenges, armed banditry continue to evolve and become even more devastating.

This paper therefore provides the following recommendations.

- Government should ensure that merit and competence be given due consideration in the employment and appointment of deserving individuals.

- Neglected educational institutions in rural areas should be given attention to reduce the level of illiteracy in the rural villages of Northwestern Nigeria.
- There is need for social and institutional reorientation of our core African values especially family institutions which is the basis for inculcation of norms and values
- The federal government should priorities border security through improvement and the use of digital technologies like sophisticated surveillance and detection devices to control the influx of illegal arms.
- The federal government should also establish and train forest guards that will provide security in the ungoverned spaces and their neighboring localities.
- Social safety net or social investment and youth empowerment programmes should be more closely supervised to ensure that the reach the largest population and rationally used by the beneficiaries.
- Community participation of the centre of the country policing strategy will be a major game changer as the present reactive policing strategy should be replaced by community oriented policing strategy which should be techno-driven has no significant effect on curbing insurgency, kidnapping and banditry in North West region.
- Collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies, telecoms operators, information sharing should be done by the establishment of a fusion centre and secure software application to enhance this as a crime and criminalities has also gone digital.

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